

INCIDENCE OF PLAGIARISM AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA

Michael Karikari Appiah

The Director,
Brain-Trust Research PVT Limited,
Box Ks 16184, Adum-Kumasi, Ghana

Abstract

The habit of coping, imitating or make use without due acknowledgment to the Author of an idea or its sources is termed plagiarism. The incidence of plagiarism among students in Higher Educational Institutions is growing perniciously rapidly than scholars projected. The emergence of the digital age has come to exacerbate this situation. One thing of great concern is that plagiarism is a problem for developed countries as well as underdeveloped nations. The 2013 conference on Plagiarism across Europe and beyond in Brno, Czech Republic raises further concern on plagiarism menace. The general objective of this study is to assess the Incidence of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions in Ghana using a sample size of 278 undergraduate students from Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana. Employing a descriptive research design and a structured questionnaire these students were assessed on knowledge and attitude on plagiarism. Stratified sample technique and Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) for windows were used respectively for respondents' selection and data analyzing. The findings were presented using frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations and Chi-square. Findings showed that there is a high incidence of plagiarism and related academic dishonesty practices among undergraduate students in the Kumasi metropolis of Ghana. 89.9% admitted that they have one way or other copied and pasted internet sources during assignments. Moreover, 77% did cheat due to excessive work load. 82.7% considered collusion as a form of plagiarism, albeit 64.7% and 65.5% respectively do not consider patchworks and pastiche as a form of academic dishonesty. Paraphrasing and getting good source were the major constraints in students' academic work. Penalties include; verbal warning (21.6%), re-write (23%) and zero score (17.3%). Of great concern is however that 88.5% of these undergraduate students are aspiring to further their studies to the graduate level. National policy on plagiarism is recommended.

Keywords: Higher Educational Institutions, Incidence, Plagiarism, Attitude, Knowledge

Introduction

Plagiarism occurs in all Human learning environments and continues to be the focus of attention in higher learning institutions. The 2013 Europeans conference on plagiarism in Brno Czech Republic reminds all major stakeholders in education that plagiarism is of a great concern. The diverse nature of plagiarism makes it quite cumbersome to adopt a particular definition. Several authors have therefore presented related definition about the concept. Theme such as stealing, immoral, offensive, cultural, deceptive, dishonesty are often used (Salleh, Ghazali, Awang, and Sapiai, 2012; East, 2009; Akbulutet al. 2008; Pecorari, 2008 and Thompson, 2002). According to East (2009) as cited in Salleh *et al.* (2012) “plagiarism, whereby another’s work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student’s own is prohibited. Any student failing to properly credit ideas or materials taken from another has plagiarized”.

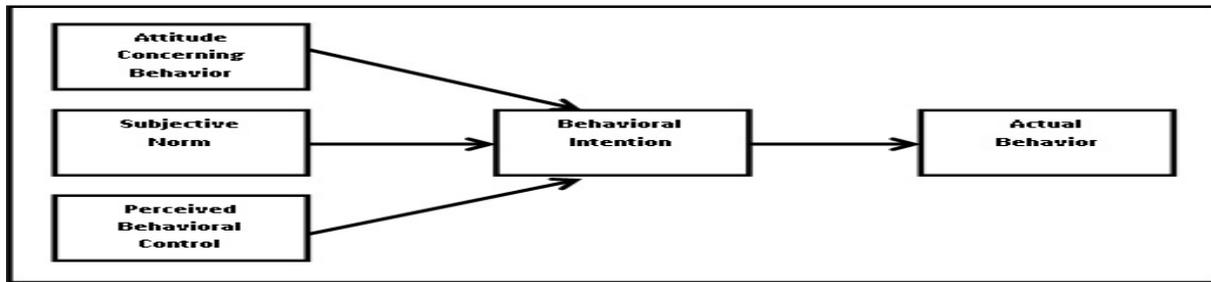
There are several reasons why plagiarism occurs in academic works. Thompson (2002) asserted that non-compliance to academic and scholarly procedures; policy and standards contribute immensely to this culture of stealing and immorality. The inability of the students to comprehensively demonstrate academic prowess in reading, writing and paraphrasing are contributing factors. Akbulutet *et al.* (2008) as cited in Salleh *et al.* (2012) posited that students usually think using many sources (patch works), quotes, citations is the primary goal of writing where their original ideas are secondary. The internet can’t possibly be eliminated when discussing student’s plagiarism. The digital age has made it possible to access chunk of information anytime, anywhere all the time everywhere (Rimer, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

A study on the incidence of plagiarism in Higher Learning Institutions in Ghana has not been adequately explored. cursory survey previously carried out revealed that Policy on plagiarism exists in most universities (Private and Public) in Ghana but enforceability is not adequately done. In some cases completely abandoned. Undergraduates hitherto lack adequate knowledge and education in dealing with plagiarism in their academic and scholarly works. It is against this background that this present study is being carried out to assess the degree of knowledge and attitude of plagiarism among undergraduates in the Kumasi metropolis of Ghana.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theoretical underpinning of this study is the Theory of Planned Behaviour. As cited in Salleh *et al.* (2012) the theory of planned behaviour was propounded by the Icek Ajzen in 1985 as a buildup on the Theory of Reasoned Action. This was done to improve its predictive power by incorporating Perceived Behavioural Control (intentions). The Authors further asserted that the perceived behaviour control has a relationship with the Theory of Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory explains the believe and capability tendencies in people’s to produce effects. Scholars believe that the theory of planned behaviour had more predictive power than the theory of reasoned action. The theory of planned behaviour stipulates that our actual behaviour is preceded by our behaviour intentions and these are equally influence by attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. The Figure 1, below further illustrate the theory. This theory was adopted to explain the incidence of plagiarism among undergraduate students. It is suggested that plagiarism among students is caused by their behaviour intentions. Moreover these intentions are stimulated by attitude concerning behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behaviour control.



Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985)

Literature Review

Literatures on incidence of plagiarism have been tremendous. Notably, prominent and vibrate Journalists, Politicians, Musician, Novel Writers and the ultimate Educationist have reportedly been accused of plagiarism. For example Stephen Ambrose was accused of plagiarism involving his book the Wild Blue: The men and Boys Who Flew B-24 over Germany were both plagiarized from Thomas Childers's book "The story of the last American Bomber shot over Germany in World War II. Thomas Childers was a history professor from the University of Pennsylvania. Ambrose a public figure and a renowned writer has since lost his public integrity and trust. In the year 2005, plagiarism scandal involving Melissa Elias can't be overemphasized; Elias was accused of plagiarized commencement speech from Anna Quindlen a Journalist as a result Elias was pressured to resign as the president and eventually as a board member of New Jersey School. Michael Bolton plagiarism scandal in 1999 is described the worst ever in the music industry when it turned out that his song Love is a Wonderful thing was stolen from the Isley Brothers. The Ninth Circuit of Appeal fined him \$ 5.4 Million which was described by yahoo as historic.

As indicated by Sousa-Silva (2013) the academic and higher learning institutions equally have recorded eminent figures fallen victim to the incidence of plagiarism notably in 2012 the Prime Minister of Romania Victor Ponta was made to resign when it was discovered a substantive aspects of his PhD thesis were plagiarized. The list continues unabated. In Germany the Education Minister Annette Schavan was accused by the plagiarist's hunters for plagiarizing about 130 passages of her PhD thesis. For her penalty the University of Düsseldorf which granted her the PhD award have revoked the title. The case of Jayson Blair in New York Times reported over 600 plagiarized articles within his four years stay in the company as a reporter. He was suspended when it was discovered that most of his articles were fraudulent and fabricated with invented quotes. In the year 2011, the German defense minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg was not spared and subsequently (temporally) renounced his PhD title when accused of plagiarism when writing his PhD thesis. Moving on, the sitting president of United States of America, president Obama was accused of plagiarism during the 2008 presidential election involving a speech reported to belong to Delva Patrick the Governor of Massachusetts. And 2006 speech delivered in Wisconsin contained works from martin Luther and John F. Kennedy. As cited in Sousa-Silva (2013) similar cases involving plagiarism scandals are reported of a lecturer and Journalist in Portugal.

In Africa similar cases have been reported. For instance in Nigeria Kalu (2012) reported that four lectures were dismissed on grounds of plagiarism at the University of Calabar. In a related incidence, Chiedozie (2012) reported a case involving a United State Nigerian lecturer who sued the Governor of central bank Dr. Lamido Sanusi of Nigeria for allegedly plagiarizing his works. Other authors have suggested measures in which to address the plagiarism menace. Thompson (2002) is of the view that policy reform whiles Becton (2007) believe that educating student on useful software tools can resolve the issue of plagiarism to a larger extent.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine undergraduates knowledge on plagiarism policies and prevention
2. To study the circumstances that result in plagiarism among undergraduates
3. To assess undergraduates knowledge on collusion, patchwork and pastiche
4. to study the factors that make academic writing difficult for undergraduates

Methodology

The study was aimed at assessing the incidence of plagiarism in Higher Learning Institutions in Ghana. The study targeted Undergraduates students in the Kumasi metropolis. The key variables in the study were knowledge and perception on plagiarism. Respondents demographics captured included: Age, Gender, Program of study, Religion and Nationality. Descriptive research design was employed in this study. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires were the main instrument used in gathering primary data. These questionnaires were adopted from Foltýnek, Rybicka and Demoliou (2013) and modified to suit the study needs. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles, conference proceedings and internet sources. The study targeted 300 undergraduate students from the selected Respondents were selected by stratified sampling technique. Out of the 300 questionnaires, 278 were answered recording a response rate of 92.7%. Data were analyzed using Predictive Analytic Software for windows (Version 21.0) due to it upgraded features.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Demographics

Variable	No. of Respondents n=278	% of total
Age		
<20	32	11.5
20-23	140	50.4
24-27	80	28.8
28-31	14	5.0
32-35	12	4.3
Gender	n=278	%
Male	150	54.0
Female	128	46.0
Nationality	n=278	%
Ghana	230	82.7
Non-Ghana	48	17.3
Subject area	n=278	%
Business Management	48	17.3
Commence	16	5.8
Financial and accounting	48	17.3
Other business	32	11.5
Other social science	60	21.6
IT in computing	28	10.1
Science	32	11.5
Engineering Sc	14	5.0
Respondents intend to pursue his/her education to graduate level	n=278	%
Yes	246	85.5
No	32	14.5

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 1, the average age of the population under study was 22.5 years. This implies that majority (50.4%) belong to the age group 20-23. Similarly, 28% of the remaining respondents were within the age group 24-27, 11.5% were below 20 years, 5% and 4% respectively belong to the 28-31 and 32-35 groups. The gender of the respondents was deployed in this study. The survey revealed that whopping majority (54.0%) were males and the remaining 46% were females. Gender inequality is still a concern in high institutions in Ghana. Expectedly, majority (82%) of the students were Ghanaians. Non Ghanaian nationalities were few constituting 17.3%. Those enlisted under this category include; Nigerians, Tanzanians, Equatorial Guinea and Ivory Coast. The student's subject areas were explored as follows; majority 21.6% were offering social sciences, 17.3% were offering business management, 17.3% were offering finance and accounting. 11.5% each were offering other business and sciences, 10.1% were offering I.T in computing and finally the least students were offering engineering related courses. Quite a plethoric number (88.5%) of the student had indicated their intention to pursue higher education on successful completion of their undergraduate studies. This is an indication that a higher prevalence rate of plagiarism and academic dishonesty in this study will have negative trickling down effects on the plagiarism indices in the higher (Graduate) level. Smaller amount of the respondents have made their intention not to further their education upon graduation.

Table 2: Scholarly training programs, policies and interventions on plagiarism

Statement	Scale		
	Yes	No	Not sure
I have received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues	23.0%	68.3%	8.6%
This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism	66.2%	0%	33.8%
Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students	61.2%	27.3%	11.5%
Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula	36.7%	34.5%	28.8%
Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism	31.7%	45.3%	23.0%
I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism	20.1%	28.8%	51.1%

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 2, the various forms of education, policies and interventions programs were examined, 23% of the students indicated that they received training in the techniques for scholarly academics writing and anti-plagiarism, majority (68.3%) admitted they had not received any form of education nor training on how to deal with plagiarism. 8.6% were not even sure whether such arrangement or policy are available. Regarding policies availability, majority (66.2%) agreed that their schools have plagiarism policies and procedures for handling related cases. It is interesting none of the student is not aware of these policies although, 33.8% were indifferent regarding plagiarism policy availability. Meanwhile, when the students were quizzed on whether plagiarism policies, procedure and penalties are available to them, majority 61.2% claimed to have access to them, 27.3% disagree to these, implying that policies and penalty procedures on plagiarism are not made available to them.

11.5% were not quite sure about the availability or unavailability of such guidelines. When the respondents were asked to indicate whether penalty for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula 36.7% agree to this, 34.5% were of the view that this was not done in their schools, 28.8% of the students were not sure of any standard formula for administering penalties for plagiarism. This could be related to study by Born (2003) who posited that, Public universities

claim to have corporate image and meanwhile their students commit plagiarism therefore its vital for the universities to protect their images. Regarding the question of whether students circumstances are taken to consideration when deciding on penalties for plagiarism, majority 45.3% were in disagreement to this. Meanwhile 31.7% attested to this statement. Majority (51.1%) had indicated that they are not quite sure whether language translations are used to prevent detection of plagiarism. Moreover, 28.8% do not agree such practice do exist in their schools. However, 20.1% of the students were of the view that it is very possible. This implies that few of the students do use language translators just to commit the act of academic dishonesty in their scholarly works.

Table: 3 Penalties for plagiarism

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percent (%)
Zero mark for the work	60	21.6
Request to rewrite	64	23.0
Verbal warning	48	17.3
Fail the subject	44	15.8
Suspend student from the institution	32	11.5
Expose student to school community	30	10.8
n=	278	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 3, regarding the availability of penalties for plagiarism, the study revealed as follows. majority (23%) of the respondents suggested that victims of plagiarism should be given the opportunity to rewrite the paper/ assignment, 21.6% were of the view that zero mark and re-sit should be instituted to deter victims, 17.3% proposed verbal warning as enough to ensure good practice among students victims, 15.8% also suggested failing the student regarding the plagiarized subject as a form of deterrence, 11.5% want penalty to be executed in the form of suspension from the school. finally, 10.8% responded that victims should be expose to the university community as a form of punishment. Other options under this category included; offenders be expelled, indefinite suspension, legal actions etc. however now of these were considered by the respondents. Regarding the damning effect of plagiarism, Teodorescu and Andrei (2009) posited that it has direct disruptive long-term effect on the behaviour and work ethics of students and those engage in these dishonest acts leaves the universities with ill work habits and their ethical foundations tern to be questioned as far as their academic integrity is concerned. In addition, these direct negative impacts may include non-promotion of student, inability to honor him with an academic titles whereas the indirect effect include tarnishing the image of the student while also having a negative implication on their country of origin. An immeasurable amount of image damage is suffered by the institution in the long term as well as the country where the act is committed (Bendixen and Abratt,2007).

Table: 4Reasons for Plagiarism

Statement	Scale		
	Yes	No	Not sure
It is easy to cut and paste from the Internet	89.9%	5.8%	4.3%
Plagiarism is not seen as wrong	82.7%	11.5%	5.8%
They think the lecturer will not care	78.4%	5.8%	15.8%
Their reading comprehension skills are weak	71.2%	28.8%	0%
They don't see the difference between group work and collusion	65.5%	11.5%	23.0%
They run out of time	85.6%	5.8%	8.6%
They are unable to cope with the workload	77.0%	5.8%	17.3%
They think their written work is not good enough	61.2%	27.3%	11.5%
They feel the task is completely beyond their ability	65.5%	28.8%	5.8%
Assignments tasks are too difficult or not understood	48.2%	23.0%	28.8%

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 4, In order to ascertain the root causes of plagiarism practices among students, the researcher adopted a ten (10) items instruments developed and used by Tomas, Rybicka and Demoliou (2013). The study discovered as follows; a whopping majority (89.9) asserted that it is quite easy to cut and paste from the internet, 5.8% and 4.3% respectively were not sure and disagree to the statement, 82.7% do not see anything thing wrong with using others information, 11.5% disagree to this and 5.8 were not sure of themselves and therefore decided to remain mute. This result affirms the work of ATL survey, (2008) which postulates that the advent of internet, activities such as searching the web, accessing journals, sharing information through video, audios, documents, has become easy and its available at all times, anywhere and everywhere as well as when a person is commuting etc. Moreover, students are exposed to floods of information that were not in existence before and make it extremely difficult for lecturers to track. These are made worse by using applications like word document in shaping the information gathered. Also, access to complete journals and academic works are easy with some coming at a fee which is easily paid by students, similarly students engage in group discussions using the internet as a medium after which ideas are collated and compiled for submission without acknowledging the contributors, (Akbulutet al.,2008; Gu and Brooks, 2008). East (2009) concluded that student's lack of courage is a reason for their plagiarism furtherance others fail to demarcate between common knowledge and ideas hence find it difficult in determining what deserves to be cited

Majority (78.4%) plagiarized because they thought their lecturers care less about this. the study further reveals that 71% of the students will cheat due to weak of appropriate reading and comprehension skills. 28.8% will not do this perhaps due to the dangers involve. majority (65.5%) postulated that they do not see the difference between collusion and group work. 23% were not will not do this whiles 11.5% were not sure about this statement. moreover, majority (85.6%) are most likely to plagiarize when they are running out of time, 5.8% will not do this whiles 8.6% are undecided. majority (77%) would cheat due to excessive work load, 17.3 % respondents are not sure of the best action when they find themselves in such a situation. as many of 61% students will cheat when they feel apathy towards their own work, 27.3% will not do this and 11.5% will remain silent on this issue. in a similar instance, majority (65.5%) are more likely to commit plagiarism in the event that their current task is beyond their ability. interestingly, the less than halve of the respondents (48.2%) are most likely to cheat when the assignment tasks are too difficult or misunderstood re-affirming the works of Wheeler (2009), who beliefs it's the lack of understanding that causes students to plagiarize other than issues of dress, language, beliefs and behavioural patterns among others.

Table 5: Students' knowledge on Collusion, Pastiche and Patchwork Relationships

Statement	Scale		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Pastiche	17.3%	65.5%	17.2%
collusion is plagiarism	82.7%	5.8%	11.5%
Groupwork is plagiarism	5.8%	64.7%	29.5%
Patch work is plagiarism	23.7%	64.7%	11.5%

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 5, several associations have been estimated in this study. Of particular interest to the researcher is the use of cross-tabulation and chi-square test of fitness. The results indicate that there is a positive association between respondent's gender and committing the crime of patchwork as an academic dishonesty. Karl Pearson chi-square value was obtained as 26.44 which was significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$). Moreover, an association between respondents gender and group work was estimated. The results indicated that there is a positive and significant association between respondent gender and their engagement with group-work as plagiarism preventive tool. Chi-square value of 121.46 which was significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$). Albeit the study revealed an insignificant ($p\text{-value}=0.668 > \text{sig-value}=0.05$). Furthermore, the association between collusion and gender was significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$) with a Chi-square value 0.747. Also there is an association between respondent's gender and pastiche chi-square was 20.24 which is significant at 0.000. Significant association between age and patchwork chi-square value is 199.02 which is significant at 0.000. More so, there was a significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$) association between age and group-work at a chi-square value of 66.20. There is again an association between respondents age and most likely hood of committing the offence of collusion which is significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$) at Chi-square value of 85.50. The respondent's age was having an association with their inclination to commit the offence of pastiche. This relationship record a chi-square value of 51.04 which is significant ($p\text{-value}=0.000 < \text{sig-value}=0.05$).

Table: 6 Perceptions on factors that make academic writing difficult

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percent (%)
Good source	112	40.3
Paraphrasing	92	33.1
Referencing formats	48	17.3
Citation and referencing	26	9.4
n=	278	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 6, Students' perceptions on factors that make academic writing and scholarly writings difficult were also explored. Majority (40.3%) had asserted that getting good source of information is their number one challenge. 33.1% posited that paraphrasing is their main difficulty, 17.3% had also established that referencing format is their major deterrent regarding academic and scholarly works. Finally, 9.4% mentioned that citation and referencing both pose a serious challenge on their academic endeavor. This corroborates related study by Hatch and Schultz (2003) who asserted that students as well as researchers perceive citing and quoting others as being superior to their own ideas.

Table 7: Knowledge on Referencing and medium for improvement

Variable		No. of Respondent	Percent (%)
	Yes	214	77.0
	No	16	5.8
	Not sure	48	17.3
n=		278	100.0
Variables		No. of Respondents	Percent (%)
	Class workshop	32	11.5
	Course or program handbook	138	49.6
	Class notes	44	15.8
	None	64	23.0
n=		278	100.0

From Table 7, it was obtained from the majority (77%) that students are encouraged to use referencing in their course work. they stated among other American Psychological Association (APA), Harvard (Authorship) and Chicago styles as the most recommendable. however, only few could provide right examples of their recommended writing style. The survey further explored the various forms of avenue available to student to help them avoid plagiarism. Majority 49.6% were of the view that course on plagiarism prevention is ideal alternatively plagiarism hand book should be considered as well. 23% indicated that web site platforms can be an alternative source of knowledge on preventive measures. 15.8% were of the idea that effective class room education should be enough. Finally, at least 11.5% of the respondents suggested that periodic workshops could provide antidotes to steed prevention.

Conclusions

There is a high prevalence of plagiarism and related academic practices among undergraduate's students in the Public universities in the Kumasi metropolis of Ghana. the root causes of this were identified as time constrain, academic work load, information accessibility using internet, problem of paraphrasing and referencing among others. Of great concern is however that a preponderance (88.5%) of these students are aspiring to further their studies to the graduate level. 89.9% asserted to the fact that it is quite easy to cut and paste from the internet. Moreover, almost all the universities visited had structured plagiarism policy in place. About 66.2% agreed that their schools have plagiarism policies and procedures for handling related cases. However, commitments towards implementations have been on sporadic basis and to some extent a fiasco.

Regarding the availability of penalties for plagiarism, the study revealed as follows. 23% of the respondents suggested that victims of plagiarism should be given the opportunity to rewrite the paper/ assignment, 21.6% were of the view that zero mark and re-sit should be instituted to deter victims, 17.3% proposed verbal warning as enough to ensure good practice among students victims. From the survey, it was obtained from the 77% that students are encouraged to use referencing in their course work. 49.6% were of the view that course on plagiarism prevention is ideal; alternatively plagiarism hand book should be considered as well.

Students' perceptions on factors that make academic writing and scholarly writings difficult were also explored. 40.3% had asserted that getting good source of information is their number one challenge. 33.1% posited that paraphrasing is their main difficulty, 17.3% had also established that referencing format is their major deterrent regarding academic and scholarly works.

Finally, the survey it was revealed that majority of the students 65.5% do not consider pastiche as a form of academic dishonesty of plagiarism, 82.7% considered collusion as a form of plagiarism, 64.7% do not consider group work as a form of plagiarism, the study revealed that 64.7% do not consider patchworks as a form of academic dishonesty

Recommendations

From the conclusions drawn, the researcher recommends as follows: First and for most, undergraduate students understanding of the concept of plagiarism itself is questionable hence not until a massive education and awareness is been intensified and sensitized, all other efforts aimed to counteract plagiarism will not fetch much results. As attested by more than 60% of the respondents they are aware of the policies on plagiarism but do not have much knowledge since the education aspect is lacking.

There must be whole national policy on plagiarism in higher institutions. This can be done through the Ghana ministry of education in collaboration with council for tertiary education. Such policy must incorporate all major stakeholders (Students, Lectures and Parents etc.) in the education mainstreaming to contribute their intellectual quota.

Moreover, in the interim students should be discouraged from resorting to the internet as the major source of information for their research dissertation and assignment works. The universities must also review/improve upon the existing plagiarism policy structures to increase academic integrity and honesty.

Plagiarism software's such as Turnitin, iThenticate, plagiarism checker, DupliChecker, Viper among others could serve as a good beginning, since some of these software are available free of charge.

This was a descriptive survey focusing on undergraduate level of study at the public universities within Kumasi metropolis in the Ashanti region of Ghana. It is suggested that future research should concentrate in other part of the country. Moreover, a comparative study between the private and the public should also be looked at in order to decipher the problem holistically.

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