



Nexus of Plagiarism Practice and Academic Integrity in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

Nigeria is not an exception to the issue of plagiarism, as a major problem for universities around the world, compromising academic integrity and educational standards. This study examined the prevalence of plagiarism among tertiary institutions' students and lecturers, factors responsible for a high level of plagiarism, its impact on educational integrity and quality, and strategies needed for achieving academic integrity and thus reducing plagiarism. Using Google Forms to collect data from 171 students and faculty members in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions, a descriptive survey was adopted. Descriptive statistics involving percentages, mean, and standard deviation were utilized to analyze data. The findings reveal that university lecturers' involvement in plagiarism is higher than their counterparts in the Colleges of Education and the Polytechnics. It also identified significant factors contributing to Plagiarism, which are a lack of institutional enforcement, inadequate policies, pressure to meet academic deadlines, and an inability to identify different forms of Plagiarism. Similarly, it identified five significant impacts of Plagiarism to include prioritization over academic honesty, unchecked plagiarism practices, difficulty in global ranking, poor credibility of academic research, and hindrance to national development. It recommended integrating plagiarism detection software like Turnitin in the schools, providing a model of academic integrity by faculty members, training in academic writing and referencing, strict enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies, and putting a plagiarism policy in place. It concluded that management should conduct regular workshops, seminars, and training for staff on proper citation, referencing, and research ethics, and they should ensure the consistent application of anti-plagiarism rules with clear consequences for violations.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Nigeria, Plagiarism, South-west, Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

One of the most significant menaces affecting the Nigerian educational system is the prevalence of academic dishonesty (Azuka, 2014; Olatunbosun, 2009; Jacob et al., 2018). This menace, as shown in literature, is perpetrated by teachers, students, parents, and school administrators and has become a regular occurrence at all levels in most schools in Nigeria (Unya et al., 2022; Azuka, 2014; Imram & Ayobami, 2011; Odunayo & Olujuwon, 2010). Consequently, various forms of academic malpractice are perpetrated in tertiary institutions; however, the focus of this study is a particularly egregious practice known as plagiarism. In literature, there are many definitions of the concept of plagiarism. It is regarded as a cankerworm or unethical practice or fraud deeply ingrained in academia. It has compromised the quality of higher education teaching, learning, assessment, and instruction, which defies independent and critical thinking in the quest to add value to the existing body of knowledge (Gow, 2019; Sekoai & Paiso, 2023). According to Alsallal et al. (2013), plagiarism is a cardinal sin that has a strong negative impact on academia and the public. Accordingly, Oliha and Osiobaifoa (2024) noted that plagiarism an illegal practice that breaches integrity and undermines ethical standards in scholarly work. Thus, in academics, it is gross academic misconduct not to acknowledge the source of information cited or referred to in any written document. It is adopting or adapting another person's idea or work without acknowledging the original owner, or intellectual theft (Ellis et al., 2018). In other words, plagiarism is the failure of a writer to give due recognition to the originator of the idea incorporated into a work or the use of ideas, content, or structures

without appropriately acknowledging the source to benefit in a setting where originality is expected (Fishman, 2009; Louw, 2017). Norman and Gipp (2013) expand this definition further that plagiarism include all forms of intellectual contributions in academic documents, regardless of their presentation, e.g., text, figures, tables, and mathematical formulae, and their origin. Authors agreed that plagiarism has the notion of a theft (Moshe & Yaron, 2014; Merin & Sangeetha, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014; Kanjirang & Gupta, 2017). However, there are various laws and sanctions for theft, corruption in the country, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, etc.

For a better understanding of what plagiarism entails, Walker (1998) has developed a typology of plagiarism that includes the following: recycling (self-plagiarism), verbatim copying (without citing the source), ghostwriting or purloining (copying another student's work without permission), sham paraphrasing (presenting copied text as a paraphrase by omitting quotations), and illegal paraphrasing or plagiarizing with the original author's consent. Similarly, Mozgovoy et al. (2010) introduced a taxonomy that combines many categories into five types of academic plagiarism, such as verbatim replicating another person's work. Also, using paraphrases to conceal instances of plagiarism and the use of technical ploys that take use of flaws in the present plagiarism detection systems, as well as intentionally erroneous references. Mozgovoy et al. (2010) went further to note that there are tough plagiarism, idea plagiarism, structural plagiarism, and cross-language plagiarism, which are challenging for both computers and people to identify.

In addition to the above typologies, and colleagues on their part have modified the typology advanced by Alzharani et al (2010) to distinguish only two forms of plagiarism, which are literal plagiarism and this encompasses near copies and modified copies as well as intelligent plagiarism, which has to do with paraphrasing, summarization, translation, and idea plagiarism. Due to above varied perspectives mentioned above. Mbutho and Hutchings (2021) affirm that it is difficult to manage or reduce due to its complex and multifaceted nature and inadequate understanding of the concept. However, Jereb et al. (2018) inform that many researchers have identified a host of factors responsible for the increase in plagiarism, and these include gender, socialisation, efficiency gain, motivation for study, methodological uncertainties, or easy access to electronic information via the Internet and new technologies. Researchers have argued that Plagiarism does not only take place intentionally, but unfamiliarity with plagiarism rules and regulations, the fear of failure, pressure to perform academically well, financial concerns (Devlin & Gray, 2007), and personal or family problems (Devlin & Gray, 2007; Goh, 2015; Nabee et al., 2020). Conversely, Wittenberg (2024) argued that the adoption of technological policing solutions like Turnitin to curb plagiarism may contribute to an erosion of authentic learning and knowledge production. Also, the discontent that arose in the use of these tools due to the consequences of their widespread adoption in academic institutions is also a major problem. In this era of the knowledge economy and artificial intelligence, students and academia have access to instant information at their convenience, and this has made plagiarizing content easier than before. Institutions must provide a clear policy on its usage for staff and students and ensure continuous training for students on how to avoid academic dishonesty and the consequences of plagiarism (Nabee et al., 2020).

The study of Mahomed et al. (2023) has offered insights into the reasons why students engage in plagiarism for improved grades, laziness, and unintentional plagiarism. However, after completing a course on plagiarism, their understanding of plagiarism improves. In addition, students engage in plagiarism due to ignorance and the absence of software to detect plagiarism. The authors recommend that the university deploy software that would detect plagiarism, and this would deter academic dishonesty (Sekoai & Papsio, 2023). The study of Abbasi et al. (2020) highlighted various factors responsible for plagiarism among academics in Iran. Some of the factors include, lack of skills, pressure from the education system, and a lack of awareness. Also, intervening factors such as technological advances, legal gaps, and lack of efficient supervision; In addition, ground factors: personal traits and attitudes of the academic community; while the strategy and intervention roles needed are role model, supervision, national/international coordination, and higher awareness are needed to curb plagiarism. The authors are of the view that if the strategies are taken into consideration, the outcome would lead to the regeneration of plagiarism and negative attitudes toward Iranian authors in the world academic communities. The authors recommend self-esteem, self-efficacy among researchers and denouncing intense competition among researchers. In addition, the laying of emphasis on quality rather than quantity of published works, and introducing clear laws and severe punishments for plagiarism. Olayinka et al. (2019) study reveals that some of the causes of people committing plagiarism is due to the desire to achieve high marks, fear of failure, and poor academic planning. The major reasons for committing plagiarism, and to the majority of the respondents, perceive plagiarism as a menace

and a criminal act. Another cause of plagiarism, according to Pryah and Tashmika (2019), is large classes due to the massification of education, and this has compromised teaching and learning.

In a similar vein, the study of Ude-Akpeh and Ezekulie (2022) reveals that students have a low perception of plagiarism, low written communication, and paraphrasing skills. This is in tandem with the study of Idiegbeyanose et al. (2016), that awareness of plagiarism was average among the students they sampled. Again, a positive relationship was found to exist at $r = 0.294$; $p < 0.05$. Wittenberg (2024) argues that the easy adoption of technological policing solutions like Turnitin may also contribute to the erosion of authentic learning and knowledge production. In another study, Ofem et al., (2025) found a significant mean difference in the perception of plagiarism, falsification, and impersonation based on school location, but urban and rural students had similar perceptions on cheating and fabrication of data. Similarly, the study went further that school community relation has a negative relation with perception of academic anxiety, with low percentage contributions to plagiarism, cheating, and impersonation, but school community relations had a strong contribution to impersonation. Thus, there is a need to mount programmes that will integrate honesty and discipline in the students. The study recommends that, considering the disparities in rural and urban settings regarding academic dishonesty, orientations on ethical research and the use of technology should be implemented for students. However, students should not be blamed for the increase in plagiarism in schools. Bell (2018) argued that the lack of proper training or awareness on intellectual property rights and the consequences of violation to the students and the institutions are the causes of plagiarism by students. Similarly, institutions have not promoted plagiarism polices to enable them to key into it to discourage academic dishonesty. In addition, a lack of self-confidence in the conduct of research will make students plagiarise due to desperation. Bell recommended the incorporation of academic integrity into the curricula and mounting tutorials all year round to enable students to sharpen their information literacy skills and understand the consequences of plagiarism.

Research has shown that plagiarism has negative impacts on academia and the public and wastes resources, also distorting the mechanism for tracing and correcting results, detrimental to competence acquisition and assessment (Tomáš et al., 2019; Alsallal et al., 2013). In addition, wrong findings can spread and affect later research or its practical applications (Gipp, 2014). Similarly, it can skew meta-studies and jeopardise patient safety (Erik von et al., 2004). Tomas et went further to explain that what can aggravate the problems of plagiarism is when a plagiarist receives unduly research grants, has career advancement, and artificial inflation of publication and citation. This, according to Duygu et al. (2016) made it more problematic as citation counts are widely used as an indicator to determine research performance, which could influence funding or hiring decisions. Tomáš et al. (2019) inform that plagiarized research papers impede the scientific process, e.g., by distorting the mechanisms for tracing and correcting results

The study of Chris-Valentine et al. (2022) shows a positive relationship between academic dishonesty and Nigeria's poor-quality graduates. Furthermore, the study revealed a significant correlation among the variables of academic dishonesty, quality graduates, and contribution to national development. In their study of students' projects among Polytechnic students in Edo State, Nigeria. Idiata et al. (2019) revealed a high incidence of plagiarism, which is against the global best practice among students. This led Chris-Valentine et al. (2022) to conclude that universities where academic dishonesty is perpetrated usually produce low-quality graduates who, at best, may contribute little to national development for global competitiveness.

Even though plagiarism is a serious crime in academia, many do not perceive it as unethical or criminal; hence, its rise among students of tertiary institutions. The high prevalence rate of plagiarism has become a cause for concern due to the recognition of the dangers it poses to core values in academia. This has also increased its interest (Macfarlane et al., 2014). It affects students, the institution, and the entire society, and the academic standards too (Saeed et al., 2011). In the words of Gregory (2021), the rate at which students engage in plagiarism is high, and this unwholesome practice constitutes a cog in the wheel of progress of the entire educational system. The issue of plagiarism is a universal problem that can be attributed to a lack of writing skills (Krishnamurthy & Savita, 2021). Consequently, it involves stealing another person's intellectual property and claiming it as one's original work. It is considered a serious threat that affects the reputation and trustworthiness of a journal. There are numerous awareness-raising initiatives to lower the high rate of plagiarism among journal editors. The rate at which researchers use other people's intellectual property is quite alarming, particularly since the arrival of the Internet (Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013).

It should be noted that the attention given to plagiarism as a form of academic malpractice is massive in recent times, but despite this, many researchers still find themselves being caught in the web of this ugly menace due to the availability of internet facilities and other sophisticated software like ChatGPT, Grammarly, paraphrasing tools, and others. Through the use of the internet, researchers in higher institutions have access to unlimited amounts of information without any form of constraints, which, of course, is the right step in the right direction because researchers can gain from the works of previous researchers. Conversely, it is a known fact that some writers are in the habit of stealing other researchers' ideas and presenting them as entirely new by not acknowledging the earlier writers whose works have been stolen. This cankerworm called plagiarism has plagued the educational system in Nigeria by producing intellectuals who are not fit. However, plagiarism as a monster in the academic environment is a universal problem that needs to be urgently addressed to see if the country's higher education institutions wish to be recognized in the community of nations. It is based on this background that this study was conducted.

Statement of the problem

The public tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been facing many problems like industrial actions, underfunding, brain drain, absence of academic staff, academic dishonesty, corruption, sex for grades, and the issue of Plagiarism involving staff and students alike. The issue of academic dishonesty occasioned by plagiarism in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria has received much attention from researchers, and findings have been inconclusive. Researchers such as Chris-Valentine et al. (2022), Olujuwon et al 2023 and Ude-Akpeh and Ezekulie (2022) have carried out studies on several related variables, such as academic dishonesty and plagiarism, among others. The gap identified by the researcher is that none of the earlier researchers focused on the prevalence level of plagiarism, examined the factors contributing to plagiarism, assessed the impact on academic integrity and educational quality, and investigated the effectiveness of the current anti-plagiarism laws in higher institutions of learning.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine the nexus of plagiarism practice and academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate the prevalence of plagiarism among tertiary institutions' students and lecturers.
2. Examine the factors contributing to the high level of plagiarism in tertiary education.
3. Assess the extent of impact of plagiarism on academic integrity and educational quality in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
4. Identify strategies for achieving academic integrity and reducing plagiarism.

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence level of plagiarism among students and lecturers?
2. What are the factors contributing to plagiarism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria?
3. Does plagiarism affect the academic integrity and reputation of Nigerian tertiary institutions?
4. What are the strategies for achieving academic integrity and reducing plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Methods and Materials

This study used web-based survey research conducted with students (Graduate and Postgraduate) and lecturers in Nigeria using a quantitative, non-experimental, convenience sample design. This Survey research provides numerical information describing the understanding, causes, and implications of plagiarism, capturing perceptions and experiences regarding academic integrity (Creswell, 2013). The survey consists of 6 dimensions and twenty-eight performance indicators, outlining their understanding of plagiarism. The six dimensions include forms of plagiarism, its prevalence, plagiarism detection tools, causes of plagiarism, its effects, and strategies needed to stem its tide. We ask participants in the study to fill out the form based on the above using a 4-point Likert scale item with intervals ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, strongly agree to disagree. Data was collected between June and October 2024 and posted on the WhatsApp platforms of academics and students in tertiary institutions. The web link-maintained anonymity and confidentiality and did not connect individual participants to the survey. Descriptive statistics involving percentages, mean, and standard deviation were utilized to analyze data. Exactly 171 participants filled out the questionnaire, and about 64 % were males, while 35.7% were females. The educational level of the respondents consists of undergraduates 13.5%, postgraduate students 43.3% and faculty staff 43.3%. Their age ranges from 18 to 51 years and above. The variables gender, educational level, age,

and institutions were studied to assess their knowledge, attitudes, and experiences with plagiarism and perspectives on strategies needed to solve plagiarism. Overall, incorporating these variables in a study allows researchers to have a better understanding of the issue under study and to generate findings that are more robust and applicable to diverse groups.

Results

1. How prevalent is the practice of plagiarism among lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

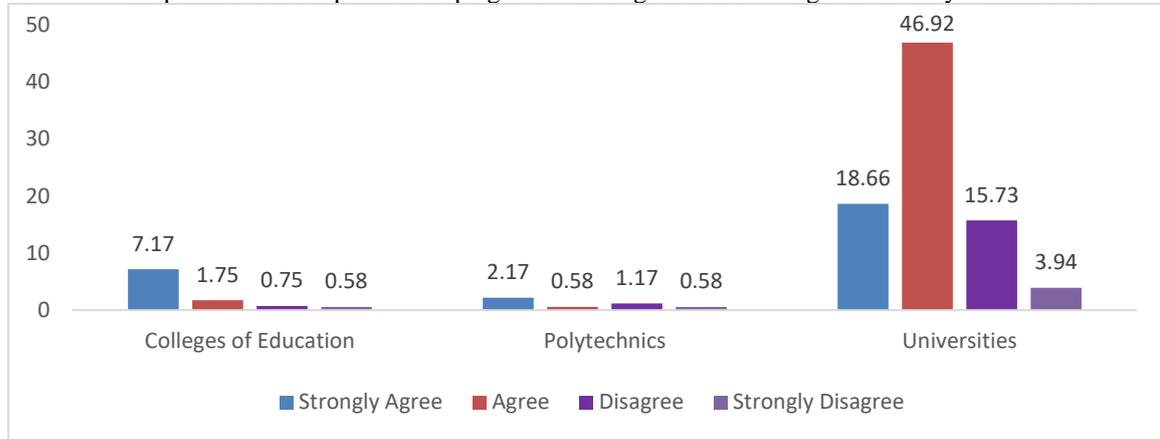


Figure 1. Institutional prevalence of plagiarism.

The responses depicted in Figure 1 showed 8.92% agreement and 1.33% disagreement in Colleges of Education, 2.75% agreement and 1.75% disagreement in Polytechnic, and 65.58% agreement and 19.67% disagreement in universities. Plagiarism is more prevalent among lecturers in universities, lower in Colleges of Education, but far lower in Polytechnics.

2. What are the main factors that contribute to the practice of plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 1. Factors contributing to the practice of plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

S/N	Item	Percentage (%)
1	My institution educates students and staff on plagiarism and its consequences.	2.4
2	I am familiar with the tools available to detect plagiarism.	3.7
3	Plagiarism is often committed unintentionally due to a lack of understanding.	5.9
4	I cannot identify different forms of plagiarism (e.g., self-plagiarism, direct copying).	11.2
5	Inadequate knowledge of citation and referencing contributes to plagiarism.	8.9
6	Pressure to meet academic deadlines leads to plagiarism.	12.6
7	Lack of institutional enforcement encourages plagiarism.	31.7
8	Lack of institutional policies on plagiarism.	14.8
9	Peer influence promotes engagement in plagiarism.	7.4
10	The accessibility of online resources makes plagiarism tempting.	1.4

As revealed in Table 1, the major factors contributing to the practice of plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions are lack of institutional enforcement 31.7%; inadequate policies on plagiarism 14.8%; Pressure to meet academic deadlines 12.6%; and inability to identify different forms of plagiarism, such as self-plagiarism and direct copying 11.2%. Other less contributory factors include: inadequate knowledge of citation and referencing 8.9%; peer influence 7.4%; unintentional errors due to a lack of understanding 5.9%; poor familiarity with available tools 3.7%; poor institutional training of students and staff on plagiarism and its consequences 2.4%; and accessibility of online resources 1.4%.

2. How does plagiarism affect the academic integrity and reputation of Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 2. Impacts of plagiarism on academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions

S/N	Item	Percentage (%)
1	Plagiarism discourages academic integrity among staff at my institution.	9.4
2	Plagiarism affects the credibility of academic qualifications.	3.2
3	Faculty members uphold low standards of academic integrity in teaching and assessment.	8.3
4	Students often prioritize plagiarism over academic honesty.	19.7
5	There are insufficient mechanisms to report plagiarism in my institution.	1.2
6	Plagiarism undermines the credibility of academic research.	11.2
7	Unchecked plagiarism damages the reputation of tertiary institutions.	16.2
8	Plagiarism erodes trust between students and faculty.	8.1
9	Institutions with rampant plagiarism face difficulties in global rankings.	12.3
10	Ethical lapses such as plagiarism hinder national educational development.	10.4

The outcomes in Table 2 showed that the five major impacts of plagiarism are prioritized plagiarism over academic honesty 19.7%, unchecked plagiarism practices 16.2%, difficulty in global ranking 12.3%, poor credibility of academic research 11.2%, and hindrance to national development, 10.4%. Other impact of plagiarism includes discouragement of academic integrity 9.4%, low standard of academic integrity in their teaching and assessments 8.3%, low credibility of academic qualifications, and insufficient mechanisms for reports 1.2%.

4. What strategies can be implemented to enhance academic integrity and reduce plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 3. Strategies that reduce plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

S/N	Strategy	Percentage (%)
1	Effective training in academic writing and referencing can reduce plagiarism.	15.6
2	Strict enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies discourages plagiarism.	12.3
3	Integrating plagiarism detection software (e.g., Turnitin, Grammarly) and making them accessible to staff and students is effective.	36.4
4	Faculty members should model academic integrity for students.	19.3
5	Collaborative efforts between institutions can foster academic honesty.	5.8
6	Institutional management must implement plagiarism policies for staff and students.	10.2

As shown in Table 3, the integration of plagiarism detection software like Turnitin and Grammarly and make them accessible to students and lecturers has 36.4% ability to enhance academic assessment, faculty members have 19.3% ability to model academic integrity to students, training in academic writing and referencing has 15.6% ability to reduce plagiarism, strict enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies has 12.3% ability to discourage plagiarism, putting plagiarism policy in place has 10.2% ability to control plagiarism. In comparison, collaboration between institutions has a 5.8% ability to foster a culture of academic honesty.

Discussion

In line with the results of this study, a significant relationship exists between plagiarism practices and academic integrity in Nigerian universities. This finding is consistent with earlier studies by Azuka (2014), Olatunbosun (2009), and Jacob et al. (2018). Plagiarism, which includes direct copying, improper paraphrasing, and failure to credit sources, is prevalent among academic staff. This finding corroborates earlier studies by Unya et al. (2022), Azuka (2014), Imram & Ayobami (2011), and Odunayo & Olujuwon (2010). This made Bell (2018) recommend the incorporation of academic integrity into the curricula and mounting tutorials all year round to enable students to sharpen their information literacy skills and understand the consequences of plagiarism. Several key factors contribute to this issue, including a lack of awareness, inadequate institutional measures, and limited access to plagiarism detection tools (Jereb et al., 2018). The study indicates that many lecturers plagiarize due to insufficient

knowledge of proper citation techniques, pressure to meet academic expectations, and poor research skills. Additionally, the availability of online resources has necessitated easy copying of materials without appropriate attribution. Some faculty members also inadvertently encourage plagiarism by failing to enforce academic integrity policies strictly. A critical gap identified is the weak enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies in many Nigerian universities. While most institutions have academic integrity policies, implementation and monitoring remain inconsistent. The absence of strict penalties and the lack of comprehensive awareness programmes contribute to the persistence of unethical practices. Furthermore, plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin and Grammarly is not widely available or regularly used by students and lecturers. The study further reveals that plagiarism compromises academic integrity by eroding originality and intellectual honesty. This supports the study of Wittenberg (2024) that the adoption of these technological policing may contribute to the erosion of authentic learning and knowledge production. When students habitually engage in dishonest practices, they fail to develop essential research and critical thinking skills. Based on the study findings, this affects their academic growth and has long-term consequences for national development, as universities produce graduates who lack originality and ethical standards. The finding corroborates the study of Macfarlane et al. (2014), Saeed et al. (2011) that plagiarism affects stakeholders, eg, students, the institution, the entire society, and academic standards are eroded too. While technology has contributed to the ease of plagiarism, it also offers solutions by which plagiarism detection tools, digital literacy training, and promoting open-access resources can help curb unethical academic practices. Universities must integrate these tools into their educational processes and train both students and faculty on their practical use and referencing, as this would reduce plagiarism.

Conclusion

The study highlights the urgent need for Nigerian tertiary institutions to prioritize academic integrity by addressing plagiarism through policy reform, awareness campaigns, and technological interventions. Strengthening institutional frameworks and fostering a culture of originality will significantly improve the credibility of higher education in Nigeria. Plagiarism remains a significant threat to academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions, undermining the education standard and research. It further revealed that the prevalence of plagiarism is driven by factors such as lack of awareness, inadequate enforcement of institutional policies, limited access to plagiarism detection tools, and academic pressure. The weak implementation of academic integrity policies has further allowed unethical practices to persist. If left unaddressed, plagiarism will continue to erode the credibility of Nigerian higher education and produce graduates who lack originality and ethical standards. Therefore, a concerted effort from students, faculty, and academic administrators is necessary to foster a culture of honesty, creativity, and academic excellence. Further research could be conducted to examine the pull and push factors of plagiarism among all levels of education in Nigeria. Other similar research could be conducted to examine why lecturers in universities plagiarise more than in colleges and other levels of tertiary education.

Recommendations

To strengthen academic integrity and curb plagiarism in Nigerian tertiary institutions, the following recommendations were proposed:

1. Tertiary institutions should conduct regular workshops, seminars, and training for staff on proper citation, referencing, and research ethics. They should ensure consistent application of anti-plagiarism rules with clear consequences for violations.
2. Policymakers should develop and ensure strict formulation of laws on plagiarism, enforcing the use of plagiarism detectors like Turnitin and Grammarly, and make them accessible to students and lecturers to identify and deter plagiarism.
3. Faculty heads should train lecturers on best practices for detecting plagiarism, while students should receive instruction on proper research and citation techniques.
4. Assignments and research work should be designed in ways that promote creativity and critical thinking rather than rote memorization or reproduction of existing materials.
5. Lecturers should lead by example by ensuring ethical research and publication practices.

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