

## PLAGIARISM DISCOURSE IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING: A CASE OF ONE UNIVERSITY IN ZAMBIA'S CENTRAL PROVINCE

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### Abstract

*The study investigated students' understanding and practices of plagiarism at one of the Universities of Zambia's Central Province. Plagiarism is a common phenomenon, and a menace in higher institutions of learning. Using interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach, the researchers collected data from 120 respondents where 90 students and 20 lecturers answered open ended questionnaires and 10 that is five lecturers and five students took part in interviews. The data collected was supported by document analysis where the university academic policy, undergraduate student assignments and research reports were analysed. Data generated illuminated that students' knowledge of plagiarism was vague where they knew how to define the term but could not explain what constituted it. The data collected highlighted that students were indulging in various forms of plagiarism knowingly or unknowingly. It further indicated factors such as laziness, peer pressure, ignorance, and availability of information from the internet among others to have exacerbated students' indulgence in plagiarism. The availability of a weak University academic policy on plagiarism mitigation strategies and non-availability of plagiarism checkers in the institution has made the penalties administered weak hence not preventing students from plagiarising. The study revealed that as an institution not much was being done to curb plagiarism. Thus, researchers recommended that there was need to do more sensitisation on plagiarism and work on the academic policy to give more direction on plagiarism mitigation measures to be enforced in the University to control the levels of plagiarism taking place in the higher institution of learning.*

**Keywords:** Citations, Discourse, Factors, Mitigation, Plagiarism, Plagiarised, Referencing

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The discourse of plagiarism seems to be a common and worldwide phenomenon existing in almost all higher institutions of learning. The practice is very common in academic world where students, lecturers, researchers and sometimes professors get involved in plagiarism sometimes consciously and at other times unconsciously.

The word plagiarism is a complex one and a difficult term to define as it means differently to different people and is exercised differently in different contexts. Students in most higher institutions of learning indulge in cases of plagiarism ranging from copying one another's work and submitting it as one's own work, to paraphrasing work without indicating a citation, to engaging a third party to do one's assignment among others ( Idiegbeyan-Ose, Ifijeh, Segun-Adeniran et al., 2018). Much as students' engagement in plagiarism helps them to solve one or more challenges experienced in their academic world, they do not consider the impact such acts have on their dignity and that of the institution at large. But the question is do students understand well what plagiarism entails and what it constitutes?

### 1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine students' understanding and practice of plagiarism in their academic life in one of the higher institutions of learning in Zambia's Central Province.

### 1.2 Objectives

The objectives which guided the research were;

- To investigate students' understanding of plagiarism in their academic life;
- To establish factors prompting students to indulge in all forms of plagiarism;
- To determine measures taken against plagiarism in the institution of study.

### 1.3 Significance of Study

The study undertaken was aimed at bringing to light the discourse of plagiarism among students in one of the universities in Central Province of Zambia. The findings of the study might add knowledge to what is already known about this topic and contextualise the topic to the Zambian situation. The findings of the study might help lecturers and other researchers to reflect on students' and their own practices of plagiarism and in the process work towards avoiding it. Above all it may help the institution to find ways and means of curbing this vice.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of plagiarism is a common term in the academic world. Almost every higher institution of learning has recorded cases of plagiarism of some kind (Rayhan & Ameer, 2021). The word plagiarism is derived from a Latin word "**Plagium**" which simply means **Kidnapping a man** (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al., 2018, Maulidya, Ping & Suhatmaday, 2021). The word in academic life simply means stealing another person's work and presenting it as one's own whether intentionally or unintentionally. Many scholars have defined the word plagiarism in many ways. Setiaway, Al-Matari and Zita (2023) defined plagiarism as the act of trying to get credit by quoting a portion from another persons' work without indicating the source of information. It means using words or ideas from another person's work without acknowledging the originator of such words or ideas (Mireku, Dzamesi & Bervel, 2023). Other researchers have epitomised plagiarism as a scholarly deception which is unscrupulous and lacks uprightness which encroaches on copyright laws and legislation (Mosh, Goodluck, Laiser & Jeneth, 2021). It is described so because it involves stealing other peoples' ideas by failing to acknowledge the source of information and pretending to have the copyright when in fact not. Acting in such manner encourages moral decay in academic field. However, many researchers have explained plagiarism to be a practice or an act of taking someone's work and presenting it as your own without giving credit to the source of information (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al, 2018). This is the common form of plagiarism. The other is where wrong citation is given for the information used. Often times there are valuable information found on the internet but which does not reflect the author. Students who may use such information may indicate a wrong or fake author. This too is also plagiarism.

From whichever angle the word is used, as argued by Rayhan and Ameer (2021) plagiarism is considered an academic misconduct. Students, lecturers or researchers who engage in plagiarism misconduct themselves. Plagiarism is considered a serious crime and fraudulent in that it consists of theft of another person's knowledge, ideas, words and information which does not originally belong to the person using them. It is furthermore considered a misconduct and fraudulent because as long as students continue practicing it, it affects negatively their success (Bethany, 2016). Even if one will do very well in an assignment or research, as long as the work was plagiarised it affects his/her success and he/she may not be proud of such success. Additionally, indulging in plagiarism hinders the person involved to develop the academic writing skill one is expected to acquire as a university student (Mugala, Masaiti & Mwila, 2022). Suffice to say, plagiarism hampers creativity and originality of work (Sibomana, Ndayambaje & Uwambayinema, 2018). Students who practice plagiarism lack the skill of creativity and what they reproduce is not original work but copied or paraphrased work of another person. This scenario permits students to fall in the trap of recycling the same available knowledge and not adding any new knowledge to the academic work and research world (Mosh, et al., 2021, Idiegbeyen et al, 2018). This practice has resulted in knowledge stagnation.

Most importantly, plagiarism is unethical and violates academic honest policies (Setiaway, et al., 2023) and defeats the purpose of education. Institutions have policies which guide students' conduct in this area. Students who act against the policies by practicing plagiarism violate these policies. The practice also contributes to violation of academic integrity. Students and lecturers and researchers are expected to acquire some integrity through what they write and publish (Sibomana et al, 2018). But if they plagiarise more and are discovered, their integrity is lost. Additionally, plagiarism may lead to devaluing of institutional degrees and degrading of the institutional reputation. Many institutions have lost credibility and good reputation because of producing students whose work has been attributed to plagiarism. Above all it leads to producing graduates who are incompetent in their fields. This compromises the quality of education being rendered (Mugala *et al*, 2022).

Despite students knowing the adverse effects of plagiarism they continue indulging in plagiarism. The question one would ask is what prompts students to participate in plagiarism?

## **2.1 Factors Facilitating Plagiarism in Higher Institutions of Learning**

There are many factors which acts as catalysts for student indulgence in plagiarism. It has been observed by many researchers that ignorance is one factor that facilitate students' practice of plagiarism (Mosh *et al*, 2021, Sibomana, et al. 2028). Students who do not understand what constitutes plagiarism (Rayees & Almaas , 2021) and those who find it difficult to write citations and who lack proper knowledge of referencing find themselves in the scandal of plagiarism unknowingly. The low level of knowledge possessed by students on referencing, referencing styles and writing of citations increases chances of plagiarism by students who find themselves in this predicament (Muzata & Banja, 2019). Secondly, laziness is another factor forcing students to take part in plagiarism. Students who find themselves overloaded with assignments, and those who do not know how to effectively plan to do the assignments and are unwilling to go through academic stress resort to plagiarism (Idiegbeyan-Ose, 2018). Such students cannot afford to fail the assignment and cannot contain to fail to submit an assignment on due date. To solve this problem they resort to plagiarise other people's work and make it appear as their own work.

The other factor is time constraint which emerges from poor time management. Students/ lecturers who do not know how to manage time when faced with limited time to submit the assignment or research project also find plagiarism the only alternative to their pressure, they find it easy to copy other people's work and submit it as their work coming from their own efforts (Setiaway, et al, 2023). Correspondingly, the availability of plenty of information on the internet where a student is only required to click and everything comes has contributed to many students and other victims to copy and paste what they find on the internet without acknowledging the source thereby contributing to the cases of plagiarism (Mireku et al., 2023,

Mugala et al, 2022, Rayees & Almaas, 2021). Many students have found it easy to write assignments by getting what is already on the internet. This is what is called Cyber or Digital plagiarism. Following is social pressure arising from families/lecturers who desire their students to do better than others or do like others even when they do not have the capacity to perform better than others. The urge not to disappoint their families or lecturers force them to plagiarise to get the approval of their families and or lecturers (Rayhan & Ameer, 2021). Admittedly, a good number of students plagiarise because of what is termed “**efficient gain.**” This is the desire to get better marks. Many plagiarise because they want to do better, they want to pass. This forces them to do whatever it takes to get a better grade. Peer pressure is another factor contributing to plagiarism. Some students plagiarise because others are doing it and are not caught (Rayees & Almaas, 2021). Even when one has knowledge about plagiarism, he/she would indulge in it deliberately.

However, plagiarism cannot just be left loose like that. It needs to be controlled to maintain the integrity of the institution. The question is what measures should be taken to mitigate plagiarism in institutions of higher learning?

## 2.2 Measures to Control Plagiarism

The first measure to control plagiarism is creating awareness among the perpetrators. Most students indulge in plagiarism because of ignorance on what constitutes plagiarism. Thus, continuous sensitisation of students through seminars and workshops would provide the missing knowledge to students thereby help them to refrain from plagiarising. Obeid & Hill (2017) opined that providing students with explicit and requisite knowledge about plagiarism and how to avoid it may contribute to reduction of cases of plagiarism in higher institutions of learning. Secondly, teaching students how to write references, citations would serve as deterrent to plagiarism. A good number of students plagiarise due to lack of knowledge of referencing and citation. Students need to be well oriented with citation styles, when and how to use quotes, when to paraphrase and make summaries with appropriate attributions (Setiaway *et al*, 2023). Providing such knowledge to students would dissuade them from plagiarising (Sibomana, *et al.*, 2018). The other is developing policies which do not only insist on penalties but which addresses the issues of what constitutes plagiarism, procedures undertaken when one is found wanting, as well as how to use plagiarism checkers and penalties to would be culprits (Idiegbeyen-Ose *et al.*, 2018). Such policies may serve as warning to students before they even participate in plagiarism. Unfortunately, most of these policies only give instructions on penalties to be administered when one is found wanting.

The use of plagiarism checkers such as Turnitin is very important to minimise cases of plagiarism in higher institutions of learning. Turnitin is a programme that subjects the submitted work to a data base of publications and web reference to assess the percentage of plagiarism in the work submitted (Rahyan & Ameer, 2021). The use of this web-based programme would restrain many students from plagiarising especially those students who have taken plagiarism for granted. Above all the change in the way assignments are phrased, where assignments given, would require students to reflect a lot and are required to be creative when answering the assignment, and where they apply a lot of knowledge instead of memorised work would minimise practice of plagiarism. Such assignments or projects will make it difficult for students to copy and paste as they will not find answers on the internet and instead will be required to use their knowledge and skills to come up with creative work.

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In an effort to understand the factors influencing students’ understanding and practice of the discourse of plagiarism, a more interpretive paradigm which sits well in qualitative research approach was purposely adopted. The qualitative approach was preferred due to its features of understanding the concept from participants’ experiences and interpretations (Bryman, 2004) as well as being able to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that control such behaviour (Kasonde, 2013). By using the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research approach, the researchers gained an understanding of

how students' perception of the discourse of plagiarism is constructed and reconstructed as they take part in it. By studying the students in the university which is their natural setting, researchers were able to comprehend the level of students' understanding of this vice (plagiarism) and how it is practiced among them.

The research design adopted in this study was case study. The choice was based on understanding that case study permits an in-depth examination of the case which was needed for this study as well as the flexibility to use multiple strategies to collect data. The triangulation of data collection methods in one study strengthened and made the findings valid and reliable, despite its weakness of being unable to generalise the findings to other settings. However, as Yin (2001) alluded, the generalisation is not made to the frequencies of sample but to what has emerged as grounded theory.

The research was conducted on one of the Universities in Central Province of Zambia. A total of 120 participants from both students and lecturers took part in the study. The study used qualitative data collection techniques to collect data. Thus, open-ended questionnaires, interview and document analysis were used. 90 students from fourth year students who have been longer in the institution were purposely included in the study and 20 lecturers. These were randomly selected even though the study was purely qualitative, to get a good selection of participants. The questionnaire strategy was used first to get the glimpse of what students and lecturers at random thought about the discourse of plagiarism in the institution. The use of open-ended questionnaire bestowed on students the chance to evaluate their own understanding and practice of plagiarism in their academic life while lecturers were given a chance to reflect on the discourse more seriously than has been done before. 10 participants that is five students and five lecturers took part in interview. The interviewees were purposely selected based on gender, positions they held and roles they performed in the institution. The strategy was preferred and utilised to cushion what had been gathered in the questionnaire. Besides, the interviews helped to understand the attitude, opinions and feelings of students towards plagiarism. Documents such as University academic policy on plagiarism and samples of plagiarised work by students were studied. The review supported information collected from other strategies.

Data were analysed using thematic and content analysis strategies. Data generated were categorised in themes. The analysis of themes involved comparing what was gathered with what was observed and read from differed reviewed literature. Credibility and trustworthiness of collected data was ensured by triangulation of data collection methods. Transferability of the findings can be made possible through the thick description that has been given in this study.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The presentation of findings followed the research objectives.

##### **4.1 Student Understanding and Practice of Plagiarism**

The interrogation of students on the definition of plagiarism brought out good responses. All those who answered questionnaires wrote correct definition of what plagiarism was. Statements such as "*the use of someone's ideas with or without proper citation or acknowledgement*" and "*the practice of taking someone's work or ideas and presenting them as your own.*" were given demonstrating that students knew the definition of plagiarism. However a twist of the question on what constituted plagiarism and forms of plagiarism were not well answered by most student respondents. This variance in response between the first question and subsequent questions indicated that students did not understand well what plagiarism was. Perhaps the definition was gotten from the internet. It showed student understanding of plagiarism was vague, hence were indulging in it without knowing as stated by idiegbeyen *et al* (2018) that students sometimes practice plagiarism without knowing. One student during interview confirmed that in the following verbatim "*we have heard about plagiarism but lecturers have not fully explained to us what constitutes plagiarism they only tell us not to plagiarise.*" This statement was proof of poor understanding



of what plagiarism was. A question on whether students were practicing plagiarism was overwhelmingly affirmed by both lecturers and students. This response corroborated with Rayhan & Ameer (2021) who noted that plagiarism was a worldwide menace in institutions of higher learning.

The examination of what forms of plagiarism were common in the institution was not well answered by students in questionnaires but lecturers highlighted the following: copy and paste from internet without crediting the source, photo copying another person’s work especially when it comes to research work, copying an assignment from a friend and buying already written assignment from those doing printing business around the institution. One student during interview confirmed this statement in the following verbatim:

*People doing printing encourage students to plagiarise, they tell them they have already written assignment, and can give them if they pay. Students who are lazy bury into this habit of always buying already written assignments. What these people do is whoever goes to print, they leave work on their laptops or desktops which they continue selling to others who will come later.*

This type of plagiarism is what is called commission plagiarism (Mireku *et al.*, 2023). This situation was found to be common practice of plagiarism which was supported by lecturers.

#### 4.2 Factors which Prompted Students to Indulge in Plagiarism

The factors identified by both students and lecturers were categorised into three groups as presented in the table below:

S/N	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL	INSTITUTIONAL
1	Laziness Poor time management Poor writing skills Poor style of assessment Lack of knowledge on the policy. Language problem Background of students who have always depended on other people’s work/ leakage. Desire to do well in an assignment	Desire to do like others Desire to impress family/lecturer Pride Chores Peer pressure	Presence of information on the internet Ignorance to cite or reference. Assignment overload Repetition of assignments No serious penalties administered No Policy

The above factors were highlighted to have been facilitating students’ practice of plagiarism. These factors have been noted by many researchers (Obeid & Hill, 2017, Sibomana *et al.*, 2021, Mugala *et al.*, 2022, Mireku *et al.*, 2023). The question on whether the institution has done well to prevent students from plagiarising indicated that not much was being done. Students complained of not being taught in details about plagiarism while lecturers felt more needed to be done. One lecturer complained of induction of students on plagiarism to be left to a small number of people who take part in the orientation of students

and yet it is every lecturer's responsibility to induct students on plagiarism at the beginning of each academic year and throughout the course of study of students. Students complained of lecturers not taking this concept serious and not teaching them properly. One student intimated that such attitude has contributed to students' continuous plagiarising. These sentiments corroborated with Muzata & Banja's (2019) findings. The scenario has encouraged students to plagiarise as some students have indicated in their responses. The documents analysed in form of students' assignments and research reports also depicted that even when comments are written in a students' assignment or research work that this is plagiarised work but a students is given good marks only few are penalised. These practices encourage students to plagiarise other peoples' work

#### **4.3 Measures Taken When Students are Identified to Have Plagiarised**

The responses from students pointed out reduction of marks, or the culprit being given zero mark and given another assignment to write which are not adequate deterrent measures. In more serious cases a student is suspended from the course. Lecturers on the other hand indicated the same. These measures were not good enough to stop students from plagiarising. The analysis of some reduced marks showed the student were given pass mark despite reducing the mark. This did not affect students so much. Some lecturers have noted some of their colleagues who only reprimanded students and did not give them any penalty. While others ignored the vice altogether. This lack of coordination on how to treat this vice has accelerated the levels of plagiarism in the institution. It appears the measures to be taken were depended on personal conviction. Those who felt the practice needed to be rooted out meted penalties while others did not. The question on whether the university had a policy was answered in the affirmative by both students and lecturers. But it was noted that majority had not read and did not know what was in the policy. The analysis of the content of the policy showed the policy was very shallow and did not give guidance on how such practices were supposed to be handed and which penalty for which type of plagiarism. The policy was embedded in the academic policy and had two bullets only implying that it lacked emphasis and elaboration. The first bullet defining what plagiarism was and second on measures as stipulated below:

*Cases of plagiarism will be investigated and penalty may range from deduction of marks to expulsion from the university depending on the seriousness of the occurrences.*

The above point lacked clarity and adequate information on which form of plagiarism guaranteed expulsion or deduction of marks. It does not give guidance on how cases of plagiarism should be tackled. It is too brief and lacks direction. This is what has affected lecturers when it comes to meting out penalties and this is what had led to variances when dealing with culprits of plagiarism. Lecturer respondents in interviews expressed skepticism when handling cases of plagiarism. It was echoed that taking certain measures which have not come out in the policy was unethical and might call for legal penalties if not well handled. This scenario revealed a big gap on how cases of plagiarism were dealt with in the institution and proved that the institution was not doing well where issues of plagiarism were concerned. A question was also asked on what had been put in place to check plagiarism. Both students and lecturers lamented the lack of plagiarism checkers in the entire University. They wondered how a big institution could lack such device which is so handy in curbing plagiarism. One member of management team intimated that a lot has been discussed and approved but the idea had not materialised despite knowing the seriousness of it. This again proved that the institution had not done much.

#### **4.4 What Mitigation Measures Needs To Be Put In Place?**

The first measure that needs to be put in place was to provide awareness among students. It was discussed that some students plagiarised due to lack of knowledge on what constitutes plagiarism or having insufficient knowledge on the vice. Thus, continuous sensitisation of students through seminars/workshops would help to minimise the cases of plagiarism in the institution. Obeid & Hill (2017) opined that providing students with explicit and requisite knowledge about plagiarism and how to avoid

it may contribute to reduction of cases of plagiarism in higher institutions of learning. Secondly, teaching students how to reference their work or write citations properly is another mitigation strategy that would aid in minimising plagiarism in institutions of learning. A good number of students plagiarise owing to lack of knowledge on referencing and citation. As Muzata & Banja (2019) elucidated referencing is an ethical and moral issue that requires the person to disclose to the readers what has been borrowed from other writers. Providing such knowledge to students would deter them from willingly indulging in such practices (Sibomana *et al.*, 2018, Muzata & Banja 2019).

Additionally, there is need to develop policies which address the vice adequately and elaborately, which do not only insist on penalties but which addresses the issues of what constitutes plagiarism, effects of plagiarism, forms, procedures for plagiarism checks and penalties for each form of plagiarism. Lack of clarity of policies found in institutions of higher learning has weakened mitigation measures and hence compromised efforts to curb the vice (Maulidya *et al.*, 2021). Teaching students skills on academic writing adequately is another strategy. Students' lack of academic writing skills often drag them into plagiarism. If higher institutions of learning would spend more time teaching students various academic writing skills, it would help them to desist from plagiarising. As Mireku *et al.*, (2023) put it that improving the academic writing skills has the potential to resolving one of the major causes of plagiarism. Suffice to say insistence on lecturers to give thorough orientation on plagiarism at the beginning of every course is cost effective and would reinforce the mitigation. Moreover, institutions of higher learning must ensure that they use a lot of plagiarism checkers software such as Turnitin and others. Some institutions fail to institute this because of lack of funds and trained personnel but it is worth having if plagiarism has to be curbed. Efforts should be made to acquire these soft wares to avoid losing the reputation of the institution because of students' indulging in academic dishonesty and misconduct as well as producing graduates who would be poor performers in the world of work.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The research conducted was aimed at trying to establish if students of this University were indulging in cases of plagiarism. It has been established that students were culprits of plagiarism though their understanding of what constituted it was vague. Students indulged in different forms of plagiarism intentionally and unintentionally. A lot of factors prompting them had been found which among others included ignorance, laziness, peer pressure, poor academic writing skills and poor policies on plagiarism among others. If the vice is not controlled it has the capacity to make the institution lose its credibility and reputation, loss of research funding opportunities, loss of quality research outputs among others. Mitigation of plagiarism discourse in higher education institutions encompasses a range of measures, from educational initiatives and technological tools to policy development and cultural considerations. Addressing plagiarism vice requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration among faculties and administrators. Furthermore, creating a culture of academic integrity is essential. This involves not only addressing instances of plagiarism but also fostering an environment where honesty, originality, and ethical behaviour are valued and emphasised.

### 5.1 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

- a) Higher institutions of learning should implement initiatives to educate students about plagiarism, proper citation practices, and the importance of academic integrity. Workshops, seminars, and online tutorials are common tools that must be used to raise awareness and provide students with the necessary skills to avoid plagiarism.
- b) Higher institutions of learning should take plagiarism seriously, and make students be aware of the consequences. These may include academic penalties, such as receiving a failing grade for the assignment or the entire course, and in some cases, expulsion. Beyond academic consequences, plagiarism can have long-term effects on a student's reputation and future career prospects.



- c) Higher Institutions of learning should buy Plagiarism Detection. Many institutions do not have plagiarism detection tools and software to identify instances of plagiarism in students' work.
- d) Administrators should develop and enforce elaborate institutional policies related to plagiarism, ensuring a consistent and fair approach across departments and programmes.

## 5.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

As a follow up to what has been discussed, more research is need to address other areas not tackled in this research. The following areas can be tackled:

- a) Plagiarism and its implication on Institutional reputation
- b) To what extent does plagiarism compromise quality education being offered in higher institution of learning?

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