

Plagiarism in Student Research: Responsibility of the Supervisors and Suggestions to Ensure Plagiarism Free Research

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Received: 3 September 2016 / Accepted: 6 September 2016 / Published online: 28 November 2016
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Abstract Plagiarism is a serious threat plaguing the research in publication of science globally. There is an increasing need to address the issue of plagiarism especially among young researchers in the developing part of the world. Plagiarism needs to be earnestly discouraged to ensure a plagiarism free research environment. We provide further suggestions to combat student plagiarism at Master's level and the regulations/guidelines regarding plagiarism in India.

Keywords Citing · Copying · Plagiarism · Publication ethics · Student research

Plagiarism in recent times has been spreading by leaps and bounds. Publish or perish arrangements or the desire for recognition and the pressure for publishing more and more papers often drives researchers towards the use of the papers/text or research of others in an inappropriate manner, and very frequently without crediting/citing their sources. Plagiarism very often begins to root itself at the Master's level where the students are initiating their research career by delving into experimentation and writing dissertations for the fulfilment of their Master's degree.

The problem of plagiarism is likely to reach epidemic proportions if more effective and timely interventions are not taken to prevent it. Plagiarism in any form needs to be discouraged at all possible levels in all possible ways. It is the need of the hour that every researcher/student understands the significance of research ethics especially those pertaining to plagiarism, its types and the different ways to avoid it

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(Yahaghi et al. 2016). It is essential to introduce a compulsory General paper regarding plagiarism and the rational use of others' text at the Master's level in the same way that the Environmental Science paper was introduced in the curriculum a few years ago (<http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/1003>).

Responsibility of the Supervisors

Once the students are assigned supervisors/guides/mentors for counselling/guidance, it is their prime duty to familiarise their students with the concept of plagiarism and its consequences. The supervisors are expected to explain the importance of publication ethics and integrity in research to their students and to raise the intellectual awareness for an appropriate use of others' work in their dissertations.

The supervisors must be in a position to sharpen the writing skills of the young researchers by imparting to them training on how to write different sections of their dissertations. One must be cautious in certain areas of research writing such as the introduction, a review of literature, and the discussion etc. where there is a greater likelihood of copying from existing material. The students must be made aware that not only the text but other contents/media of the articles such as photographs, pictures, diagrams, maps and tables should only be used in an acceptable and appropriate manner with appropriate attributions. Prior permission must be sought from the copyright owner before using these contents in the articles and theses. The media contents which are to be used in the theses should be original or modified and if the copyrighted material has been modified, then it should be mentioned that the file has been "modified after.....". At times, institutions have set certain guidelines to prevent plagiarism such as compulsory use of plagiarism detection software. It is the responsibility of the supervisors to ensure that the students adhere to the guidelines detailed by the mentor and the institute and are made fully aware of the software that can be used to detect plagiarized text figures.

Regulations and Guidelines Regarding Plagiarism in India

In a recent development, the University Grant Commission (UGC), New Delhi, India has recommended a mandatory anti-plagiarism scan before awarding the M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees to the candidates (Jaisankar 2015). Many Indian universities have already implemented these guidelines. Further, in order to deal with plagiarism cases, the draft law would be presented to the Ministry for its approval. According to the regulations detailed in the legislation, in cases where plagiarised content found in the theses, the students may be 'punished' with one or other of the following actions; warning, advisory, formal disapproval, cancellation or deregistration, barring of modifying content from submission etc (Pandey 2016).

Plagiarism detection software programs are usually acquired by the universities for assessment of the degree and amount of plagiarism in the theses and reports of the research work (Yahaghi et al. 2016). The question one frequently ponders is the

acceptability percentage of the plagiarised content in the theses or research manuscripts. The UGC's communications being circulated to the various universities states that an individual's work is said to be plagiarised if more than 30% of the material is copied from other sources (Jaisankar 2015). But then, it is not only the percentage that matters, what matters more is what, how and why the contents are copied. There obviously can be no escape for copying 30% of the content from a single article or 10% from each from three different articles as these may still amount to plagiarism despite it being within the acceptable 30% limit.

Suggestions

Further, to initiate the drive of plagiarism-free research, various actionable steps are:

1. In the existing scenario, the UGC has made it mandatory to run the M.Phil. and Ph.D. theses and dissertations through anti-plagiarism software. It needs to be implemented by all the universities though. Similar recommendations are required for the verification of the Masters theses in the universities.
2. Autonomous universities should monitor the research work at the mentor as well as student levels.
3. All students (UGs, PGs, M.Phil. and Ph.D.s) taking up research should be allowed free access to the plagiarism detection software used by the universities so that they can engage in suitable modifications/corrections to their work.
4. To increase awareness of the subject and inculcate honest practices, use of plagiarism detection software should be implemented for the formative, summative, and classroom assignments submitted as a part of the curriculum (<http://www.stir.ac.uk/academicpolicy/handbook/assessment>).
5. There should be clear guidelines for the percentage of the plagiarised content that may be deemed acceptable along with an elaboration of what can amount to plagiarism in the designated acceptable limits.
6. In order to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the intellectual work, the researchers/students should mandatorily submit a plagiarism check report before/along with the submission of their research work.
7. Frequent awareness programs should be held for researchers and young students on the all important issues relating plagiarism, and they should be guided about best practices in research and its subsequent publications.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors state that there is no conflict of interest regarding this manuscript.

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