

The Pestilence of Plagiarism – An Overview

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to show how plagiarism has become a growing concern in academic writings and research pursuit in English helping the scholars/teachers including students to go for stealing ideals, sources and arguments rather knowingly from established scholars and writers and their works and how the practice of presenting such borrowed and stolen ideas and viewpoints of other thinkers and academicians as one's own is undoubtedly an unpardonable crime inviting stringent punitive action from all circles not only from University or College authorities but also all academicians who are authorized to look into this serious issue spoiling academic system and research ambience.

Keywords: Plagiarism, ideas, arguments, stolen ideas, thinkers, writers, punitive action, growing concern.

Plagiarism – Growing Concern

In modern times, plagiarism has become a growing concern in academic writings in English. With the increase in the use of the Internet, the act of stealing ideas and arguments and bodily lifting whole chunks of passages from established scholars and writers have become rampant. The practice of presenting the original ideas and viewpoints of other thinkers and academicians as one's own is undoubtedly an unpardonable intellectual crime which would invite stringent punitive measures from university or college authorities or academicians who are authorized to look into the matter.

What is Plagiarism?

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines plagiarism highlighting four important aspects of it. They are:

- (1) to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another scholar or writer as one's own,
- (2) to use another's production without crediting the source,
- (3) to commit literary theft, and
- (4) to present as new and original and idea or product derived from an existing source.

In sum, plagiarism is an inexcusable fraudulent academic exercise that cuts at the very roots of the sterling qualities of academic authenticity and scholastic excellence.

Intellectual Property

In Western countries the expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property. In fact, the rights of original thinkers, writers and scholars are protected by copyright laws as in the case of original inventions. But in Indian universities and colleges, scholars and academicians have started realizing the irreparable damage caused by the indiscriminate practice of stealing ideas and arguments with impunity. Teachers as well as students have to be fully alive to the growing menace of plagiarism. They should try to seek effective measures to stem the evil of plagiarism thereby preserving the sanctity of academic exercises.

Forms of Plagiarism

Plagiarism assumes various forms ranging from lifting long passages from original texts to cleverly paraphrasing passages in such a way that they appear as original. In some cases, the student or the so-called scholar uses exact quotations without making any clear acknowledgement. It must always be made clear to the reader which part of the treatise is one's own and which part is borrowed. Copying and pasting from the Internet without acknowledgement is another form of plagiarism. Passages or sentences taken from the Internet must be adequately referred and the details should be included in the 'Works Cited' or 'Bibliography'.

Paraphrasing or presenting the ideas or arguments taken from an authentic source without duly acknowledging it also amounts to plagiarism. In the website of the University of Oxford, it is mentioned that:

A passing reference to the original author in your own text may not be enough; you must ensure that you do not create the misleading impression that the paraphrased wording or the sequence of ideas are entirely your own. It is better to write a brief summary of the author's overall argument in your own words, indicating that you are doing so, than to paraphrase particular sections of his or her writing. This will ensure you have a genuine grasp of the argument and will avoid the difficulty of paraphrasing without plagiarising.

Collusion

Collusion is another form of plagiarism in which the transparency regarding the assistance received from another scholar is blatantly violated. Especially in group work projects one has to make clear the extent to which one is indebted to the other members of the group while being aware of the extent of collaboration permitted. Inaccurate citation is yet another unwholesome practice which might cause the loss of credibility of the author of the treatise. One has to cite correctly in keeping with the conventions that prevail in the respective discipline using either a footnote or an in-text reference.

The research scholar is not expected to seek the assistance of professional agencies even in the preparation of a part of his/her thesis or treatise. He/she should not submit material which has been prepared by another scholar who has given the consent to publish or submit the material without giving the real author's name. Similarly, one should not submit a work for assessment which has already been submitted by one self for another course. But of course, the earlier work by one can be cited if necessary and the details of the references should be made clear.

As explained in the website of University of Oxford:

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Plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. It is a principle of intellectual honesty that all members of the academic community should acknowledge their debt to the originators of the ideas, words, and data which form the basis of their own work. Passing off another's work as your own is not only poor scholarship, but also means that you have failed to complete the learning process. plagiarism is unethical and can have serious consequences for your future career.

With Effort We Can Achieve Originality

Initially scholars may find it difficult to come up with original views or opinions. But as they proceed and try to understand the various aspects of the topic that they deal with by going through the primary and secondary sources many times and ruminating over the ramifications of the topic, they will develop greater clarity in comprehending the topic which in turn would lead them to the uncharted areas of thought eventually enabling them to substantiate their arguments by putting two and two together. Thus, the ideas, thoughts, arguments and pieces of information one collects from primary and secondary sources are potential inputs which on passing through the analytical acumen of the scholar assume unprecedented significance and enable him/her to develop his/her own ideas which are bound to remain intellectually and academically unquestioned.

Ambiguous Boundary

It is true that the boundary between plagiarism and original research is quite ambiguous. But an understanding of the various forms of plagiarism would enable the scholar to fight this menace. The writer lifts sentences or paragraphs verbatim from another writer or writers and presents them as his/her own. Sometimes, the author copies significant portions of the text straight from a single source without making any change in the original. In some cases, the writer copies from different sources, slightly altering the sentences to make them fit in while retaining the original structure of the sentences. There are instances in which the writer alters the overall appearance of the paper by changing key words and phrases. In extreme cases the writer may paraphrase two or three papers on the same topic, put them together, create a semblance of sequence and claim it as his/her own. Last but not the least, there is the practice of stealing from one's previous work without making clear the real source of it.

Copyright Laws

Every scholar should know that copyright laws exist in order to protect intellectual property rights. Such laws make it illegal to reproduce someone else's expression of ideas or data collected by him/her without permission. This includes music, images, written words, videos and a variety of other media. Earlier a work was only protected by copyright if it included a copyright trademark (the © symbol). In accordance with the laws established in 1989, works are now copyright protected with or without the inclusion of the symbol. Anyone who reproduces original material without appropriate acknowledgement can be prosecuted in a court of law. If it is proved beyond doubt that the treatise or article has substantial similarity to the original one, it may be deemed as violation of the Copyright Act.

It should be noted that the Copyright Act protects only works which express original ideas or information. Works in the public domain can be made use of, provided they are cited properly. The facts that are not the result of original research can also be made use of without fear of plagiarism. Facts which are readily available from numerous sources and are generally known to the public are not protected by copyright laws.

How much one has copied from the original is quite immaterial. Even if one has copied only a very small portion from the original it amounts to serious violation of copyright laws. But scholars are free to make use of passages from an original work by citing the source properly. Good scholars take passage from an original work only to reinforce, strengthen and substantiate their own ideas and arguments. So citing the source only reaffirms the authority of a treatise or an article.

Style Sheets

When one does research seriously one has to ensure that the sources that one depends on are authentic and genuine. *The MLA Handbook for Writers and Research Papers* advocates evaluating the sources of materials depending on their ‘authority, accuracy and currency’ (Gibaldi, 41).

The **authority** of a source can be determined if it has a visible author’s name, if it has a reputable publisher, or if it has been peer reviewed. The **accuracy** of a source can be determined by how well the facts and information contained in the source are cited. Reliable sources will provide all the bibliographic information required for you to verify the credibility of its sources. The date of publication will indicate the **currency** of a source, and you will be able to determine if the information is up-to-date for your research topic.

Researchers and scholars should be fully alive to the academic evil of plagiarism. Stealing the ideas, thoughts and arguments of other scholars and deliberately camouflaging them is not only an affront to the integrity of the academic and scholarly pursuits but also an inadvertent attempt to smother one’s own innate ability to think and write originally. There are novice researchers and scholars who are blissfully ignorant of the seriousness of the crime in which they are indulging in. Such, scholars, in the long run, will be ostracized in the academic community. Wherever plagiarism flourishes or goes unchecked, the knowledge society is bound to crumble.

Serious Plagiarism

The website of Athabasca University offers the instances of plagiarism which would invite severe punishment:

- Submitting or presenting work as if it were your own when it isn’t.
- Obtaining then submitting a term paper from a repository.
- Submitting material for credit that has already been given credit in another course (or the same course at a previous time), without the approval of the professor.
- Submitting information or material in a course that you know to be false.
- Submitting co-authored work without the knowledge and agreement of all authors, as well as the approval of the professor (Thompson).

To Conclude

In sum, it is the bounden duty of the scholars, researchers, academicians and students to fight the evil of plagiarism, for, the whole edifice of knowledge which had been constructed by innumerable contributors over the years would crumble if it gets polluted by plagiarism. It is stealing of ideas and unauthorized use of another scholar's arguments to unchecked, colleges, universities and the academic institutions would degenerate, and they would become centres of obscurantism.

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