

Internet and Plagiarism: Awareness, Attitude and Perception of Students of Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to provide to secondary school students and school administrators in Nigerian educational sector a better understanding on students' awareness of Internet plagiarism, attitudes towards plagiarism and perception of plagiarism in the context of writing and doing other assignments online. Methodology adopted is the survey design in which questionnaires and group discussions were used for obtaining data from students. Results shows that more of the students have not even heard the word plagiarism while very few of them could give the meaning of the term plagiarism. The purpose of using the Internet was observed to be on information needs.

The work also discovered that students use the Internet more on educational activities especially in the area of doing school assignments. Although, it also showed that the students do not use the Internet in stealing what others have written as well as only few of them accepted that using internet for plagiarism is good because it helps them in meeting up with the challenges of class work and assignments. The results show that teachers do not teach the rules of using content from online and how to cite the works of others so as to avoid plagiarism. Consequently, it was recommended that teachers should enlighten the students on the plagiarism and its consequences.

Keywords:Plagiarism, Internet, Secondary School Students, Information, Nigeria

Introduction

Plagiarism has never been easier than it is ravaging the information industry today. Before the internet, cheating among secondary students in Nigeria was labor-intensive and obvious. It is extremely important to get a clear and accurate definition of plagiarism from the outset, as much of the reason for the escalation of plagiarism in education in recent years has been attributed to genuine confusion over what does and does not constitute plagiarism. Potential plagiarists had to find appropriate works from a limited pool of resources, usually a nearby library, and copy them by hand. Since these resources were almost always professionally written, the risk of detection was very high (www.plagiarism.org).

In the simplest term according to Merriam Dictionary, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward. Cromwell (2000) claims that “many trend watchers think cheating is epidemic, usually beginning in the middle school and extending through secondary schools”. Despite the fact that cheating has been in existence, the advent of Internet has made cheating/plagiarism so easy.

Technology has improved and grown so quickly that information became easily accessible by everyone from everywhere through the internet which makes the issue of plagiarism even more challenging to the academic corpus (e.g. teachers, lectures, tutors etc.) in the digital era. The flourishing of Internet access in the educational sector has itself, mark a sea change in students' behavior. In the past, most students faced the prospects of going to the library with trepidation (Smith and Philips, 1999). However, a trend has emerged in Internet access and use by secondary school students that forecast challenges for those that will be responsible for the continuous moral and academic support to these students. Because, these students increasingly utilize the Internet to do research on their own initiative, and satisfy their other forms of information needs (Smith and Philips 1999). As a result, most unguarded students forego the importance and copyright ethics of the Internet, as it contribute to their academic work and decides using it for immoral acts of various such.

According to Razera (2011), plagiarism is to make use of someone else's ideas, work, information etc. without giving proper attribution to the author. This issue is known for many years and it has always been a challenge for the teachers at all schools. Before the internet era, plagiarizing something was tiresome because students would most likely copy text by hand from a book, an encyclopedia, newspaper etc. With the development of internet this hard work is now simplified and replaced by two simple commands “Ctrl+C” and “Ctrl+V”, the famous “copy and paste”, (Razera, 2011). However, scholars and programmers are currently developing software at detecting plagiarism.

The Internet now makes it easy to find thousands of relevant sources in seconds, and in the space of a few minutes plagiarists can find, copy, and paste together an entire term paper or essay

because much of the material online is produced by other students, it is often difficult or impossible for educators to identify plagiarism based on expectations of student-level work. Even when an instructor does suspect plagiarism, the sheer size of the internet seems to work in the plagiarist's favor. Search engines can be useful for tracking down suspect passages, but even they have their limitations, given the number, variety, and password-protected nature of many websites. Even where search engines do prove useful, manually searching the internet for matches of hundreds of student papers can be a formidable task.

According to plagiarism dot org, all of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing the audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.

The emergence of Internet has helped in scholarship and development, but the easy virtues on information it has relented itself to has enhanced plagiarism at all levels. The internet has provided easy access to a huge amount of information and therefore facilitating the whole “copy and paste” tendency. Educational systems are also changing with the internet. Before the development of the internet, the educational system was based on the traditional approach consisting of teachers and students physically in a classroom, radio, correspondence base (Razera, 2011).

Despite the fact that cheating has been in existence, the advent of Internet has made cheating/plagiarism so easy. And the vast realms of information on the truly, worldwide web are

so readily available. Who will resist it? (Schulte, 2002 in Conradson and Hernandez-Ramos, 2004). Contrary, Dr. Jamie McKenzie, editor of the online educational journal "From Now On"(www.fno.org) claim that many students engaged in plagiarism truly do not understand that the exercise of cutting and pasting into papers without attribution is morally wrong. "They (student) don't think of it as cheating. They are simply collecting information and don't understand the whole concept of intellectual property" (quoted in Hafner, 2001).

Many academic experts on plagiarism concur with this point of view. In short, the various types of plagiarism run the gamut from students' not knowing at all the need to acknowledge their sources, to believing a source to be common knowledge, thus, committing an innocent error in judgments biased in favour of their own sense of "originality" to student's submission of papers entirely composed by another author, hence, consciously executing an overt act of academic dishonesty. Educators at the secondary school level need to become aware of and learn to differentiate egregious transgressions from the more innocuous cases of cheating without an explicit intent (Creech and Johnson, 1999; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2004).

A participant in Large & Behesti (2000) believed that by re-typing information found on the Internet, not simply cutting, and pasting, that he was conforming to acceptable practice. This would make it obvious that plagiarism seems to be more tempting from web pages than other sources. This would conform to Large, Behesti & Breuleux (1998), who stated 'the temptation of plagiarism is greater when the storage medium is electronic and the content suitable for transference, unedited, into the student project, as in the case, say, of a children's encyclopedia on CD-ROM'.

Burdick (1998) said 'technology allows students to get information, and use it without even reading it, much less understanding it. Students can combine or copy the words physically, without comprehending, assimilating, or combining the ideas intellectually. These research findings would concur that children lack the motivation to locate and evaluate information. This might be because not all people are comfortable with technology as means for information retrieval. Technology allows students to assimilate information without reading it properly, less understanding it. As a result, the ease with which students can copy and paste information by

electronic means does not challenge them intellectually. This begs the question as to whether the end objective of information retrieval is being defeated, i.e. broadening one's knowledge whilst learning to question theories, processes and reasons.

According to www.plagiarism.org, the seemingly "public" nature of online content blurs the distinction between publicly and privately owned information. Electronic resources, by nature easily reproducible, are not perceived as "intellectual property" in the same way that their material counterparts are. Just as file transfer programs such as Napster make it easy to trade copyrighted music files most people would never think to steal in physical form, the internet makes plagiarism easy for students who might have thought twice about copying from a book or published article.

Consequently, students and teacher's perception have mostly been indifferent because their concerns centers on how to get answers to the assignments or project being given in school. Article by Duplicheckers.com, states that; at the educational level students are very immature and they cannot realize the later effects of plagiarism on their career and at that very low stage they get habitual to present the copied work. There are different ways through which Plagiarism can be decreased but it cannot be eliminated. Search engines are also being used for catching the Plagiarism but the limitations are there. There are many websites like Harvard Business School and the Jstor which are providing the material with in some limitations like the proper registration and downloading charges.

Plagiarism helped by Internet will be the easiest ways of student continue to violate this copyright law. Notwithstanding, the greatest resources for potential plagiarists are the hundreds of online paper-mills, or "cheatsites", that exist solely for the purpose of providing students with quick-fix homework and term-paper solutions. Many of these services contain hundreds of thousands of papers on a wide variety of topics, and some even offer customized papers for an additional fee. The fact that many of these sites have become profitable ventures (complete with paid advertising) only attests to the unfortunate truth that plagiarism has become a booming industry. In Nigeria, the situation has gone beyond plagiarizing as most secondary school national examinations have answers to examination questions ten minutes after the

commencement of such exams. This cheats sites such as www.naijaboys.com provide answers to questions few minutes after the start of a given examination. Thereafter, students/candidates who are able to sneak their mobile phones or those being allowed to enter the hall with their mobile phones can access the answers to respective questions using their mobile Internet.

Plagiarism is a high-profile issue for schools, particularly issues relating to the internet and coursework. However, on matters of plagiarism, that seems to be less the case. Educators have been quick to consider plagiarism a cheating issue, which it certainly is, but either ignore or pay inadequate attention to the fact that it is also an education one (Bailey, 2010). Simply put, no one is born with the ability to understand the difference between paraphrasing and original work, how to properly cite sources and when citation is necessary. These are all things that have to be taught and learned and anything that must be learned must be learned through some trial and error.

In Nigeria unfortunately though, schools have not created zero tolerance policies on plagiarism. While these policies are undermined, they actually do more to create a climate of confidence among students and that, in turn, creates a desire to play dishonest and a desire to try and defeat any systems that check for plagiarism.

The first thing educators need to do is focus on actually teaching about plagiarism. Currently, in many schools, the “education” about plagiarism is limited to a few paragraphs in a student handbook. Writing courses, which are mandatory, need to teach more than just the mechanics of writing a good paper, but also how to cite sources, paraphrase correctly and be a good researcher. It seems simple but there seems to be a divide between what is taught in writing classes and what is useful when creating actual assignments. Also, teachers need to focus on crafting assignments that are resistant to plagiarism. This includes topics that cannot be easily copy/pasted and including in-class portions that test knowledge away from access to outside sources.

Finally, there needs to be recognition that there will always be a plagiarism problem and that it cannot be “stamped out”. The same as there are viruses and bacteria in even the healthiest person, there will always be some cheating, even in the most honest school. Perhaps a level of

awareness from the elementary school to universities will help in reducing the menace of plagiarism. However, it should be noted that strict plagiarism enforcement without firm plagiarism education does not make better students; it makes better cheaters in the school system (Bailey, 2010).

He went further to state that if schools are going to deal with the epidemic of plagiarism, they need to treat it more like an actual infection and focus on all-around health rather than pumping in more quick fixes. The current path only makes cheaters more resistant to the methods that are used to catch them and creates a climate of fear that is both counter-productive for learning and can actually encourage cheating, since many students feel as if they are being treated as such anyway. To help combat plagiarism, TurnItIn makes a number of suggestions for educators: make your assignments plagiarism-proof, the company suggests. Help students better understand citations. And — of course — the company recommends schools use a service like TurnItIn. Even worse for copyright holders is that these better cheaters, after graduation (or while in school) often show a high level of disrespect for intellectual property of others. Though not every file sharer or Web plagiarist is/was a plagiarist in school, or vice versa, there is little doubt that rampant plagiarism in an academic environment erodes the respect one has for honesty and other people's work (Bailey, 2010). For the sake of academia and the creative world at large, it is crucial that school shift the way they deal with plagiarism (if they have been doing that) and find a more product approach to the problem.

Statement of Problem

Plagiarism has undoubtedly eaten deep into the society which is not unconnected with the quest for formal education which has increased the number of secondary students all over the world. In addition, research has also made waves leading to information explosion. Consequently, the amount of material available on the internet has also increased. Thus, the challenge of teaching and approach the issue of plagiarism become even higher to the academics (Flint, Macdonald &

Clegg, 2006). More than half of teachers believe internet plagiarism is a serious problem among sixth-form students, a teaching union survey suggests. Internet emergence has helped tremendously in the educational world as no meaningful research is presently conducted without the help of Internet. However, it has also emerged that Internet is the easiest means of plagiarizing in the academic world especially secondary school students who knows little or nothing about the term plagiarism. A report released today by the plagiarism-detection tool TurnItIn(2011) confirms what a lot of teachers already know: that students are copying content from online sources. According to the report, for both high school and college students, Wikipedia and Yahoo Answers were the top two most popular sources of lifted copy.

The goal of this research is to provide to secondary school students in Nigerian educational sector a better understanding on teachers and students' awareness of plagiarism, attitudes towards plagiarism and perception of plagiarism in the context of writing and doing other assignments. While the purpose of this work is to investigate if the awareness, attitudes and perception of plagiarism among students and teachers in secondary schools.

Methodology

This research adopted the survey design and the research instruments were questionnaires and group discussion. The target populations were students of secondary schools in Edo State. Multi-stage and purposive sampling methods were used in the research. Firstly, two (2) local governments (Egor and Oredo) were randomly selected among the three (Egor, Oredo and Ikpoba-Okha) in the cosmopolis. Thereafter, ten (10) schools were randomly selected from the two (2) local governments each to make twenty (20) selected schools. Thirdly, fifty (50) students were also randomly selected from each school to make 1000 students. However, purposive sampling was used to select only the senior secondary students for the research. The reason was because the pre-test revealed that the majority of the junior secondary students had no knowledge on the subject matter especially on the Internet use for research and plagiarism. The questionnaires were distributed to students during class hours and collected at the end of a 60 min period resulting in a 100% response rate.

Discussion of Result and Findings

Table 1: Distribution of Students According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	518	51.8
Female	482	48.2
Total	1000	100

From Table 1, 51.8% of the students are male which shows a less significant difference with the female (48.2%) counterpart.

Table 2: Distribution of Students According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10-12	64	6.4
13-15	422	42.2
16-18	447	44.7
19-21	67	6.7
Total	1000	100

Table 2 shows that students within the ages of 16-18yrs (44.7%) are the highest, while others are; 10-12yrs (6.4%), 13-15yrs (42.2%) and 19-21yrs (6.7%).

Table 3: Distribution of Students According to Class

Class	Frequency	Percentage
SSS1	303	30.3
SSS2	547	54.7
SSS3	150	15.0
Total	1000	100

From table 3, the distribution shows that more of the students (54.7%) are in SSS2, while others are SS1 (30.3%) and SS3 (15.0%).

Table 4: Purpose of Using the Internet

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Information (1)	564	56.4

School work (2)	327	32.7
Communication (3)	48	4.8
Chatting (4)	48	4.8
Others (5)	13	1.3
Total	1000	100

For table 4, 56.4% of the students use the Internet for information. The table shows those who use it for school work are 32.7%. The other uses obtained have very low percentage viz: communication (4.8%), chatting (4.8%) and others (1.3%).

In conclusion, more of the students use the Internet for information and school work.

Table 5: Activities for Which the Internet is Use

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Assignments	874	87.4
Biography	505	50.5
Biology	621	62.1
English assignments	664	66.4
Computer assignments	719	71.9
General paper (geography, government economics, commerce)	707	70.7

For table 5, 87.4%, which represent the majority of students, use the Internet for assignments, which is followed by those who use it for Computer assignments (71.9%). The other uses obtained some significant level of percentage responses that followed; these are Biography (50.5%), Biology (62.1%), English assignments (66.4%), and General Paper (70.7%).

Therefore, it can be concluded that students significantly make use of Internet on educational activities.

Table 6: Distinction between Positive and Negative Use of Internet

Use of Internet	Positive (2)	Negative (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
For plagiarizing	266 (26.6)	734 (73.4)	1.27	.45
Stealing what someone has written	50 (5.0)	950 (95.0)	1.05	.23
For solving class work	904 (90.4)	96 (9.6)	1.90	.30

For fraud (yahoo yahoo)	183 (18.3)	817 (81.7)	1.20	.79
For getting up-to-date information	880 (88.0)	120 (12.0)	1.89	.46
For impersonating	286 (28.6)	714 (71.4)	1.29	.46
For communicating with friends/family	888 (88.8)	112 (11.2)	1.89	.32
For viewing sex photos	64 (6.4)	936 (93.6)	1.07	.25
Weighted Average =			1.45	

From table 6, 95.0% claimed that they do not use the Internet in stealing what someone has written. In addition, students indicated the following: using internet for Fraud (18.3%), for impersonating (28.6%), and for plagiarizing (26.6%). This means that only 26.6% of the students use the Internet for plagiarizing.

While the majority (90.4%) claimed to use the Internet for Solving class work and this is followed by 88.8% for Communicating with friends and family as well as 88.0% for getting up to date information. 6.4% Do not use the Internet for viewing sex photos

Generally, the weighted average of 1.45 shows that students do understands the distinctions between the positive and negative use of the Internet.

Table 7: Learning of Plagiarism Principles

Questions	Yes (2)	No (1)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers teaches us citation of works	252 (25.2)	748 (74.8)	1.75	.44
We are taught the rules of using content from online sources	466 (46.6)	534 (53.4)	1.46	.50
Weighted Average =			1.61	

From table 7, 74.8% majority of the students claimed that their teachers do not teacher them on how to carry out citation of academic works while 53.4% indicated that their school do not teach the rules of using online contents for assignment and others.

Findings

A group discussion of the awareness of plagiarism with the students showed that the majority of the students have not even heard the word plagiarism while very few of them could give the meaning of the term plagiarism.

The purpose of using the Internet was observed to be on information needs.

The work also discovered that students use the Internet more on educational activities especially in the area of doing school assignments.

Findings also revealed that the students do not use the Internet in stealing what others have written as well as only few of them accepted that using internet for plagiarism is good because it helps them in meeting up with the challenges of class work and assignments.

The results show that teachers do not teach the rules of using content from online and how to cite the works of others so as to avoid plagiarism.

Conclusion

Plagiarism which has been a bane in the academic world has not been helped with the easy nature of information use on the Internet. Internet benefits have also been over clouded as a result of indiscipline in the secondary schools. However, the students may be accorded less blame because the awareness has not been created on the immorality of plagiarism. The result from the research has shown little or no awareness on the part of students when it comes to plagiarism. The bulk of the secondary school students cannot define or give a simple meaning to the term “plagiarism” rather than observing its principles.

In the Nigerian society today, students in the town and gown have lacked the factors that may be behind our “culture of academic dishonesty.” As a result of this, students are taking advantage of easier copy-and-paste technology and online resources. For the sake of academia and the creative world at large, it is crucial that school shift the way they deal with plagiarism and find a more product approach to the problem. According to Udotong (Obinna, 2012), the Nigerian government should urgently address the problem of plagiarism which he said has eaten deep into the educational system of the country.

Plagiarism is a very big challenge since the advent of Internet. The problem is even heightened in Nigeria where most teachers and school administrators of students are ill- equipped in all ramifications to confront the challenge. The truth is that now that plagiarism is long entrenched

in some of our secondary schools and universities, particularly in social sciences and humanities where there are no direct calculations or experiments. In the university system, some students do not conduct any research project. They simply go to another school and collect thesis, project or dissertation and make a change of the page cover with their name on it. With the foregoing, it is advised that the awareness towards this effect should start from the secondary schools level so as to reduce the menace of intellectual property in the future.

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