

# Internet and Increasing Issues of Plagiarism



**Naziya Hasan**

Assistant Professor,  
Deptt. of Teacher Education,  
Manipur University,  
Manipur

**Naved Hassan Khan**

Assistant Professor,  
School of Education,  
Central University of Haryana,  
Haryana

## Abstract

With the proliferation of mobile technology and other useful easily and freely accessible devices, it becomes quite easy to get matters or contents, either in written, visual or audio form, on any topic of interest. This trend is making its root stronger among college as well as school going young minds of the students. They copy the related content ad infinitum from internet for completing academic works and teachers become satisfied with their neat and clean (in terms of mistakes) assignments and even written answers in examinations. Are the teachers and students aware about the issues of plagiarism? Do these teachers and students know that it is an academic theft and dishonesty? It cuts the creative wings of the learners. This can also lead them risk their reputation and career which is reflected clearly in latest notification of University Grants Commission on (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2018, published on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018 in the Gazette of India. Supported by various studies, this paper deals the need of spreading awareness among teachers as well as students about plagiarism and cyber cheating along with its consequences on their later lives. The present paper also tries to suggest different solutions for combating this rampant problem which is everywhere in our academic atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Plagiarism, Internet, Cyber Cheating, Academic Integrity

## Introduction

Rapid spread of technology has brought us all into an extremely different world. Today's age is known as digital age where children use to play and learn with new and novel experiences through the use of iPods and smart phones. 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are called as Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998) and Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001). Technology has tremendous role to play in making them so. Technology changes the way one learns and acquires skills and competencies. According to Ma, Wan & Lu (2008), "The Internet has become more and more important for young peoples' lives at school and at home. It provides young people with tremendous opportunities in social interactivity, peer to peer communication, career seeking, shopping and civic interests. The internet is affecting all subjects in K-12 education. It is changing the way educators teach by providing new perspectives on communication and dissemination, and by opening up exciting new resources for students and teachers." It has, no doubt, made our life easy and enjoyable, but at the same time, with a company of other challenges. Today's students rely mostly on internet for already cooked items or materials where they use their hands and heads for copying only. In later life, this habit can lead them in great danger and loss. The most harmful loss is the loss of creativity and credibility. From the very initial stages of learning, being a teacher, he/she should make students aware about the issues of plagiarism, the way to handle the vast array of information available on internet and should not promote the habit of copying from others.

## Aim of the Paper

Conceptual understanding is the basic requirement for proper execution of any planned activity. Keeping in mind the same notion the present paper aims around the development of conceptual background of plagiarism and the need of spreading awareness about it in order to strengthen the academic integrity and honesty in educational institutions. It, further, purports to show the strong connection between plagiarism and internet usage along with the reasons of cheating among students of different levels and streams. At the end, it suggests the steps and preventive measures for its avoidance.

**Review of Literature**

The strength of any new work depends upon the depth and grip of its foundation. Likewise, new studies are always supported and being polished with the help of previous researches conducted in related areas. The present paper, in the light of various studies, deals with the need of spreading awareness among teachers and other stakeholders about plagiarism and cyber cheating. Townley&Parsell (2004) found in their study that "while preparing assignments, most of the students retrieve information using internet and they do not treat the online sources as they view printed materials in terms of authorship, copying and plagiarism." Brimble& Stevenson-Clarke (2005) conducted a survey of students and teachers of Queensland University in Australia where it was found that there were differences between students and teachers regarding the perception, penalties, prevalence and reasons for academic dishonesty. Interestingly, students were found to be more aware of the prevalence of plagiarism than their teachers. In a study by McCabe (2005), it was found that most of the students copied nearly word to word from sources, not cited. He noted that "many high school students believe- or say they believe- that if information is on Internet, it is public knowledge and does not need to be footnoted- even if it is quoted verbatim." McCabe's study revealed that in USA and Canada, one in every five students of colleges and universities admitted that they cheated in examinations and tests. Center for Academic Integrity (2005) has conducted a nationwide survey of 60 Universities where it was found, in the case of internet usage for cheating, that 77% of students (undergraduate) thought that cutting and pasting one or two sentences from online sources without appropriate citations was not a serious issue.

In addition to this, people, generally, perceive that internet is free for all and a public domain so copying from it does not require any citation or acknowledgement (Oliphant, 2002; Baruchson-Arbib&Yaari, 2004). There are other studies (Suarez & Martin, 2001; Ma Lu Turner & Wan, 2007; Sulikowski, 2008; Senders, 2008; Emerson, 2008; Ma et. al., 2008; Power, 2009) which claim that easy access to online material is a catalyst for plagiarism. In the similar line, another investigatory study was conducted in middle school by Ma, Lu Turner & Wan (2006) which reported that "the characteristics of the internet brought more convenience to digital plagiarism, particularly among middle school students." In his study, Selwyn (2008) reported that in higher education institutions of UK, about 60% undergraduate students accepted that they were involved in internet based plagiarism. The investigation of Tayraukham (2009) regarding plagiarism in higher education in Thailand showed that students were indulged in plagiarism to get answers to their questions and to score high marks on the cost of gaining knowledge and experience in their subjects. Low level of awareness and knowledge about plagiarism was found in the study of Ryan, et al. (2009) which was conducted in University of Sydney. The exploratory study of Ramzan, et al (2011) highlighted the seriousness among UG and PG

students of different universities of Pakistan. Its findings revealed that students plagiarized in large number and they did that for completion of their assignments and projects. There are a number of studies on issues of plagiarism and its prevalence in education system which needs to be eradicated with the help of spreading awareness and knowledge about the concept and its severe consequences.

**Plagiarism: A Conceptual Background**

Plagiarism is the "wrongful appropriation" and "purloining and publication" of another author's "language, thoughts, ideas or expressions" and the representation of them as one's own original work. It always remains the concern of teachers and administrators who want students' originality to come out and reflect in and through their assignments and research works. The modern concept of the term plagiarism as immoral and originality of one's work as an ideal, emerged in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Etymologically, plagiarism word is derived from a Latin word 'Plagiarius' which, literally, means 'kidnapper' which denotes the one who steals someone else's work and publish that as his/her own. The word, in literature, was pioneered by Roman poet Martial who complained that his verses were kidnapped by other poets. The same word was used in English in 1601 by dramatist Ben Johnson, to describe literary theft. The derived form 'Plagiarism' was introduced into English around 1620s.

According to the document published by Council of Writing Program Administrators (2003), "In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common knowledge) material without acknowledging its source." As per the meaning given in Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary (2009), plagiarism means the act of "copying another person's ideas, words or work and pretend that they are your own." According to Oxford Dictionary of Education (2015), "Plagiarism is the act of appropriating someone else's idea or work and passing it off as one's own." According to UGC, Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions Regulation (2018), "plagiarism means the practice of taking someone else's work or idea and passing them as one's own."

Plagiarism is defined in multiple ways in higher education institutions and universities. Stanford University defines plagiarism as the "use, without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or source, of another person's original work, whether such work is made up of code, formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other form." Yale University views plagiarism as the "use of another's work, words, or ideas without attribution" which includes "using a source's language without quoting, using information from a source without attribution, and paraphrasing a source in a form that stays too close to the original." Oxford University characterizes plagiarism as the use of a writer's ideas or phraseology without giving due credit. Brown University defines plagiarism to be "appropriating another person's ideas or words

(spoken or written) without attributing those word or ideas to their true source." Victoria University of Wellington gives a comprehensive definition as, "Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. Someone else's work means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals, or any other printed sources, the work of other students or staff, information from the internet, software programs and other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material."

Almost all higher education institutions, where research work with originality is given paramount importance, see the idea of plagiarism in a similar way though adopt preventive measures in their own style and preferences. All above given definitions describe that plagiarism is a serious and complex issue which denotes the concept of copying other's work, word or ideas and presenting them as their own work without source citation or acknowledgement. The idea behind plagiarism is that of right of ownership (Evering & Moorman, 2012). It assumes that everything has a value, be it in material form or abstract notions, which are owned by its creator, can be bought and sold by others. Other terms, related to plagiarism, are cyber cheating, academic theft, literary theft, academic dishonesty, violation of intellectual property rights, non-maintenance of academic integrity etc. When technological tools are used in an inappropriate way for academic works, it is termed as cyber cheating. Academic integrity relates to the values such as avoidance of cheating or act of plagiarism, maintenance of academic standards, honesty in research and academic publishing.

#### **Plagiarism and Internet**

Everything changes with time and influences the society in negative as well as positive ways. The same is the case with emergence and wide spread popularity and use of digital technology or digitalization of the world. On one hand, the growth of technology and its advance tools have given a new shape to the communication patterns and accessibility to a tremendous variety of ideas and information. On the other, at the same time, it has opened the gate to misrepresent the ideas and information, accessed from some sources, as their own without proper attribution and citation. The internet is being used for research work, assignments, project work, etc. Nowadays, no one wants to spend time on creating something new because they got the READYMADE or COOKED materials online with ease and without efforts. Who will waste their time in using their heads for preparation of original works and assignments? This mentality is making its grip stronger over the young minds of today's students especially because of rapid spread of technology. The same thought is supported by Ma, Wan & Lu (2008) who said, "The Internet has brought wonderful opportunities for improving teaching and learning, but at the same time, it has also brought challenges to academic integrity." The similar notion is given by Lathrop & Foss (2000) as, "the deterioration of ethics

among young people seems to be closely related to the internet and other advanced technologies." Oxford Dictionary of Education (2015) stated that plagiarism is due to the "advance in technology and the easy availability of internet access, which allows dishonest minority of students to cut and paste text from unacknowledged sources and incorporate it into their own work."

In the words of Council of Writing Program Administrators (2003), "With the advent of the internet and easy access to almost limitless written material on every conceivable topic, suspicion of students plagiarism has begun to affect teachers at all levels." Internet and accessibility of bulk of information with a click is always being linked with the proliferation of plagiarism in today's era. In academic as well as non-academic fields, the issue of plagiarism got high stake after rapidly spreading growth of advancement in the field of information and communication technology.

According to Evering & Moorman (2012), "Although plagiarism is clearly an academic issue, the proliferation of digital media with which students interact daily and the growth of the Internet as source of information have made it a literacy issue as well." In the words of M. Ramzan, et.al, (2012) "More and more students and researchers are turning to the internet for cooked solution and shortcuts for writing assignments, research papers and theses." It is a well-known fact that plagiarism is not a newly born concept, but was present in the form of copying words, thoughts, ideas or works from printed materials. Undoubtedly, it got full speed and its adulthood stage in this digital era where vast accumulation of information about anything is easily available with just a simple click. "The major draws of internet plagiarism are the ease with which students can simply cut and paste a paper from other sources and the mind-boggling array of information available and encouraging them to do so" (L. Renard, 2000). Further, it is added by S. Conradson & P.H. Ramos (2004) that "Accessibility of computers, internet and other electronic resources such as CD-ROM encyclopedias has made cheating quicker and easier for our current generation of technology-savvy teenagers."

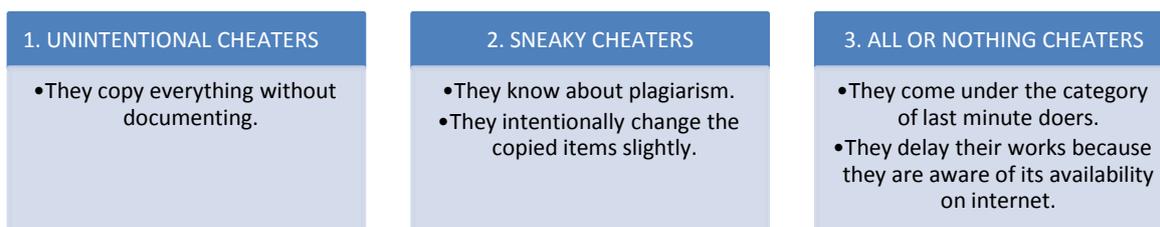
On contrary to this linkage of plagiarism with internet and open accessibility, Comas & Sureda (2008) said, "Blaming ICTs for the rise in cases of plagiarism in academic settings is like blaming the bank robberies on the presence of cash in the building." It highlights the changes required in the approaches and methodology of teaching where students should be taught to handle the vast amount of information in more rightful and ethical manner. However, many research studies concluded that internet and easy access to information is one of the probable causes of rising plagiarism among university, college and school students and researchers. According to Howard & Davies (2009), "In an age when students gravitate to online sources for research-and when tremendous amounts of both reputable and questionable information are available online- may have come to regard the internet itself as a culprit in students' plagiarism."

**Reasons for Cheating**

Cheating is the complex issue for most students (Michael and Miethe, 1989) including teachers and administrators. Their standards in regard to what is and what is not cheating often vary depending on the context (La Beff et al, 1990). Decisions about academic dishonesty are clearly influenced by societal and school norms, as well as, the attitudes of teachers and most importantly, friends (McCabe & Trevino, 1993, 1997) which compel them to crave for the final product with distinction, no matter what means they are using for the product. For their

ease, there is a boon of internet. Computer savvy students have caught on to this means of avoiding effort in such numbers that some teachers wonder whether anything original is being written anymore. The internet offers many wonderful educational resources. It also presents students with a world of unethical techniques and ideas (Renard, 2000). Plagiarism is viewed in terms of a sort of “academic crime or sin” (Sutherland-Smith, 2005). In “Cut and Paste Ethics”, Lisa Renard (2000) has described three types of internet cheaters which are given in the following figure.

**Figure 1: Types of Cheaters\***



\*Adapted from Cut and Paste Ethics by Lisa Renard (2000)

A close look on the reasons of cheating through review of related literature show that it is a much more complex phenomenon. The reasons are associated with students’ lack of awareness, ethics, integrity, interest, and motivation, excess of pressure to gain good score in examination and peer-culture. Teachers’ technique used in teaching, in giving assignment in large number and of poor quality also comes under it. In addition, parents negligence towards their children and their high expectations regarding scores. Last but not the least, the administrators who fail to make a clear cut policy in schools and other educational and research institutions to check plagiarism and stop its prevalence. Every cheater has its own reasons for cheating and plagiarism which are not observed only by students but by teachers, parents and administrators.

Valuing grades over learning or focusing on passing the examination not on experiences of learning where learning is considered as product instead of a process gives growth to plagiarism. Students consider learning as a product. Students who decided to plagiarize rather than to write their own papers have learned somewhere along the line that the final product takes precedence over learning something from the process of writing (Renard, 2000). To add, lack of proper planning and poor time management, lack of interest, poor level of motivation, lack of awareness or ignorance about plagiarism, lack of maturity, fear of failure, poor pattern of scoring procedures, underdeveloped sense of integrity, peer culture, web sites, punishment not reinforced and pressure for achievement (Ma, et al, 2008) and no provision of punishment or penalty for being caught in cheating and plagiarism are the reasons responsible for growing issues of plagiarism and cheating among students. Dawson & Overfield (2006) described that students were aware that plagiarism was not good but they were not clear of what constitutes it and how to avoid it in their works

and writing. Study of Razera et al (2010) found that lack of motivation, poorly worded examination, lack of training in scientific writings were some of the factors that forced students towards plagiarism.

Poor quality of assignment or failure to see relevance in assignments is also a pertinent reason of cheating among students and researchers. When busy and vague assignments are given to the students, they lose their interest for its completion and tend to go for short cut to complete it just to get the task done (Evering & Moorman, 2012).

Most of the studies reviewed for the present paper, regarding the issues of plagiarism and its connection with internet usage, showed that internet has played the role of a catalyst in the issue of plagiarism. Students, in the studies, thought that the materials which were available on internet was free for all and had no issue in not giving citation or acknowledgement while copying few parts or the whole things. Studies showed that students were well aware of the prevalence of plagiarism (Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Snow, 2006; Dawson & Overfield, 2006) but they accepted that they were unaware of the ways to avoid it. McKenzie, editor of online educational journal ‘From Now On’, claimed that “many students engaged in plagiarism truly don’t understand that the exercise of cutting and pasting into a paper without attribution is morally wrong. They don’t think of it as cheating. They are simply collecting information and don’t understand the whole concept of intellectual property” (As quoted in Hafner, 2001).

**Steps and Suggestions for Prevention of Plagiarism**

Studies have revealed that plagiarism is rampant in academia and is making its grip stronger with the advent of internet and massive information, available through this source. These results are like wake up calls for educators, teachers and administrators, which indicate about the growing rate of cheating among students. It needs to be checked with proper measures adopted by the concerned

people. Lack of knowledge regarding plagiarism and its related issues is one of the most important causes of internet plagiarism. So, the students need to be trained and made aware of its concepts, consequences and the ways to avoid it in their assignment or research works. Development of academic integrity denotes the moral code or ethical policy of academia. This includes values such as avoidance of cheating or plagiarism; maintenance of academic standards, honesty and rigor in research and academic publishing. The knowledge about academic integrity, academic honesty, cyber cheating, etc. must be imparted to them. It is because the system's failure in reducing cheating is largely the result of failures in prior teaching and learning (Council for Writing Program Administrators, 2003). In order to create more constructive, creative and collaborative academic environment, it is a prerequisite to spread awareness regarding the issues of plagiarism. The probable suggestions for prevention of plagiarism are given in the following manner:

1. According to Petrovecki (2001), "The best approach to prevent plagiarism is to educate students and point out the importance of honesty in science and professional work." Students should be taught and be educated about plagiarism, cheating and its repercussions. They must be aware about the importance of originality in one's work and the importance of acknowledging the works of others. It is revealed that students are seldom engaged in instruction or discussion about what plagiarism is, why it is a problem, and how it can be avoided (Power, 2009). Students should be taught about the proper ways and process of paraphrasing, summarizing, citation skills, etc. to prevent cheating and plagiarism.
2. Establishment of academic policies for reducing cheating behaviours as academic integrity policies and honor codes can be catalysts in preventing plagiarism (McCabe et al., 2001). The culture of academic integrity will rise with the help of meaningful assignments and inquiry-based learning. It is observed by Pupovoc, et al (2008) that "prevalence of plagiarism largely depends on the cultural characteristics of the academic setting and the degree to which plagiarism is implicitly allowed or explicitly accepted in the academic community and wider society." In their study, Baruchson-Arbib & Yaari (2004) suggested that students should be taught to observe ethics in use of internet resources, its proper citations and importance of copy right laws to reduce the plagiarism from academia. These policies should be visible, publicized and accessible to the students for whom it is framed. Instructions regarding plagiarism should be addressed explicitly where students get a chance to engage in discussion about academic integrity. In order to curb it in the beginning of students' life, promote cheating and copying ethics and values from early childhood.
3. Make assignment thoughtful, reflective, novel, and full of clarity and originality. Papers with high interest and real elements and analysis are less likely to promote plagiarism among students. Stephens and Ballast (2011) suggests a "digital makeover" for traditional lessons in order to create more student-centered assignments that focus on higher order thinking skills (Evering & Moorman, 2012). Avoid the generic, 'every-teacher- assigns-it' assignment or paper topic. Students should be engaged in more collaborative, creative and innovative works which are essential components of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) should be promoted. Teacher-taught relationship also helps in preventing plagiarism. Closer interpersonal relationship between teachers and students bring a decrease in academic plagiarism (Underwood et al., 2003; McCabe et al., 2006). Further, comparison essays or comparative writings can be used which involve higher level thinking skills and give less chances to copying and cheating. For better results, it is suggested to compliment the model assignments by showcasing students' original writing or work. Students should also take their assignments as opportunities for genuine and rigorous inquiry and learning (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2003).
4. Students should not only be taught the usage of technology but the ways to do it in ethical manner which require digital literacy experiences including skills, knowledge and expertise necessary to locate, navigate and evaluate information in an ethical manner (Howard & Davies, 2009). Fulton (1997) persuasively argues that schools must change traditional approaches to learning in order to help today's students acquire the skill sets required for succeeding in the workplace of the future. These advanced skills will be achieved "through the learners' interactions with content" in the digital age and not through "the transmission of facts". They should be taught the skill of documenting the sources and their citation. Simple description of internet as a culprit cannot work in the case of avoiding plagiarism. In the words of Howard & Davies (2009), "Students don't need threats; students need pedagogy. That pedagogy should both teach source-reading skills and take into consideration our increasingly wired world. And it should communicate that plagiarism is wrong in terms of what society values about schools and learning, not just in terms of arbitrary rules."
5. Create an ideal testing environment which requires the re-evaluation and re-design of traditional methods of educational assessment. Look for clues like lack of proper citation or referencing, atypical language for the particular student and mixed writing in order to identify the plagiarism in the works of students and work on those issues accordingly.
6. Utilize essay scanning software like SafeAssign, Orkund, Turnitin, Viper, Glatt Screening, etc. for

checking students' assignments and works. According to Pupovoc, et al. (2008), "Although it is easier to plagiarize in the age of ICT, it is also easier to detect and measure plagiarism."

"When assignments are highly generic and not classroom-specific, when there is no instruction on plagiarism and appropriate source attribution, and when students are not led through the iterative processes of writing and revising, teachers often find themselves playing an adversarial role as plagiarism police instead of a coaching role as educators" stated by Council of Writing Program Administrators (2003).

In order to prevent plagiarism, it is suggested to make ethical policies in the institutions to follow it rigorously, to make students aware of the concept and issues of plagiarism along with the steps for its avoidance, to teach the skill of summarizing, paraphrasing, source citation, etc., to give assignments which are interesting, according to the level of students, new and original which ask for analytical reflection, to teach about the ethical use of information available on internet which also need to be given acknowledgement, to teach them about intellectual property and sense of ownership and to use software to check plagiarism.

#### Conclusion

Plagiarism is an act of passing off idea or work, taken from others, as one's own without giving attribution to the source. Though it is not a new term or issue in the academic fields, it spread world widely with the advent of technology especially internet which makes every information available to everyone. Technology is termed as a culprit in the case of plagiarism (Howard & Davies, 2009) but it made its detection easy too. With the growing issue of plagiarism, students' creativity, originality and innovation is at risk which needs to be measured with proper action and steps taken by teachers, educators and administrators. To conclude, it can be stated that plagiarism can be avoided with awareness about it and with certain policy framework regarding ethics and values. Mere knowledge of plagiarism divorced from the development of professional ethics will not work in curbing the rampant issue of plagiarism. In addition to that, the better quality of assignments, evaluation processes, spirit of collaborative work and closer interpersonal relationship between teachers and students can be helpful in preventing the plagiarism.

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