

PLAGIARISM- AN UNDERSTANDING

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Academic research involves months and years of careful planning and hard work. Translating this research from bench to bedside gives a sense of thrill and satisfaction. It is essential to be completely honest while carrying out and publishing research. Deviations, also called scientific misconducts do occur during this process, and most common of these is plagiarism¹. Plagiarism is derived from the Latin word “plagiarius”, meaning a kidnapper, and the person who commits it is called a plagiarist^{2,3}. Plagiarism is defined as “The use of another author’s language, thoughts, ideas or expressions or the representation of them as one’s original work without crediting the source”⁴. In easy words, it is “The practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them as their own”⁵. Act of plagiarism goes back a long time in history and the first article on it was written by Halstead in “Science” in 1896, under the title “Complement or Plagiarism”⁶. Since then scores of articles have been published on the topic.

Research has become a growing industry, and there is fierce competition to publish work. Researchers find themselves obliged to publish their work to get promotions or funds, to prove their academic competency, and to maintain their careers^{7,8}. These pressures, coupled with a lack of time, research skills and ease of obtaining information from the internet, lead to intentional shortcuts and plagiarism. Although most researchers understand the obvious forms of plagiarism, there is a lack of clarity on the grey areas which is also a cause of plagiarism⁹.

Around 23% of articles submitted for publication are rejected due to plagiarism¹⁰ and its prevalence rate is reported to be between 11%-19% in different communities¹¹.

Plagiarism can occur in different forms, as depicted in (Table1).

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Whatever the type, plagiarism is divided into major and minor forms, depending upon the magnitude of the offence. Major forms include intentionally using large portions of another person’s work and presenting it as one’s own. In minor forms, insignificant parts of the text are not properly cited, which reflects academic immaturity. Plagiarism that is committed deliberately is a greater offence than when it is done unintentionally².

CAPSULE SUMMARY

Plagiarism is the most common type of misconduct in scientific writing and is defined as taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them as their own thus retarding progress. It carries serious penalties if proved. Plagiarism-free scientific writing is a shared responsibility of medical institutes initiating the scientific writings and the Journal editors who publish it.

If this misconduct is detected before publication, the article is sent back to the author for making required changes or re-writing of the complete article. The penalties are different for different forms of plagiarism when it is detected after publication (Table 2). There are many examples where plagiarism has cost the authors their entire careers.

In the past, it was the responsibility of editors and reviewers, depending on their personal experience, to detect plagiarism.

Recently, many software-based services for the detection of plagiarism are available. One free service is eTBLAST which is available on the website: <http://etest.vbi.vt.edu/etblast3/>. Another software is iThenticate, which offers options to filter direct quotations, bibliographies, and methodologies to minimize the chances of wrong reporting. Another paid tool is Turnitin plagiarism detection software. This is the most widely used software and is also used by our journal. There is no universally agreed percentage for similarity index to match over which plagiarism may be declared. However, most journals take a 20%-30% similarity as cut-off line^{12,13}. The use of these software programs is not enough to make a decision, and the case must be taken in context.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan gave an anti-plagiarism Policy in 2007 and revised it in 2023. It allows a 19% overall similarity index and up to 5% similarity each in internet sources (Information available publicly), publications (Academic databases), and student-papers (Database of documents uploaded in Turnitin by Instructors or Students). Similarity with the student repositories may be ignored if the author is the principal investigator. The similarity index in the sections of results, conclusion, and recommendations should not be more than 9%, and these sections may be separately evaluated from the rest of the manuscript. The policy details all

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aspects of Plagiarism¹⁴.

In this era of artificial intelligence (AI), scientific medical manuscripts have been written using it. Moreover, software programs can rephrase the write-up by AI. If suspected, certain software can detect whether the paper is written by humans or by machines¹.

Production of plagiarism-free scientific writing is a shared responsibility of any medical institute. The recommendations

given in Table 3 can help achieve this goal^{3,13}.

Publishing medical research is essential for increasing the knowledge of the medical community. Plagiarism is the most common problem in research writing and shakes the virtues of trust and honesty which are an integral part of such writings, creating an environment which retards scientific progress. It should be dealt with strictly at all levels and authors should be appropriately punished, to set an example in the scientific community and to discourage such behaviors.

Table 1: Types of Plagiarism

PLAGIARISM TYPES	
Depending upon intention	
Accidental (Unintentional)	Caused by a lack of awareness of limits of taking data and pieces of writing from another source
Deliberate (Intentional)	Intentionally copying other's work in any form
Depending upon nature of plagiarised material	
Plagiarism of Ideas	Conducting research on someone else idea without acknowledging it
Plagiarism of Text	Copy pasting or word to word writing
Patch working	Changing a few words of the copied work and presenting as one's own work
Mosaic Plagiarism	Using text from different sources and intertwining into one flow
Paraphrase Plagiarism	Rephrasing a text without proper attribution
Software based text modifications	Using softwares like text spinner to evade plagiarism
Self Plagiarism	When part an original work is used in different publications by the researcher without making a reference
Collusion plagiarism	Asking someone else to write an article and presenting as your own
Contract plagiarism	Paying someone else to write an article and presenting it as their own

Table 2: Penalties for Plagiarism

Severity of plagiarism	Penalties
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of explanation
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal letter to heads of institute of the plagiarist institution • Refusal of future submission from author • Refusal of future submission from institution • Reporting to Medical Council • Expulsion of authors/co authors from institute • Retraction of the article • Students <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Redo assignment/paper ii. Fail the assignment/paper iii. Redo class or degree iv. Fail the degree

Table 3: Recommendations for avoiding Plagiarism

Source credit (mentioning reference) should be given when another person’s ideas, opinion, theory, facts, statistics, graphs or drawings are used in own research.
If exact words from the source are to be copied, then it should be between quotation marks “” followed by reference.
For copying scientific facts which are universal and cannot be changed, the text should be rewritten in author’s own words followed by source crediting.
Obtain permission from the source article is large part of a previously published article needs to be included in the manuscript.
Use plagiarism software before submitting the manuscript.
The students and faculty within the institute should have enough knowledge about plagiarism, its forms, consequences and how to avoid committing it, and all institutes should provide training on how to write a scientific article without plagiarism.
For junior researchers, the article may be broken into small pieces, setting a deadline for each piece discussing with seniors at each stage.
“Publish or perish” leads to undue pressure and inadvertently to, plagiarism. Publishing should not be an academic promotion drive venture.

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