

A CROSS-SECTIONAL AWARENESS STUDY ON PLAGIARISM: PRINCIPLES AND PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT

Due to lack of awareness about intellectual property rights among the students, the incidents of plagiarism seem to be on the rise in conducting and compiling research reports/documents in higher education and academic content writing. Taking this into cognizance, the present study underscores the level of awareness about different aspects of plagiarism among the research scholars of West Bengal. A cross-sectional survey study was conducted with 91 research scholars from different higher educational institutions in West Bengal. A self-constructed questionnaire was developed for collecting responses through Google forms. Email & social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were used to disseminate the questionnaire. The data obtained were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The study interpreted that most of the research scholars are aware about plagiarism and they also have knowledge on various aspects of plagiarism such as different types of plagiarism, various plagiarism detection tools, consequences of plagiarism, measures adopted to avoid plagiarism etc. Some of the reasons to reproduce the work of others are also identified from this study. Most of the respondents stated that higher educational institutions should organize awareness programmes such as seminars, workshops, etc. to increase level of academic integrity among the research scholars.

KEYWORDS: *Awareness, Plagiarism, Research scholars, Academic Integrity*

INTRODUCTION

The word plagiarism has been derived from a Latin word “Plagiarius” which means “Kidnapper”. The Oxford University defines plagiarism as “Presenting someone else’s work or idea as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition. Plagiarism may be intentional or reckless or unintentional. Under regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence”. The plagiarism issue has received much more attention in recent decades as incidents of plagiarism seem to be on the rise in higher education (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Obeid & Hill, 2017; Hosny and Fatima, 2014; Amiri and Razmjoo, 2015; Babalola, 2012). In research, copying other works without proper citation is considered as academic misconduct and dishonesty. Now-a-days the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resulted information to be more easily accessible without any geographical barriers. Hence researcher can now gather information from any part of the world. Students’ awareness about academic integrity and different aspects of plagiarism plays an important role in determining their attitudes towards plagiarism. Inadequate knowledge on plagiarism is one of the important reasons which increase the incident of plagiarism in research (Park, 2003; Dawson and Overfield, 2006).

In 2018 University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued the guidelines for academic integrity and prevention of plagiarism in higher educational institutions. According to the guideline plagiarism would be categorized into four levels- Level 0: if similarities found up-to 10%, then it is considered as minor similarities with no penalty, Level 1: if similarities found above 10% to 40%, then student shall be asked to submit a revised script within a stipulated period not exceeding six month, Level 2: if similarities found above 40% to 60%, then student shall be debarred from submitting a revised script for one year, and Level 3: if similarities found above 60% then student registration for that programme shall be cancelled.

A lot of studies reflected that research scholars are not fully aware about different aspect of plagiarism (Zulfiqar et al., 2011; Adam and Sanusi, 2016; Geetha and Ramesha, 2020).

So, there is no doubt that violation of academic integrity & dishonesty is a moral & ethical issue but lack of knowledge and awareness duly play a vital role for plagiarism. Researchers have carried out several studies in different institutions across the world to explore the knowledge, awareness, and attitude towards plagiarism. However, no documentary evidence has been found that underpins awareness about different aspects of plagiarism among the research scholars of West Bengal (India).

So, the present study efforts to explore the level of awareness on various aspects of plagiarism among research scholars of West Bengal.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

An effort has been made to review some of the existing literature on knowledge, attitude, and awareness about different aspects of plagiarism among the students and research scholar of different higher educational institutions. Through detailed analysis of previous works on this issue will give insight to identify the research gap and outcomes of the studies.

A study by Kumari & Lakshmi (2015) found that most of the scholars are aware about plagiarism but still there is a need of awareness program to enhance knowledge about plagiarism. Tripathi et al. (2015) revealed research scholars are aware of plagiarism but still need to give more knowledge about it. Pandey, Sharma & Rawal (2016), found that scholars are aware of plagiarism, but they have a lack of awareness about types of plagiarism, copyright laws, plagiarism policies etc. Savitha & Krishnamurthy (2020) found that most of the research scholars are aware of plagiarism and they have fair knowledge on various issues of plagiarism such as different types of plagiarism, various anti- plagiarism software, consequence of plagiarism etc. Issrani et al. (2021) found that Students' knowledge and attitudes about plagiarism differ by their demographic characteristics and academic year. Most of the students displayed adequate knowledge regarding plagiarism in terms of copying word of ideas, quotes referencing and copying words without changing the matter. Okere, Adam and Sanusi (2016) revealed a gap in the knowledge about Intellectual Property Education and Plagiarism issues among the students of higher learning centers. Another study by Geetha & Ramesha (2020) found that lack of awareness about IPR and confusion about copyright issues among the research scholars of Bangalore University.

So, based on detailed analysis of related literature, it is found that most of the scholars or students have low to high level of awareness about different aspects of plagiarism. It is also reported that variation in level of awareness is due to different socio-demographic factors. Exploring all the studies it is also found that there has been no research carried out on the level of awareness about different aspects of plagiarism among researchers and academicians in the context of West Bengal.

So, there remains dearth of empirical studies in this area and the current study intends to find this gap by conducting a study on “A CROSS-SECTIONAL AWARENESS STUDY ON PLAGIARISM: PRINCIPLES AND PRAXIS.”

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To explore the level of awareness about different aspects (viz., concept, sources, detection tools, consequences, and experiences) about plagiarism among the research scholars of West Bengal

METHODOLOGY

The study was a Cross-sectional survey. The study was conducted from 27th November to 3rd December, 2022.

The population for this study covered the Ph.D. research scholars of West Bengal. 91 research scholars were selected through purposive sampling. A self-constructed questionnaire was developed for collecting data. Before constructing the tool, a thorough review of related studies was carried out to select possible items which would reflect and fortify the objective of the study. The questionnaire had two sections-

- **Part A-** sought general information (Name, gender, age, discipline, and institution) of the respondents.
- **Part B-** covered 09 items related to awareness about different aspects of plagiarism.

Content validity was carried out as a part of finalizing the questionnaire. The method used for content validity was expert judgment. Data were collected through Google forms. Social handles such as WhatsApp, Facebook and email were used to disseminate the questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected were analyzed through interpreting the sections of the questionnaire

INFORMATION & INTERPRETATION PERTAINING TO PART- A

The study sample consists of 52 (57.1%) male and 39 (42.9%) female research scholars. The survey documented majority of the respondents 41 (45.1%) belong to the age group of ‘within 30’, followed by 28 (30.8%) of them belong to age group of 31-35, 11 (12.1%) respondents belong to the age group of 36-40 & 41-45. The study found that majority of the respondents 60 (65.9%) belongs to Social Science discipline, while 25 (27.5%) of respondents are from Science and 06 (6.6%) from Language & Humanities disciplines.

DIMENSION/ITEM-WISE ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION PERTAINING TO PART-B

Awareness about the Conceptual Meaning of the term Plagiarism

Table 1 depicts that almost all the research scholars (99%) were aware about the conceptual meaning of the term ‘Plagiarism’.

Table 1: Awareness About the Conceptual Meaning of the Term Plagiarism

Statement	Yes	No	Total
Awareness about the conceptual meaning of the term Plagiarism	90 (99%)	1 (1%)	91

Sources of Awareness of Plagiarism

Figure 1 indicates the sources through which respondents came to know about plagiarism. The study found that, 64 (70.3%) respondents mentioned 'Research supervisor' as the main source to get knowledge about plagiarism, while 55 (60.4%) respondents mentioned through 'self-reading', 54 (59.3%) respondents stated 'workshop/ seminars/ conferences', 30 (33%) mentioned 'co-researcher' as the source to be aware about plagiarism.

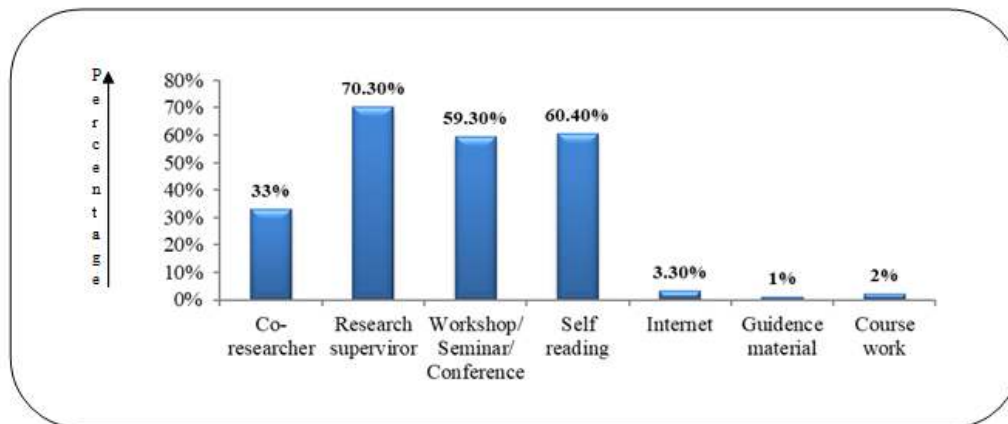


Figure 1: Sources of Awareness of Plagiarism.

Awareness about types of Plagiarism

Figure 2 shows the respondents awareness on various types of plagiarism. It is found that majority of the respondents i.e. 71 (78%) are aware about different types of plagiarism. Out of which 73.2% are aware about direct plagiarism, 71.8% are aware about unintentional plagiarism, 67.6% are aware about self plagiarism and complete plagiarism.

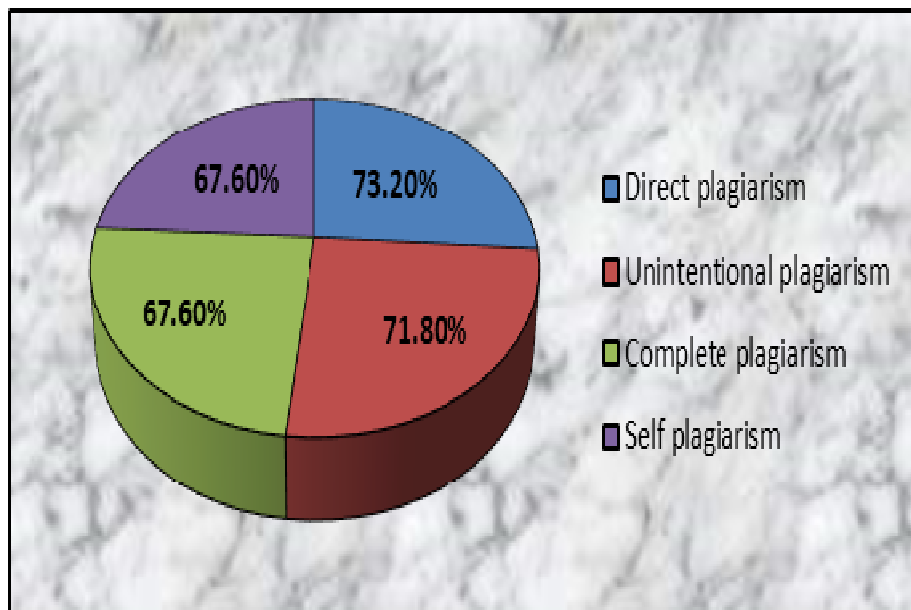


Figure 2: Awareness of the Types of Plagiarism.

Awareness of Plagiarism Detection Tools/ Software

In this study it is found that most of the respondents i.e., 82 (90.1%) are aware about different plagiarism detection tools/ software's. Figure 3 depicts that a majority of the respondents 66 (80.5%) are aware of Turnitin, followed by 52 (63.4%) Urkund, and 36 (43.9%) Duplichecker.

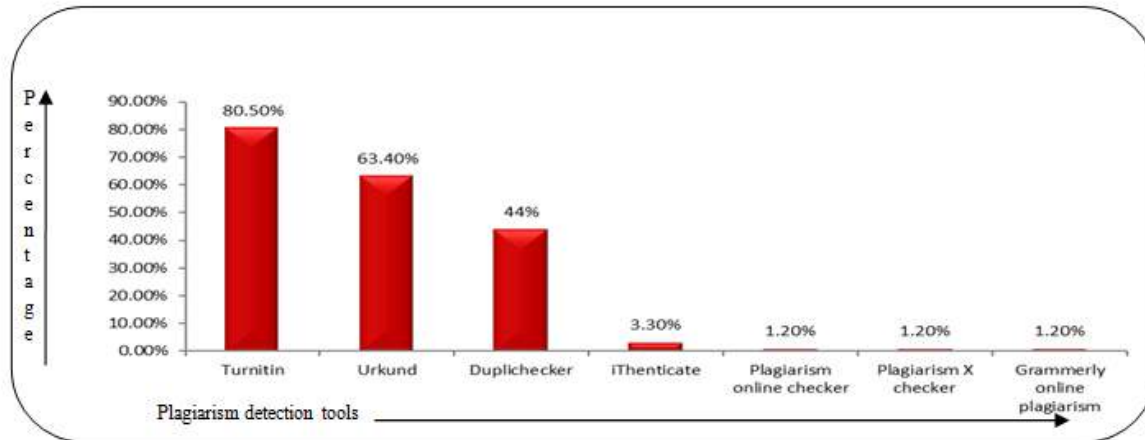


Figure 3: Awareness of Plagiarism Detection Tools

➤ **Awareness About the Consequences of Plagiarism Like Legal Action, Fine ETC.**

Copying other words without proper citations is an offence; hence the question was arising on consequences of plagiarism. Fig 4 indicated that a good number of respondents 65 (71.4%) are aware about consequence of plagiarism like different legal action and penalties.

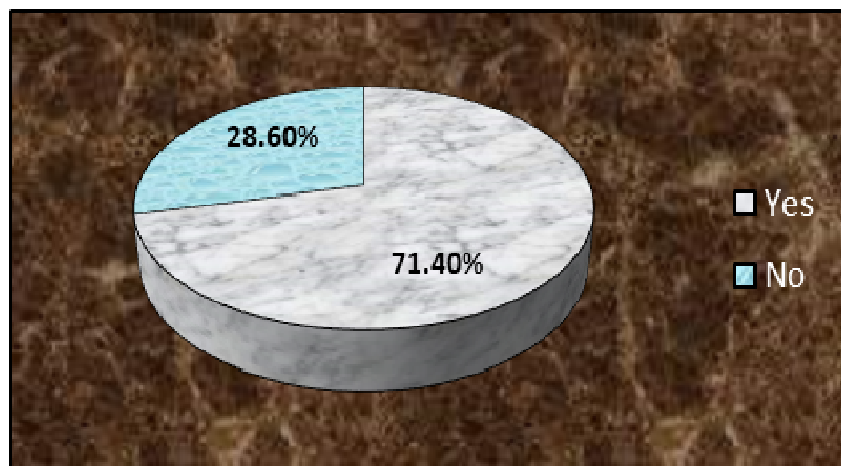


Figure 4: Awareness About the Consequences of Plagiarism

To Avoid of Plagiarism

Most of the respondents i.e., 80 (88%) are aware how to avoid plagiarism. Out of this most of the respondents 68 (85%) are given proper citation to avoid plagiarism, whereas 53 (66.3%) of respondents are converted the original information into their own words and 50 (62.5%) are run plagiarism check software to avoid plagiarism.

Table: 2 Avoidance of Plagiarism

Sl. No.	Steps to Avoid Plagiarism	Frequency	Percentage
1	Give proper citation	68	85%
2	Converted the original information into own words	53	66.3%
3	Run a plagiarism check software	50	62.5%

Familiar with the Term Plagiarism for the First Time

Figure 5 shows that 40.7% of the respondents come to know about plagiarism first time during their Master's degree, while 38.5% of the respondents during their Ph.D, only 2.2% of the respondents during their Bachelor's degree

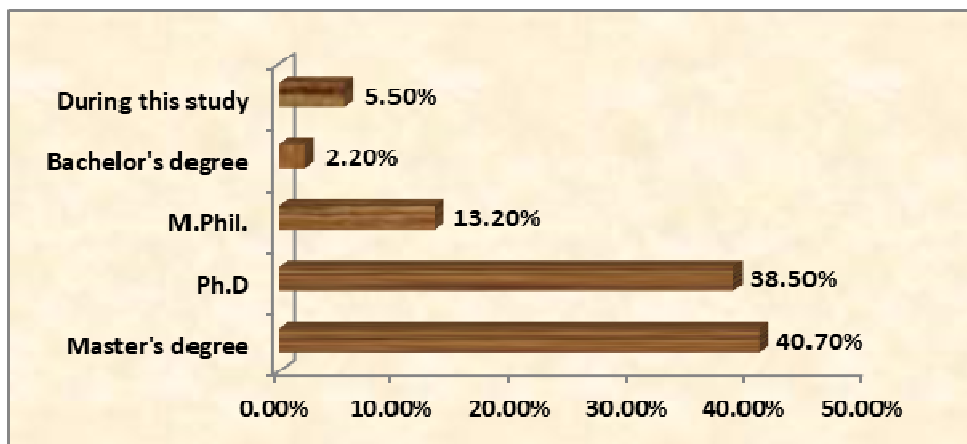


Figure 5: Familiar with Term Plagiarism for the First Time

Reasons to Reproduce the Work of Others

Many reasons are associated with reproducing the work of others. The study found that the majority i.e., 43 (47.3%) of the respondents reproduce the work of others due to language barriers, while 35 (38.5%) of the respondents due to lack of time for research, 28 (30.8%) of the respondents due to laziness and they felt that research writing is very difficult for them.

Some of the reasons to reproduce the work of others were also identified through the responses obtained, like-

- Lack of knowledge and awareness about plagiarism
- Easy reference
- Inability to use one's own critical thinking and creativity
- Evidence to validate the present research work
- It is unintentional and coincidental that at times an idea or use of words/ phrases tend to be like that of other's
- Non-sufficient materials
- The personal choice of the individual
- To make content more prosperous and enriched without caring for academic integrity

Need for Awareness Programme

Figure 6 shows need for awareness program on different plagiarism issue. From the Fig it is evident that majority 88 (96.7%) of the respondents stated that Higher Educational Institutions should organize awareness programmes such as seminars, workshops, orientation, sensitization events to increase the level of awareness among the research scholar.

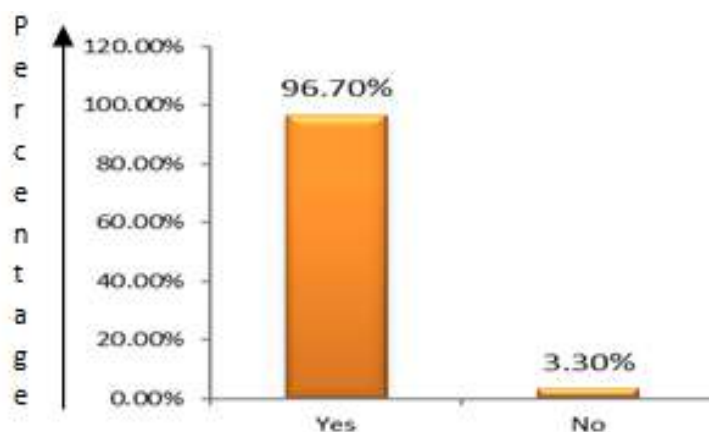


Figure: 6 Need For Awareness Programme

FINAL THOUGHTS

This study was a humble attempt to explore the level of awareness about different aspects of plagiarism among the research scholars from different HEIs like colleges, Universities, IEST (Indian Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology), IIT & BSI (Botanical Survey of India) located in different parts of West Bengal. This study takes into cognizance that Higher Education Institutions should organize awareness programme/sensitization workshops on different aspects of academic integrity with reinforcements of plagiarism to retain and facilitate the level of awareness on different aspects of plagiarism and its consequences among the academia in West Bengal on a continuous basis. The findings of the study reverberate with the studies of Kumari & Lakshmi (2015). They reported that most of the scholars are aware about plagiarism but still there is a need for organizing awareness programs/sensitization workshops etc. to enhance knowledge about plagiarism and keep updated. Also, it is in scuttle with Tripathi et al. (2015) their findings revealed research scholars are aware of plagiarism but still need to give more knowledge about it. Research and Publication Ethics as one of the mandatory courses in the Ph.D. Course Work should be disseminated with expertise and due significance and not just mere dissemination of the academic knowledge. It should be instilled to sustain academic integrity in the research and academic fields. The academic integrity must be exhibited both in pen as well as in spirit-thriving sustainability.

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