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Plagiarism- A Scientific Misconduct

Meenakshi Ambwani¹, Chaturbhuja Nayak²

Abstract

Plagiarism is referred to as literary copying or stealing work or idea without acknowledgment of an original author that ultimately hampers the quality of an article. Plagiarism is rampant in current times as writers donot have knowledge about this unethical malpractice. Also, with easily available information on any topic through internet, writers indulge in the wrong trend of copying to prepare their articles with greed to gain name, fame and also increase the number of their publications for promotions and salary hike. The writers indulging in plagiarism are considered incompetent and these dishonest perpetrators have to face punishments and they even lose their reputation.

This review article deals with historical background, causes, types of plagiarism; role of publication agencies, plagiarism detection tools and strategies to avoid it. The need of the hour is to create awareness as to what constitutes plagiarism by conducting seminars, workshops on guidelines that need to be followed by the authors while writing articles. Maximum responsibility lies with the authors to follow the moral, honest policies and not to indulge in fraudulent behavior.

Keywords: Ethics, Literary theft, Plagiarism, Plagiarism detection tools, Publication agencies, Punishment.

Introduction

With the usage of the Anglo-Saxon axiom “Publish or Perish” as early as 1928 in a scholarly context, this mantra is gaining much significance in recent times, especially with regard to scientific writings. This phrase was, however, extended in the year 1932 by *Harold Jefferson Coolidge* in a non-academic context in a book. ¹ New research must be revealed to the public and publications, especially in peer-reviewed journals, needs to be done to keep the system alive and dynamic.

In view of writing articles as per the standard guidelines, Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) clearly expresses what constitutes the malpractice of plagiarism. It basically emerges from the use of the published and unpublished idea of another person where permission is not sought and involves both in-press and digital categories. ²

The World Association of Medical Editors defines plagiarism as, “The use of others’ published and unpublished ideas or words (or other intellectual property) without attribution or permission, and presenting them as new and original rather than derived from an existing source.” ² It involves imitating six consecutive words or seven to eleven words overlapping on a set of 30 letters; ³ and the sentence must be paraphrased. ⁴

Historical background

The story of plagiarism dates back to around 80 A.D. when, Fidentinus, a poet used to recite the works of another Roman poet named Martian. As there were no courts during that time, Martian didn’t have much of a choice. He retaliated by writing verses and mentioning Fidentinus as a kidnapper, a ‘plagiarus.’ ⁵

‘Plagiarism’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*plagios*’ meaning ‘crooked’ or ‘treacherous’. ⁶ It is, however, extended to the Latin root ‘*plagere*’ - ‘kidnap’;

¹Professor, Head of the Department, Homoeopathic Pharmacy, Bakson Homoeopathic Medical College & Hospital, Greater Noida, UP, India

²Former Director-General, Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH), Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India, New Delhi, and President of Homoeopathy University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
Corresponding Author:

Dr. Meenakshi Ambwani

36- B, Knowledge Park- I,
Greater Noida- 201306, UP, India.

E-mail: ambwani_drmeenakshi@yahoo.com

plagiatum - 'stealing people', 'kidnapper of children, to abduct, a plunderer'.⁷ The word *Plagiary*, a derivative of *plagiarius* has been described in the English language and was presented by author and satirist Ben Johnson in 1601 as a literary theft/copycat.⁸

Causes of plagiarism

Many writers are unaware of what is meant by plagiarism. They, however, do not know how citations should be done in an article.⁷ Now-a-days, there is intense competition due to which people intentionally tend to copy material, and ideas of other writers to fulfill their personal ambitions to obtain fame, power,⁹ job, salary hike, promotions, scholarships, recognition by society, their office boss, colleagues, and friends.¹¹

Scarcity of time, poor language, grammar skills⁷, and writing dilemmas might cause problems while reviewing literature; information gets stored in our subconscious levels, so it becomes difficult to jot down new ideas.¹² Also, with the availability of smartphones, and laptops with internet access, information of any kind, even audio, and videos can be searched from different websites easily and can be used.⁷ This basically starts from the school itself when students have to prepare assignments and they copy from social media to obtain grades.¹⁰

Types of plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism/Cut-paste/ Word-to-Word plagiarism refers to deliberately copying word to word the text in small parts or completely without acknowledging the original author of an article or a research study.²

Inexperienced and new authors often fall prey to **Unintentional/ Accidental plagiarism** as they are unaware of the rules of writing articles and get their articles published at the start of their careers.¹² They paraphrase the sentences, use synonyms improperly and do incorrect citations.¹³ Just changing a few words class, order, or vocabulary in a sentence is not paraphrasing; the proper idea of the writer must be highlighted correctly in the writer's own language without changing the meaning of the sentence.¹⁴

The editor will hold both author and co-authors responsible for penalties in accordance with the

authorship criteria mentioned by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Writers must search and read the literature thoroughly before writing their articles and must avoid plagiarism as ignorance is not acceptable in the scientific world.¹⁵

Mosaic/patchwork plagiarism: When a writer copies parts of a work, takes words or phrases, or sentences from the article and changes the words or the order of the words, and uses them in his own article, without giving credit to the original author.¹⁵

Self-plagiarism: The writer composes an article and gets it published in a journal. He again writes a new article for publication in a different journal but he takes matter/ findings/ illustrations from his own original article. He doesn't cite his previous work. Author makes the readers believe that he has made two different new articles.^{7,17}

It has been observed that, in some cases, the author wants to publish research studies in a sequence one after the other. For the new article, he uses the previous findings of the research as a basis. Here, the author must cite the source of his own original article to avoid falling under the plagiarism purview. He can also seek the permission of the publisher in this case.^{15,18}

Salami slicing or salami tactics/ technique: It refers to dividing and producing multiple publications.¹⁹ It is a technique whereby the author conducts a research study but divides the research into different parts and then gets those published in different journals instead of publishing one scientific paper with the findings in one journal. It is only the reviewers or experts in the field who can detect such unethical practices.²⁰

Collusion plagiarism: It is referred to as a deliberate, known way of committing the act of cheating, and with the involvement of others.²³ Many publication agencies have emerged that publish articles of an individual on payment of some fees. The credit is taken by the author that the manuscript is his/her original work.¹⁸ Essaybanks.com²¹ is one such agency. These have their own websites where they promote advertisements to attract students, teachers, and researchers. They provide services including writing articles, proofreading thoroughly, and getting the articles published in standard journals. The material

is sometimes not even taken from websites, so avoid getting detected by plagiarism detection software. The finished file so prepared has no mistakes, is of good quality, and is as per the journal requirements.²² Camps are also arranged by many companies where scholars can meet the experts in person and discuss their research.

This practice is flourishing nowadays as many people who are careless, uneducated, irresponsible, but over-ambitious want to just give money to agencies for writing articles. They do not want to visit libraries or do hard work in writing articles but follow shortcut methods to achieve their motives.

Text recycling: Here, a researcher publishes the same article/ research study in other journals or in different languages.⁹

Translational plagiarism: When an author translates a matter from one language to another as a means to provide information to readers who cannot understand the first language then also permission has to be sought from copyright holders. Translational plagiarism occurs when referring to the original publication in the original language is not given. It is usually considered as a means of honoring the original writer,²⁴ the editor of the publication house must know that the second article is a translated version of the previous one.²

Cyber plagiarism: The most recent of all, cyber plagiarism is a growing concern for researchers and academicians. It refers to stealing, borrowing, or downloading articles from webpages/ websites, images, figures, audio, video recordings and even incorporating ideas without attribution to the original source.²⁵ Academic professionals from schools, colleges, and universities do indulge in copying online matters for their assignments, projects, dissertations, etc. contributing to the digital violation, which hampers the originality of the individual.¹⁰

Duplicate/ multiple plagiarism⁹: This type is followed by the authors either due to their ignorance or deliberately increasing their number of publications. Duplicate plagiarism refers to publishing the same article or scientific paper in more than one journal. To prevent this, a copyright letter must be filled by stating that their work is original and the manuscript has not been submitted to another journal for publication.

Consequences of plagiarism

Plagiarism is an act of violation of copyright. When ethics are at stake, punishments can be grave. Experts can suggest penalties depending on the seriousness of the offense committed. The publishing office can take disciplinary action by holding up, rejecting, or retracting future articles of authors found guilty.⁷ Many have been suspended from jobs, expelled, debarred from being a part of grant-in-aid schemes of research studies/scholarship schemes, and even blacklisted for future projects.⁷ Famous personalities from academic backgrounds have been legally penalized under plagiarism cases.¹⁰ Publication houses can impose fines if continuous breach is detected by the editors in the articles.⁴

In the academic and research wing, as per the Gazette of India, higher educational institutes allow only 10 % of plagiarized material with no penalty.²⁶ However, there is quite a discrepancy in the range of 'acceptable percentage of similarity'. A research paper with 11% copied text is considered at the same level as 40 %. Also, punishments are different for 40 % and 41 % of literary theft detected in manuscripts.¹³

Plagiarism detection tools

Imitation and borrowing from other's articles/ books/ research studies need to be detected principally by the expert editors and reviewers.¹⁶ The concept of plagiarism is known in the intellectual world for long but is visible nowadays more easily;³ thanks to the latest technology/gadgets and detection software available in the market making the plagiarism detection process easy.¹⁶

With technological advancements, various plagiarism detection software, free and with payment, are available. Turnitin, Urkund, eTblast, and iThenticate can match two articles after searching billions of web pages in a small span of time.²⁷ Safe Assignment tool can scan around 8 billion Internet documents including 300,000 documents provided by Paper Mills. Many others like Eve2 (Essay Verification Engine), Docol, CrossCheck, and Viper are freely available software. Different tools are bought by colleges or universities for their teachers and students who can check plagiarism in their articles/ research papers on payment of some fees. The authors must

check their scientific writings for plagiarism before sending them for publication.^{18,24}

Guidelines to avoid plagiarism⁷

1. Provide acknowledgment to the original author even if taken from own previous article.
2. For text directly copied, quotation marks are used and give proper citation through numbers either in bracket or superscript. Same citation to be used if the different text is taken from same book etc. more than once.
3. The matter / text must be written in own words with proper citations.
4. References used must be directly linked with the text.
5. Paraphrasing must be done and text must be written in own words.
6. For use of figures, images, tables and photographs, written permission from the original author is a must.⁹
7. Citation is not required in case of use of medical facts, generic terms, standard symbols, equations, formulas etc.^{13,20}

Conclusion

Plagiarism is a highly unethical, legal offense and has raised concern about the quality of scientific manuscripts published in current times. Individuals must be motivated to develop their original ideas and innovations in writing. A change in the mindset of people, researchers, and scholarly professionals is needed against the menace of plagiarism. Awareness seminars, lectures in colleges/ universities, and workshops on plagiarism must be undertaken to highlight the need for good quality papers for the progress of a field. Publication ethics must be taught at all levels of education.¹⁰ Inculcating the habit of reading as a routine must be a mandate undertaken by parents and teachers from the school level.¹⁰

24x7 library services need to be provided.¹³ Enforcement of the law is crucial. Institutes and publishing houses must prepare policies along with measures to be undertaken if plagiarism is reported.⁷ COPE guidelines must be followed at every step.

The authors must adopt honest practices in creating their novel work following the ethics of scientific publications. The motto must be “Follow the path of doing work with purity, and originality, which is everlasting, rather than making false claims through plagiarized material, that will dwindle away in a short time.”¹⁰

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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