



# **Plagiarism in Tertiary Institutions In Rivers State: A Study Of Individual And Institutional Causes And Possible Solutions**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study was undertaken to investigate the individual and institutional cause of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, as well as possible solution. The study was guided by three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study with a sample of 161 academic staff and 305 postgraduate students used for the study. A semi-structured questionnaire composed of 25 items was used for data collection. Data analysis was done using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while independent samples t-test was used to test the corresponding null hypotheses. Result revealed that both individual and institutional factors contribute towards the increasing cases of plagiarism in tertiary institutions. It was therefore recommended that tertiary institutions should establish clear and concise academic policies against plagiarism, which should be rigorously implemented.

**Keywords:** plagiarism, tertiary institutions, academics, students

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other schools that provide the needed manpower for national development are expected to be the major drivers of global knowledge economy. The implication of this argument is that there are expected to generate theories and ideas which can effectively be translated into innovative products and services that meets the needs of man. As lofty as the above objective is, the current reality of students and academics plagiarism has become a source of worry and concern to stakeholders concerned. The problem herein is that when students and /or their lecturers engage in plagiarism, it not only leads to discrediting of their research and years of honest effort, it also brings to disrepute the standing of their institutions. Furthermore, this becomes a cog in the wheel of excellence in research.

While the problem of research has taken a global dimension, the problem has an historical dimension and has remained a perennial challenge for centuries. According to Jonathan, Bruce, and Douglas (2011), the world “plagiarism is as old as time and the first documented usage of the word can be traced to the first century AD. Further providing historical details, Jonathan et al (2011) averred that in about 80 AD, a Roman poet by name of Martial accused another poet, Fidentinus, of copying and reciting his works without proper attributions. Writing a poem to Fidentinus, he quipped

Fame has it that you, Fidentinus, recite my books to the crowd as if none other than your own. If you're willing that they are called mine, I'll send you the poems for free. If you want them to be called yours, buy this one, so that they won't be mine

In writing these poems to those he believed plagiarized his works, he was the one who used the Latin word “plagiarus.” The etymological meaning of the word “plagiarus” meant kidnapping. The sense in which it was used by Martial was that other poets were “kidnapping” his works as though they were stealing his slaves as was common in that time. It would take another 15 centuries for the word to make its way into the English Language and took on the popular meaning it has today.

In its current usage, the term plagiarism has been defined variously by different authorities. According to Iyela (2002) described it as entirely copying another person’s work without acknowledging the author whose work has been plagiarized. Limiting it to students, Agu, Olibie and Anyikwa (2009) defined it as the act of students copying other people’s essay, term papers, and other research works and presenting them as their own inventions. There further stated that students plagiarize classroom assignment, term papers, seminar papers, projects, thesis and dissertations. As noted above, plagiarism has taken on different forms throughout the historical development of education and knowledge generation, however, the advent of the internet has made the problem more widespread and relatively easy (Bailey, 2017).

The internet has also birthed some new forms of plagiarism. This includes, as identified by Harris (2012), downloading research papers online, buying commercial papers from internet paper mills, using articles from online database as though they belong to the plagiarist, belonging to paper sharing groups, cutting and pasting papers from several sources to create a coherent paper, faking the source of a document.

The reason why people plagiarized has been a subject of consideration in the literature which can be classified into individual and institutional factors. According to Cleary (2012), individual factors contributing to students’ plagiarism include laziness, panic, lack of confidence, static knowledge, inability to source materials, poor citation skills, and lack of effective digital literacy. Commenting on institutional factors responsible for plagiarism, Park (2003) stated that the academic tradition of not searching for sources, poor coaching/training, absence of institutional policies on plagiarism, lack of effective plagiarism detection tools, inadequate training of staff and poor writing culture are significant factors contributing to increase in plagiarism among students and academic staff.

While all forms of plagiarism are inimical to the advancement of knowledge, involvement in plagiarism has been conceptualized into different degrees. Using their classification, Plagiarism Search (2015) classified plagiarism into three types according to intensity. These are substantial plagiarism, where the plagiarist reworks the original article or paper and replaces the words with their synonyms; minimal plagiarism where some information are introduced into the texts and the text patterns are modified, and lastly complete plagiarism where there are no changes in the source information except a change in the author(s)’ identity. Bowdoin College (n.d) classified plagiarism into four broad types. These are direct plagiarism, self-plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism, and accidental plagiarism. In direct plagiarism, an individual execute a word-for-word collection of someone else’s work and attribute it to themselves without placing quotation mark. In self-plagiarism, a person submits a previously submitted work, or mixes some part of a previous work as though it is a new work for credit. In mosaic plagiarism, a student “borrows phrases from a source without using quotation marks, or finds synonyms for the author’s language while keeping to the same general structure and meaning of the original” (Bowdoin College, n.d. para. 3). Accidental plagiarism occurs when the individual fails to cite their sources or unintentionally paraphrase a source or sentence structure without attributing it to the original author. It should be noted that mistakenly attributing a source not, as well as misquoting a source does not absolve the writer of plagiarism.

Due to the myriads of ways in which plagiarism is undertaken in tertiary institutions, efforts at addressing and preventing this widespread practice has taken various forms also. According to Agu et al (2009), this has been done through two different methods. This includes manual detection method and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The manual method involves looking for certain clues that are indicative of plagiarism. The manual method involves a deep and critical observation of the paper by the teachers, professor or reviewer. Among the clue to look out for is consistency in referencing. Reviewers or teachers should look out for variations in referencing styles. For example, one paragraph or one sentence may have a mixture of MLA or APA referencing style. Also, one paragraph may contain only CBE citations while another makes use of the Chicago referencing style. Another approach is too

look out for long paragraphs or sections that are well written and shows a high level of knowledge or expertise. This could reflect copying of a section from scholarly articles, encyclopedias, webpages or other published works. Agu et al (2009) further stated that teachers showed look for off-topic presentations. This occurs when the paper fail to address the topic it claims to address, or when some parts are well developed while the others are off-track from the topic of consideration.

The above manual approaches require a large amount of time from teachers and reviewers. Even with the best of details, the large number of students and papers for consideration might overwhelm the search for plagiarism. It is therefore on this basis that the use of ICT tool in the search of plagiarized contents has been strongly advocated for (Lancaster & Culwin, 2005). In general terms, the totality of tools, software, engines and technologies used for finding plagiarism in submitted assignments, papers and projects are called plagiarism detection systems. The defining characteristics of these systems is that there are automated, with little or no input on the part of a human actor (Lancaster & Culwin, 2005).

The history of plagiarism detection systems can be traced to the late 1970s when it became necessary that plagiarism in source code submission made by students in computer science be ascertained. At the initial stage, there were no available plagiarism detection software for students' essays, projects and thesis written in free text formats. From that early beginning, there has been a plethora of plagiarism detection software which has been well presented by Lancaster and Culwin (2005). According to their taxonomy, classification can be based on source code or free text, based on location of the engine (local-based or web-based), based on availability of the engine (public or private) etc. There are other classifications presented by the authors, interest readers should consult their paper for more detailed classifications.

Despite the adoption of plagiarism detection systems in schools and the establishment of academic policies against plagiarism, some students still involve in the act as shown in past studies. For example, Sprajc, Urh, Jerabic, Rivan and Jereb (2017) showed that students' involvement in plagiarism was significantly negatively related to their level of motivation. In their study involving a sample of 139 students, it was shown that access to information and technology was largely responsible for plagiarism. In a related study, Orluwene and Magnus-Arewa (2020) investigated on the attitude of postgraduate students towards plagiarism in University of Port Harcourt using a sample of 200 postgraduate students drawn using purposive sampling technique. The result revealed that students in the University of Port Harcourt had positive attitude towards plagiarism, with female students being more disposed towards plagiarism than male students.

From another perspective, Vazquez-Recio, Calvo-Garcia, Lopez-Gil, Picazo-Gutierrez, Ruiz-Bejarano and Calvo-Gutierrez (2016) investigated on the conception and causes of plagiarism among university students in Spain. The study was carried out using a sample of 539 students in various universities. The result showed that students meaning of plagiarism excludes instances when the source allows the students to copy without attribution and when the students copies from the internet. Some causes of plagiarism identified in this study included resource availability, teachers' competence and nature of work requested, as well as students' attitude and motivation. Using a comparative approach Jereb et al (2018) investigated on the factors influencing plagiarism in higher education among German and Slovene students. Using a sample of 485 students drawn from Germany and Slovenia during the 2017/2018 academic year, the study revealed that factors such as gender, motivation for study, and socialization did not significantly determine students' involvement in plagiarism.

In a study on motivational factors influencing plagiarism conducted by Tayraukham (2009), the result revealed that students who were motivated towards academic performance were likely to involve in plagiarism than those interested in subject mastery. The dynamics for this outcome is because students who are most likely to involve in plagiarism when their goal is aimed at getting maximum credit from a course than when they aim at attaining expertise of the subject contents. This is in agreement with the findings of Anderman and Midgley (2004) who obtained that performance-oriented classroom environment is significantly more likely to induce cheating behavior (including plagiarism) than a mastery-oriented classroom environment.

In their own study, Park (2003) and Songsriwittaya, Kongsuwan, Jitgarum, Kaewkuekool, and Koul, (2009) showed that peer pressure and family/societal pressure sometimes propel students to indulge in

cheating behavior, including plagiarism. For some scholars, the need to live up to expectation by publishing a specific number of articles has contributed to the problem of plagiarism. Similarly, in some institutions, students are expected to publish articles from their theses or dissertations as a requirement for graduation. In the face of this pressure, some engage in various forms of plagiarism (Engler, Landau, & Epstein, 2008).

From the review of literature done above, it can be observed that while there are various factors which influences students to indulge in plagiarism in higher institutions, none has been conducted in the University of Port Harcourt to investigate on the probable cause of plagiarism and possible solutions for addressing it. It is therefore from this gap in the literature that the present study was conducted to ascertain on some causes of plagiarism and possible solutions among students in the University of Port Harcourt.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate on the causes of plagiarism and some possible solutions in tertiary institutions. In specific terms, the objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate on individual factors responsible for plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students.
2. To ascertain some institutional factors contributing to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students.
3. To identify possible solutions to the problem of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students.

### **Research Questions**

From the above objectives, the following research questions were developed to further guide this study:

1. To what extent do individual factors contribute towards plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students?
2. To what extent do institutional factors contribute to the problem of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students?
3. What are the possible solutions to the problem of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State as perceived by academics and students?

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the research questions stated above, the under listed hypotheses were formulated for testing at 0.05 level of significance to further aid the conduct of this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the extent to which individual factors contribute to plagiarism in tertiary institutions as perceived by academics and students in Rivers.
2. There is no significant difference in the extent to which institutional factors contribute to plagiarism in tertiary institutions as perceived by academics and students in Rivers.
3. There is no significant difference in the possible solutions for addressing plagiarism in tertiary institutions as perceived by academics and students in Rivers State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey research design was adopted in the conduct of this study. This was because the study only seeks to survey the perception of academics and students on the possible individual and institutional factors contributing to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The sample for this study constituted of 161 academic staff and 305 postgraduate students chosen through purposive sampling technique from three universities in Rivers State. The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting only academic staff and students with functional plagiarism prevention policies. Furthermore, postgraduate students were chosen for this study because in most of the tertiary institutions in Rivers State, attention on plagiarism is often given at the postgraduate level.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into three sections labeled A-D. Section A was designed to elicit information on the demographic characteristics of respondents such as status (staff or student), gender, and name of institution and level of study. Section B of the instrument was designed to elicit response on individual factors that contribute to plagiarism.

Similarly, Section C was designed to generate information on possible institutional factors contributing to plagiarism, while Section D was designed to elicit information on the possible solutions to plagiarism in tertiary institutions. These various sections of the instrument were designed using a four-point Likert scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE) which were scored as 4, 3, 2, and 1 point(s) respectively. Using Cronbach alpha reliability technique, the instrument was administered on 20 academic staff and 50 students in a university in Bayelsa State which was not used for the study. Result revealed that Section B, C, and D had alpha coefficients of 0.82, 0.74, and 0.87 respectively.

Data were collected over a one-month period during the 2018/2019 academic session. The researchers administered copies of the instruments directly to the respondents and instructions guiding the responses of the instruments was explained to the respondents. The researchers supervised the administration of the instruments and completed instruments were collected on the spot. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested with independent samples t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Academics and Students on individual factors influencing plagiarism**

	Item	Staff (n = 161)			Students (n = 305)		
		Mean	SD <sub>1</sub>	Decision	Mean	SD <sub>2</sub>	Decision
1	Difficulty in keeping track of information from the web	2.99	0.76	HE	3.11	0.97	VHE
2	Laziness in academic related task	2.62	1.05	VHE	2.85	0.96	HE
3	Inability to find research materials	2.66	0.98	HE	2.96	0.89	HE
4	Weak writing skills	2.63	0.68	HE	3.15	0.95	VHE
5	Difficulty in asking for help	2.54	0.78	HE	2.91	0.97	HE
6	Poor time Management	3.34	0.76	VHE	3.05	1.11	VHE
7	Lack of self-confidence	2.36	0.78	LE	2.57	0.95	HE
8	Ease of getting higher marks	2.20	0.80	LE	2.29	0.84	LE
9	Negative attitude towards academic work	3.76	0.47	VHE	3.55	0.82	VHE
10	Lack of connection between academic work and everyday practice	2.10	0.41	LE	2.31	0.66	LE
	Grand Mean	2.72	0.75	HE	2.86	0.91	HE

From the result shown in Table 1 on the individual factors contributing to plagiarism among students, it is shown that with the exception item 7 (lack of self-confidence), item 8 (ease of getting higher marks), and item 10 (lack of connection between academic work and everyday practice), the remaining factors were considered as individual factors contributing to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State by both academic staff and students. From the result shown in the table, it is indicative that for both staff (mean = 3.76) and students (mean = 3.55), the greatest individual factors influencing plagiarism was negative attitude towards academic work (item 9), with the least factor being lack of connection between academic work and everyday practice (item 10) for academics, while for students it was the ease of getting higher marks (item 8). On the basis of the grand mean value obtained for academics (2.82) and students (2.87), it therefore indicates that individual factors contribute to a high extent on the problem of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Academics and Students on institutional factors influencing plagiarism**

	Item	Academics (n = 161)			Staff (n = 365)		
		Mean	SD <sub>1</sub>	Decision	Mean	SD <sub>2</sub>	Decision
11	Poor system of control in the universities	2.74	0.70	HE	3.02	0.91	VHE
12	Poor awareness of plagiarism among teachers and lecturers	2.79	0.78	HE	2.87	0.90	HE
13	Lack of effectiveness awareness among students	2.20	0.83	LE	2.29	0.86	LE
14	Non-provision of effective research tools	3.16	0.57	VHE	3.55	0.72	VHE
15	Publish or perish syndrome in Universities	3.10	0.84	HE	3.31	0.66	VHE
16	Non-availability of grants and academic sponsorship	2.91	0.80	HE	2.72	0.94	HE
17	Ineffective academic policies in tertiary institutions regarding plagiarism	2.83	0.63	HE	2.68	0.88	HE
18	Excessive workload among staff and students	2.74	0.54	HE	2.78	1.02	HE
19	Failure to punish those who engage in plagiarism	2.64	0.73	HE	2.81	0.89	HE
20	Lack of consistency in implementation of plagiarism	2.72	0.91	HE	2.94	0.99	HE
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>2.90</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>HE</b>

From the result shown in Table 2, it is shown that the institutional factors were considered as contributing to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Some of the identified institutional factors included poor system of control in the universities, poor awareness of plagiarism among teachers and lecturers, non-provision of effective research tools, publish or perish syndrome in universities, non-availability of grants and academic sponsorship, ineffective academic policies in tertiary institutions regarding plagiarism, excessive workload among staff and students, failure to punish those who engage in plagiarism, and lack of consistency in implementation of plagiarism policies. On the hand, it was disagreed that lack of awareness among students is an institutional factor influencing plagiarism among both academics and students. Finally, the grand mean values of 2.78 and 2.90 obtained for staff and students respectively showed that institutional factors contribute to plagiarism in tertiary institutions to a high extent.

**Table 3: Possible Solutions to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State**

	Item	Academics (n = 161)			Staff (n = 365)		
		Mean	SD <sub>1</sub>	Decision	Mean	SD <sub>2</sub>	Decision
21	Implement an effective plagiarism detection system	3.05	0.84	VHE	2.75	0.91	HE
22	Make students submit all assignments through web-based plagiarism systems	2.94	0.71	HE	2.91	0.86	HE
23	Establish detailed academic policy relating to plagiarism in schools	2.79	0.82	HE	2.66	0.85	HE
24	Engage staff and student on effective academic writing skills	3.37	0.77	VHE	3.12	0.87	VHE
25	Implement punitive actions against individuals involved in plagiarism	2.78	0.89	HE	2.92	0.98	HE
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>2.87</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>HE</b>

From the result shown in Table 3, some of the possible solutions for addressing plagiarism in tertiary institutions includes the implementation of an effective plagiarism detection system, making students submit all assignments through web-based plagiarism detection systems, establishment of detailed academic policy relating to plagiarism in schools, engaging staff and student on effective academic writing skills, and implement punitive actions against individuals involved in plagiarism. From the grand mean result obtained for staff (2.98) and students (2.87) respectively, it therefore indicates that these approaches can effectively address plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

**Table 4: Independent samples t-test of academics and students on perceived influence of individual factors on plagiarism in tertiary institution in Rivers State.**

Status	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Academics	161	2.72	0.75	464	1.67	0.09	Retain
Students	305	2.86	0.91				

From the result presented in Table 4, it is shown that when the response of academics and students were compared on the extent to which individual factors contribute to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, a t-value of 1.67 was obtained at 464 degrees of freedom with a p-value of 0.09 which was greater than the chosen alpha of 0.05. Since the p-value was greater than the chosen alpha, it therefore indicates that there is no significant difference in the perception of academics and students on the extent to which individual factors contribute to plagiarism in Rivers State. The null hypothesis was therefore retained.

**Table 5: Independent samples t-test of academics and students on perceived influence of institutional factors on plagiarism in tertiary institution in Rivers State.**

Status	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Academics	161	2.78	0.73	464	1.48	0.13	Retain
Students	305	2.90	0.88				

From the result presented in Table 5, it is shown that when the response of academics and students were compared on the extent to which institutional factors contribute to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, a t-value of 1.48 was obtained at 464 degrees of freedom with a p-value of 0.13 which was greater than the chosen alpha of 0.05. Since the p-value was greater than the chosen alpha, it therefore indicates that there is no significant difference in the perception of academics and students on the extent to which institutional factors contribute to plagiarism in Rivers State. The null hypothesis was therefore retained.

**Table 6: Independent samples t-test of academics and students on possible solutions to plagiarism in tertiary institution in Rivers State.**

Status	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Academics	161	2.98	0.80	464	1.31	0.19	Retain
Students	305	2.87	0.89				

From the result presented in Table 6, it is shown that when the response of academics and students were compared on the possible solutions against plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, a t-value of 1.31 was obtained at 464 degrees of freedom with a p-value of 0.19 which was greater than the chosen alpha of 0.05. Since the p-value was greater than the chosen alpha, it therefore indicates that there is no significant difference in the perception of academics and students on the possible solutions towards managing plagiarism in Rivers State. The null hypothesis was therefore retained.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

From the result obtained regarding question one, it was revealed that that individual factors such as poor writing skills, difficulty in keeping web sources, poor time management and negative attitude towards academic work, as well as difficulty in asking for help. This finding indicates that some students and academic staff are not willing to invest the level of academic concentration needed to make the job a

success. This result is in agreement with that obtained by Cleary (2012) who opined that students engage in plagiarism due to laziness, panic, lack of confidence, inability to source materials, and poor citation skills. This is closely related to the result obtained by Sprajc et al (2017) who found out that lack of motivation among students in Slovenia is significantly related to involvement in plagiarism.

The second result from the study showed that apart from individual factors, some institutional factors contribute to the problem of plagiarism experienced in tertiary institutions. According to the result, poor system of control in universities, poor awareness of plagiarism among teachers and lecturers, and the publish or perish syndrome common in universities as well as the workload among students and staff were considered as significant institutional drivers of plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This result is not surprising but expected as most institutions in Rivers State have only recently introduced academic policies against plagiarism. Furthermore, even in the introduction of these policies, there has been a great void in the level of implementation based on the observation of these researchers. This result is in line with the assertion of Park (2003) that absence of robust institutional framework in schools has been a major factor attributed to the increase in plagiarism. Regarding institutional pressure, this study confirms the findings of Songsriwittaya et al (2009) who found out that when institutions emphasize the “publish or perish” norm, both students and staff are more likely to indulge in plagiarism at various degrees.

The final result from the study showed that the universities, students and academic staff have a lot of role to play in minimizing, and possibly eliminating, plagiarism from tertiary institutions in Rivers State by adopting some strategies including the implementation of effective plagiarism detection system, insisting that students submit all assignments, essays, projects and thesis through web-based plagiarism system. Also, tertiary institutions should endeavor to provide programmes for staff and students to improve their writing skills. When these efforts have been implemented, those who engage in large scale plagiarism should be made to face appropriate disciplinary committees for punitive actions. These findings are in line with the recommendation of Agu et al (2009) which stated that higher institutions should make clear policies on plagiarism and communicate same to them.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings obtained and the discussion presented, the following recommendations were made as follows:

1. Tertiary institutions in Rivers State should develop a clear, logical and concise academic policy related to plagiarism to enable their students become aware of the types of plagiarisms and the consequences of indulging in any forms of plagiarism.
2. Students’ writing as well as lecturers’ scholarly publications should be subjected to plagiarism testing before acceptance for grading or promotions. This is likely to deter them from involving in plagiarism.
3. There should be relaxation of the policies involved in the promotion of academic staff. This is because when academic staff are given huge quota for publications before they are promoted, they are likely to indulge in plagiarism to overcome the seeming barrier.
4. Universities should make subscription to online database that will provide students and staff access to current material which can aid their research writing instead of them resorting to contract writing from paper mills that are involved in plagiarism.
5. Finally, academic writing workshops and training should be provided for both students and academic staff to enable them improve on their writing skills. This workshop should include how to source, organize and adequately reference materials obtained from the internet.

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