Plagiarism and Academic Research Ethics in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is defined as 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. Curbing the plagiarism is one of the necessary measures to curb mediocrity in research. In the age of ICT huge resource of academic and research works are easily available to everyone through internet. The discipline of Education is never undersupplied of plagiarized papers and theses. The ignorance of the ethics of research in India is so much that it is only discussed at higher policy level. This paper seeks to explore the conditions of research that exude plagiarism and suggests probable solutions to check the problem.

***Key Words:** Plagiarism, Research Ethics.*

Introduction

The word *plagiarism* is derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* meaning 'kidnap' or 'plunder'. Plagiarism is thus abduction of word, idea, and/or method with the intention to present it as original work of the deceiver. The idea may be an explanation, a theory, a conclusion, a hypothesis, a metaphor in whole or in part, or with superficial modifications without giving credit to its originator. It disregards an ethical principle that the written work of an author, whether in form of manuscript or a published

document has an implicit contract between the author of that work and its readers. This contract assumes that the author is the sole originator of the work, and any text or ideas borrowed from the document have to be clearly identified as such and the ideas conveyed therein are accurately represented. With the expansion of information and communication technologies, all sorts of documents and graphics are easily accessible and provide a temptation to pick up ideas and words and at times it is forgotten that such theft can be detected with the same ease. The Indian academia has just risen to the situation. University Grant Commission, in a recent document, has recognized the need of measures to curb the menace of plagiarism. As the policy is yet to see the light of the day, it is pertinent to discuss its context in Indian academic scenario

An Ethical Overview of Perception of Original and the Created

After the genome project, God may be accused of a high scale self-plagiarism, as He fooled the anthropocentric mortals to consider humans as His most unique creation without giving any clue that they are stuffed with his previous creations. I propose this piquant statement to underline the ambiguities that lie beneath the widely held concepts of original and plagiarized and I also suppose the concept of creativity to lie between the two concepts of the original and the copy. Whether one is creative or original first is an egg-hen question but some other related concepts have important bearings for policy making regarding plagiarism and enhancement of research quality.

To start with the concept of the original, it carries a notation of origin. Idealism held God's idea (inaccessible to the human thoughts) as the original. After all, the God's idea represents a Big Bang, and that of the human is a spark in his head! Humanity has taken a long journey to be able to aspire for 'a theory of everything', a simple explanation of every phenomena of the universe. The humans today believe that everything in the universe is a combination and recombination of the products of the either God's idea or of the Big Bang. Originality in this sense is inaccessible to human being. Robert Macfarlane (2007) reiterates in context of literary creation,

"Two contrasting cultural narratives exist, therefore, to explain literary creation. One is a hallowed vision of creation as generation-which we might call creation-the other a more pragmatic account of creation as rearrangement, which we might call invention. Creation is associated with the artist, invention with the artisan.".

The combination and recombination of existing things make the created things. The claim of a human being to originality is to invent an unprecedented combination to make things and ideas easier. This search of recombination is also named as research. Research in modern age is a professional occupation to further the boundary of human understanding

and one of its bases is to prize reasonably to the inventor of the right combination. As a profession it also demands for right conduct and ethics.

The concepts of trust and accountability are central to the research enterprise, as T.C. James (2010) rightly reiterates in the context of copyright protection,

"Every creative work is an extension of self of the creator. This protection involves right to claim the authorship of the work and to restrain or claim authorship of the work and to restrain or claim any damage in respect of any distortion, mutilation, modification or other act in respect to the work which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author". These rights are considered as moral rights. Even in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Article 27 (2) declares that "Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author". (Same as Section 57 of the Indian copyright act, 1957, same as Article 6th of Literary and Artistic works Paris Act of 1971, same in Berne Convention) It is also a natural justice that product of labour, skill and capital must not be appropriated by another. But it should be understood that plagiarism differs from copyright as copyright applies only to expression and not the ideas. But plagiarism may apply to both. In fact there are two distinct types of plagiarism – plagiarism of ideas and plagiarism of words. Plagiarism of words is to copy an author's words and use it without giving any credit to the original writer and fake an impression that it is written by the copier. This form is more popular in lower circle of research like Ph.D. researchers and general academicians. The other is more common with high level of research circle where a high chair academician claims someone else's (subordinates or some other writers') original ideas as his own. Before discussing the types, it is important to understand that the border-line between plagiarism and research is surprisingly murky. After all, advanced research is only possible by standing on the shoulders of others, as it is often said.

"In some disciplines (such as literature or law) a scholarly paper may well consist of a conjecture followed by hundreds of quotes from other sources to verify or falsify the thesis. In such case, any attempt to classify something as plagiarized vs. not-plagiarized just based on a count of lines of words that are taken literally from other sources is bound to fail. In other areas (like in a paper in mathematics) it may be necessary to quote standard literature just to make sure that readers have enough background to understand the important part, the proof of a new result whose length may well be below one third of the paper! In other disciplines like engineering or computer science the real value of a contribution may be in the device or algorithm developed (that may not even be explicitly included in the paper) rather than the description of why the device or algorithm is important that may well be spelled out in a number of text books. There is no valid definition of even textual

plagiarism that is not somewhat domain dependent, complicating the issue tremendously". (Maurer, Kappe & Zaka, p. 1050-84)

Plagiarism and the Indian Context

Righteous behaviour or ethics, commonly defined as norm for conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, is always relative to culture so that there cannot be a universal ethics. Hence one has to understand Indian context for defining right conduct in reference to plagiarism. Plagiarism has been considered a serious academic misconduct in west for a long time but the Indian academia is yet to see a scandal of serious consequences in lack of adequate regulations. With the expansion of ICT, especially the internet, a huge resource in form of documents and graphics, is available to anyone who has the access to them. This has given a concerning impetus to the recycling practices of Indian universities. As a UGC paper points out:

"One of the measures to curb mediocrity in research, plagiarism and scientific and academic dishonesty is to address this problem by stringent regulations to check plagiarism. Mandatory installation of plagiarism-check software like TURNITIN or any other relevant software in all libraries by UGC funding and an introduction of compulsory check of all thesis and dissertation before they are evaluated would bring in enormous scientific ethics and will control plagiarism." (University Grants Commission, November 2011, p. 102)

There are various types of plagiarism. It is categorized into four: unintentional, accidental, intentional and self-plagiarism. While idea plagiarism is practised at higher echelon of academia the copy paste type of plagiarism is most commonly practiced at academic centres of periphery. While a number of cases may be categorized as accidental due to ignorance of plagiarism and referencing style, the intentional plagiarism is not uncommon and self-plagiarism is practiced with a sense of right. Why does such unacknowledged, unauthorized duplicate publication persist? Some authors may do it simply because they are not aware that it is wrong. They like to present their work in as many places as possible to increase its visibility and to inflate their curriculum vitae for career promotion. But translated plagiarism is more readily practiced. An educated Indian on average is multilingual. Cross-language plagiarism can also involve self-plagiarism, i.e., the act of translating self-published work without referencing the original. This offense usually aims at increasing the number of publications. Another common scenario of cross-language plagiarism happens when a student downloads a paper, translates it using an automatic translation tool, corrects some translation errors and presents it as their own work. Language problem may be another reason for plagiarism in scientific and technical publication. Many mainstream prestigious journals are published in English, and authors for whom English is a second language may be tempted to copy extensive passages from an English-language text within their own work. Research

methodology courses are formally included in the Ph.D. curriculum of every university, but they are not updated and are run in a superficial manner. In fact there is no robust research culture especially in social sciences.

Curbing Plagiarism: A Holistic Approach

The first thing we need to change is the traditional approach of the teaching of research methodology. The course should

- Reiterate that research is a knowledge build up or extension of existing boundaries of knowledge, not a form of essay writing.
- Emphasize that the whole process of research from conceptualization to reporting is important.
- Balance what research is and what it is not?
- Include plagiarism along with other research misconducts. The students should be sensitized in the course through specific projects and assignment.
- Include innovative models of teaching for training students in research methodologies.
- Made students aware about various citation formats like APA, MLA and their differences.
- Induce students to develop a personal style of expression and presentation should be promoted.

Besides research the language issue is also important. English is still the mainstream language of Indian academia. It divides the leading and non-leading centres of academic research. Adequate help should be provided to the researchers who use English as a second language. Journals should be willing to help edit for clarify work of authors for whom English is a second language. More than that Indian scholarship is pathetically dependent on western economy of knowledge production. While the French and Germans developed their distinguished identities, the Indian scholars are still at consumer status. They are dependent on the ideas and concepts produced in English academia. Indian scholars should be promoted to have their distinct identity and a modern Indian tradition should evolve. Other languages may play a vital role in this. There could not be singular set of criteria to identify plagiarism for all the disciplines subject specific approach has to be adopted. Institutions and universities should stipulate plagiarism identification standards for different disciplines. Clear directives regarding plagiarism policy should be given to universities. The codes in educational institutions should be designed to encourage positive and academically correct behaviours. The codes should encourage positive and ethical behaviours, rather than mere legalistic codes to punish inappropriate behaviours because the success of the codes is rooted in a campus tradition of mutual trust and respect among students and between faculty members and students.

There are two different areas of plagiarism analysis which ought to be used strategically: extrinsic plagiarism analysis and intrinsic plagiarism analysis

Extrinsic plagiarism analysis Intrinsic plagiarism analysis

● May be a simple search with Google or anysearch engine.

● Any tool like TURNITIN that check the suspected document against a corpus of data. It tries to detect plagiarism without a reference collection, usually by considering differences in the writing style of the suspicious document.

A comprehensive code of ethics for research and its management as well as its reporting should be developed by the professional bodies of researches and academics. A body should be formed where the complaints on plagiarism may be lodged and a mechanism for redressing needs to be developed. Serious cases of plagiarism should be punished especially on higher echelons of academia.

Conclusion

Thus plagiarism is a complex and tricky issue. In light of the resent initiatives to increase the research output, that lag far behind the advanced countries, it is necessary to create a successful filter to ascertain that the raise should not be just inflation in the bars but a substantial contribution for academic and society in general. A spirit of research with the requisite ethical values should be inculcated in the researchers. The basic agency to inculcate these values is the teachers. They should present an example by their own conduct.

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