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## About Eastern Africa Journal of Contemporary Research (EAJCR)

# Postgraduate Students' Awareness of Forms of Plagiarism and their Effects on Academic Reputation in Selected Public Universities, Kenya

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## Abstract

*The standard of original, plagiarism-free research conducted by universities determines academic accomplishment. It emphasizes the caliber of the study and backs the university's initiatives to convey its significance on a global scale. A university can build a strong reputation and generate qualified individuals who aid in the advancement of society. The objectives were knowledge on forms of plagiarism and their effects and consequences of plagiarism. The study adopted descriptive research design using a survey approach. The locale was at Kenyatta University, Karatina University, and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. The target population was 247 from three schools in the three public universities. Sample size for students was 200, 60 lecturers and three Anti-plagiarism software administrators. The study adapted stratified sampling technique. Purposive sampling was also used to determine sample size from lecturers and Anti-plagiarism software administrators. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through self-administered questionnaires and interview schedules respectively. The study was grounded on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which served as its foundation. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The results of the study indicated that most of the postgraduate students were not exclusively aware of all forms of plagiarism had a reasonable understanding of the different penalties associated with plagiarism. It was recommended that, a campaign should be practiced to raise the level of awareness on forms of plagiarism and its effects. The study suggested that university management should also provide researchers with continuous sensitization through workshops and training on a variety of topics, such as how to improve academic writing abilities and steer clear of plagiarism.*

**Keywords:** *Plagiarism, Forms of Plagiarism, Consequences of Plagiarism, Reputation of Academic Institution*

## 1. Introduction

Plagiarism is a major ethical transgression that is gradually encroaching on our higher education system. A number of tools and control methods have been developed by academic and research institutions in response to the plagiarism problem. Plagiarism is defined by Washaya (2022) as the deliberate or unintentional presentation of another person's words, ideas, or artwork as one's own without giving due credit. Yazici, Yildiz, Aksu, and Şentürk (2023) believe that plagiarism is a major issue in many academic institution of higher learning. Plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity as it dents the values of honesty, originality, and intellectual property rights. It is a misrepresentation of the students, author's and researcher's knowledge and skills which violates intellectual property rights of the original author or creator through devaluation. Not only does plagiarism harm the original author and the plagiarist, but it also damages the reputation of the higher education institutions involved. One of the oldest academic offenses, plagiarism compromises the integrity of education, claims Tollefson (2024).

Educational rankings are used to evaluate the quality and success of higher education institutions. Researchers and the amount of funding institutions receive are impacted by these rankings, which reflect institutional renown and excellence (Musselin 2018). Due to the importance of funding higher education institutions, researchers must uphold high professional standards (Gamage et al. 2020). Bojadjiev et al. (2023) indicated that institutions can gain this credibility by conducting exceptional research that results in new information, technologies, discoveries, and innovations that have an impact on society. Washaya (2022) asserts that universities and other institution of higher learning may build a solid reputation by delivering original research with minimal to no plagiarism, creating skilled workers for the workforce, and promoting the growth of more responsible or civic citizens.

Faculty and postgraduate students at the university are in charge of carrying out the innovative scholarly work (Foltýnek et al. 2020). As a prerequisite to completing their degree, postgraduate students must create original scholarly publications. These created works that adhere to the plagiarism threshold set by the university. Kumar and Mohindra (2019) claim that prior to training, postgraduate students knew very little about plagiarism forms. Their survey's results showed that postgraduate students (48%) were not sufficiently aware of the problems associated with plagiarism, and 57% were not aware of plagiarism forms. Ibegbulam and Eze (2015) concur that training level was frequently linked to understanding of plagiarism forms in their study at the University of Nigeria.

Inadequate knowledge on forms of plagiarism leads to students engaging in plagiarism which damages educational institutions' reputations, which negatively affects a country's future decision-makers Zimba & Gasparyan (2021). It undermines and erodes the core purpose of higher education, which is to transfer knowledge, by allowing students to learn without having to master it. According to Onuoha and Ikonne (2015), it lowers standards, erodes students' academic credibility and degrades the institution's reputation, and compromises professional ethics and educational quality globally. Recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have significantly exacerbated the plagiarism issue. Since generative AI is being used to

create works that are hard for supervisors to tell between original and unoriginal, plagiarism has taken on a new dimension. Furthermore, given how quickly these AIs are developing and how partially institutions have accepted them, some are using them for approved learning activities including research, idea generation, and tutoring. However, students may abuse generative AI to develop and turn in work that looks unique but is actually the result of algorithms (Turnitin, 2024; Chowdhury, 2020).

The emergence of generative AI tools has left graduates lacking competence, confidence, and the ability to maintain integrity in the workplace, making it difficult for assessors to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated content, especially without the support of AI writing detection technology (Turnitin, 2024). Thus, the current study addresses postgraduate students' awareness of forms of plagiarism.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess postgraduate students' knowledge of forms of plagiarism and control measures in selected public universities.

2. To establish the consequences of plagiarism on postgraduate students at selected public universities

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The concept of planned behavior was applied in this study. The three main components of this theory are attitude, perceived behavior control, and subjective norms which predict an individual's tendency to engage in a particular activity (Ajzen, 2006). The theory states that a person's intentions dictate whether or not they will carry out a particular conduct. The model illustrates the relationship between plagiarism and specific characteristics and ethical standards. Students are encouraged to plagiarize with the hope that they won't be caught. Therefore, correct citation and referencing, enforcing anti-plagiarism policies and assisting victims in reducing the amount of plagiarism by fostering ethical behavior that can help reduce plagiarism.

### 2.2 Literature Review

Plagiarism remains a pressing concern in academia, particularly with the ease of access to digital content. Many students, especially at the postgraduate level struggle with understanding what constitutes plagiarism, including its forms and consequences. Several studies, including those by Chowdhury (2020), Shankar and Ramasesh (2019), and others, show that both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are common, often due to inadequate research and citation skills. Tools like Turnitin have proven effective in reducing plagiarism and encouraging proper academic writing, serving both as deterrents and learning aids.

Research has revealed a significant gap in students' knowledge regarding various forms of plagiarism such as total plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and data fabrication or falsification. Many

students, particularly in developing countries, remain unaware of these forms due to lack of formal training (Kumar & Mohindra 2019). Studies (Ibegbulam & Eze 2015; Adamu & Dan-Iya 2020) recommend increased awareness through structured training programs, emphasizing academic integrity, citation rules, and the consequences of plagiarism. Enhanced understanding of institutional policies, intellectual property rights, and academic honesty is crucial for building responsible scholars.

Plagiarism carries serious consequences, ranging from academic penalties such as expulsion to legal repercussions, including fines and jail time in severe cases like copyright infringement or falsification in critical fields like medicine and engineering (Washaya 2022). Beyond the individual, plagiarism undermines institutional reputation, weakens learning outcomes, and contributes to societal issues by producing underprepared graduates (Hutchings, 2014). Institutions are urged to invest in continuous education and anti-plagiarism strategies to uphold academic standards and protect intellectual integrity.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used in this study since it offered the greatest methods for gathering information that illustrated connections and explained the actual situations as it is. The design helped the researcher in establishing the loopholes that hinder knowledge on forms of plagiarism among postgraduate students. In order to collect data from a large number of respondents at one time and observe the variables without altering them, the study used a cross-sectional design. It was preferred since it was a one-time procedure, with the interview schedules being conducted in-person with the administrators of the software and the data collection instruments i.e. questionnaires, being given to the responders just once.

### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, Kenyatta University, and Karatina University. These public universities were selected for the study because they feature reputable libraries and postgraduate programs.

### 3.3 Target Population

The population consisted of lecturers, software administrators, and postgraduate students (Master's and PhD) from the chosen public universities. The sample size was 200 postgraduate students from three different schools. Since postgraduate students are expected to produce highly scholarly work, they were specifically targeted. Sixty lecturers who lectured and supervised postgraduate students were the focus of the study. Kenyatta University (KU) was selected because it is among the pioneer universities in Kenya, with the highest national and regional enrollment especially in the School of education hence the choice of the school. DKUT was chosen since it is one of the fastest-growing universities and has gained international recognition for being the Silicon Valley of Africa, having established

a semiconductor factory to produce nanotechnology goods for the global market. Karatina University is among the newly established universities which offer several postgraduate programs and also has the biggest population of postgraduate students

## 3.4 Sampling Technique

The study used a stratified sampling technique and the strata comprised of different schools from the three public universities that is, KU, KARU and DKUT. The selection of postgraduate students was based on those who had completed their coursework and were working on their proposals and theses. This sampling was important because a proportionate distribution of the entire sample was used to calculate the number of respondents from each university. The study adopted purposive sampling technique to get sample size of the lecturers and software administrators. The software administrators were purposely selected because they are the principal controllers of the Anti-plagiarism software. The purposive sampling technique was used on the lecturers who teach and supervise the postgraduate students. It was used because it was hard to get the sample population from a group in one particular place.

## 3.5 Sample Size

The study employed Slovin's formula to determine the postgraduate student sample size. It was used to compute the sample size (n) given the population size (N) and a margin of error (e) (0.005) (Level of confidence). The formula below was employed to obtain the student respondents' sample size.

It is computed as $n = \dfrac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$

Whereas:
n = No. of samples
N = Target Population
e = Error margin / Level of confidence (0.005)
Therefore;

$KU = \dfrac{120}{1 + 120(0.05)^2}$

$= \dfrac{120}{1.3}$

$= 92$

$KARU = \dfrac{85}{1 + 85(0.05)^2}$

$= \dfrac{85}{1.2125}$

$= 70$

$DKUT = \dfrac{42}{1 + 42(0.05)^2}$

$= \dfrac{42}{1.105}$

$= 38$

Therefore there will be 200 postgraduate student respondents sample size represented by

the table below.

**Table 1: Sample Size**

| Universities | Students' Sample Size | Lecturers Sample | software Administrators Sample | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| KU | 92 | 30 | 1 | **123** |
| KARU | 70 | 18 | 1 | **89** |
| DKUT | 38 | 12 | 1 | **51** |
| **Totals** | **200** | **60** | **3** | **263** |

Source: Researcher (2025).

### 3.6 Research Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Questionnaires and interview schedules were used for data collection. Sixty structured self-administered questionnaires were created for lecturers and two hundred for postgraduate students. Questionnaire was chosen because it allowed participants to submit honest, thorough, and anonymous answers. An interview schedule was created for the administrators of the anti-plagiarism program.

Prior to starting the study, authorization was sought from NACOSTI (National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation). The universities where the study was carried out were asked for their permission by the researcher. The researcher set up an in-person interview with the software administrators. The interview was conducted in the individual offices of the administrators. The researcher performed in-person interviews at the appointed time, and all answers were documented in writing to facilitate data processing.

## 4. Results

The results of the study show that majority of postgraduate students appeared to understand what plagiarism is. According to the respondents 162(81%), plagiarism is an act that fails to recognize the efforts of others. Few respondents 38(19%) indicated that they didn't have adequate knowledge on what entails plagiarism and its forms. This means that, lack of knowledge of plagiarism and its form would lead to the practice of vice. The supervisors went on to clarify that they shared the same definition of plagiarism with the postgraduate students. They defined it as academic theft where plagiarist doesn't acknowledge the effort of others, which concur with Chowdhury (2020) who defined it defined as the act of presenting someone else's words, ideas, or artwork as one's own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, without properly citing the source, failing to use quotation marks where necessary, or giving inaccurate information about the source of a quotation. This means that people who didn't know what plagiarism and its different forms is were more likely to engage in the act, which would result in substandard scholarly outcomes as well as damaging the reputation of both the universities and the graduates. However, a bigger percentage claimed to have inadequate knowledge on all forms of plagiarism hence the practice of the vice. The study aimed at identifying the sources of information regarding plagiarism forms among postgraduate students. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sources of Information about Forms of Plagiarism**

| Sources of Information about Forms of Plagiarism | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| i. | During Bachelor's degree | 21 | 10.5 |
| ii. | During Master's Course | 36 | 18 |
| iii. | During PhD | 14 | 7 |
| iv. | Through research conference, workshop and seminars | 12 | 6 |
| | | 16 | 8 |
| v. | Through internet and University website | 49 | 24.5 |
| vi. | Through research supervisors | 27 | 13.5 |
| vii. | Through plagiarism policies | 25 | 12.5 |
| viii. | Through student's handbook provided during admission | 0 | 0 |
| ix. | Others | | |
| **Totals** | | **200** | **100** |

**Source(s):** Survey data 2025

According to the study results in Table 2, the highest number of respondents 49 (24.5%) learned about forms of plagiarism from their lecturers while they were teaching and supervising them on their proposals and theses. This suggests that their lecturers were the ones who instilled knowledge about forms of plagiarism, which helped the postgraduate students avoid plagiarism and produce high-quality scholarly work. Thirty-six (18%) of the respondents said they had learned while pursuing a master's degree. Twenty-seven (13.5%) said they learned from reading the policies on plagiarism, and 25(12.5%) said they learned from reading the student handbook that was given to them at the time of admission. 21(10.5%) were taught within the bachelor's degree program. Sixteen (8%) said they learned from university websites and the internet. Twelve (6%) learned through attending zresearch conferences, workshops, and seminars, while fourteen (7%) learned while enrolled in a PhD program. The supervisors went on to explain that the majority of the postgraduate students were taught about plagiarism and its forms while doing their coursework.

From the findings it is clear that lecturers were the most important source of information on plagiarism to students. It implies that lecturers play critical role not only in impartation of knowledge, but also as co-creators of new knowledge through research supervision. Additionally, Findings about the effectiveness of anti-plagiarism control measure showed that majority indicated high effective 43(71.7%) and no students rating them as less effective. This strong confidence supports Joseph's (2018) observation about successful integration of anti-plagiarism control measures.

**4.1 Forms of Plagiarism**

The results of the study showed that postgraduate students may engage in plagiarism since they know very little about the many forms of plagiarism and the penalties for it. From the study results, postgraduate students most frequently committed the following types of

plagiarism: failing to properly credit authors (69.8%), using quotation marks and poor citation (64.1%), and copying information from the internet without citing its source(s) (66%). This demonstrate that postgraduate students are not confident in their abilities to write intellectually compelling works without plagiarizing. The findings of the study showed that students' inadequate writing skills, which in turn led to plagiarism, was linked to a lack of understanding of various forms of plagiarism. The majority of respondents identified plagiarism as copying and pasting content from the internet, textbooks, coworkers, or lectures. The results also revealed additional forms of plagiarism shown in Figure 1, which concur with the forms of plagiarism listed below by Onuoha and Ikonne (2015).
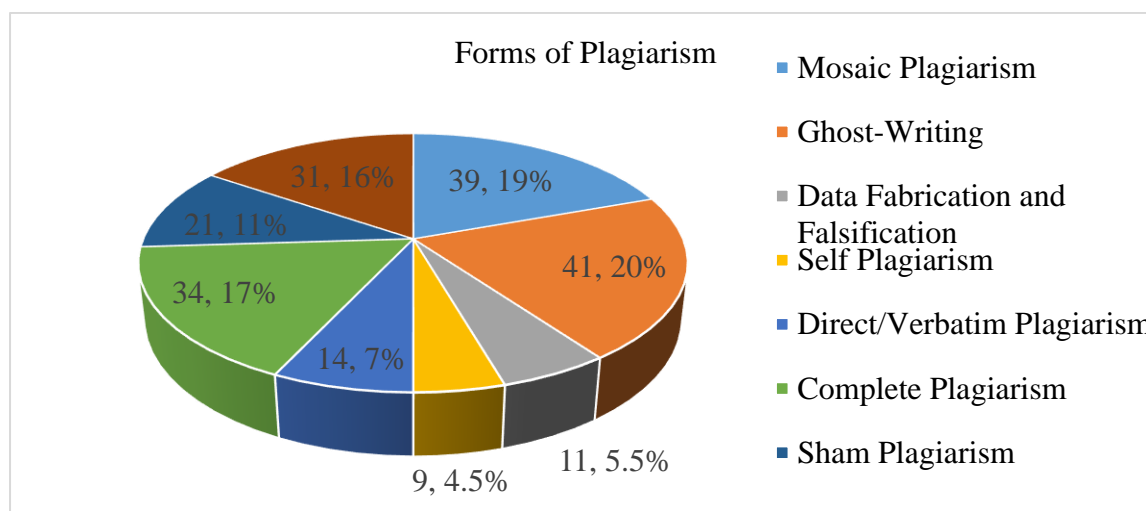


**Figure 1.:** Forms of Plagiarism
**Source(s):** Created by authors

Figure 1. Demonstrated that 9(5%) of the respondents lacked adequate knowledge of self-plagiarism. This resulted in a high rate of plagiarism, which in turn led to poor scholarly outcome and a bad reputation for universities. Eleven (5.5%) respondents claimed to be familiar with falsifying and fabricating data. Fourteen (20%), said they were familiar with direct or verbatim plagiarism but couldn't be able to avoid practicing it. The majority of respondents were aware of Ghost 41 (20%) and mosaic plagiarism 39 (19%), which suggested that postgraduate students are less likely to plagiarize. The lecturers provided additional clarification on each of these forms of plagiarism and revealed that the postgraduate students mostly engaged in self-plagiarism, direct and falsifying and fabricating of the data. The findings of this study concurs with Strathdee (2015) who indicated that plagiarism takes different forms including and not limited to; total plagiarism, self-plagiarism, accidental plagiarism and others mentioned above.

From the study results it is clear that students practice various forms of plagiarism both intentionally and accidentally. It is evident that there is need for robust creation of awareness on the various forms of plagiarism so as to enlighten more students on how to shun plagiarism. Additionally, a study by Mubeen, et al. (2019) reports that third (33.8%) of those surveyed said they had never attended any lectures, seminars, or workshops on ethical writing. According to this survey, the majority of students and lecturers in Pakistan had not receive

formal training in research and scientific writing. A recent study revealed that postgraduate students knew little about scientific misconduct. It has been discovered that focused workshops enhance staff and student understanding of anti-plagiarism control measures and other instances of associated unethical academic writing practices. This concur with Ibegbulam and Eze (2015) in their study at University of Nigeria, which indicated that awareness on anti-plagiarism control measures was, on average, correlated with the degree of training. A large population of (78%) of the study respondents also reported being unaware of penalties for engaging in plagiarism. However, the more the researcher/scholars are versed with the skills and knowledge on ethical writing, the more likely they are to avoid plagiarism.

## 4.2 Consequences and Penalties Associated with Plagiarism

All institutions expect their students to adhere to the university rules and regulations, as stipulated in their institutional policy documents and help them avoid practicing plagiarism. These regulation governing academic integrity has also led to various penalties and punishment aimed at those who break the institutional policies. The universities have specified punishments for the breaking of the rules on academic integrity. The study also found that most respondents unanimously agreed that adopting anti-plagiarism tools like turnitin will help students avoid plagiarism, increase their capacity to prevent plagiarism, and contribute to the development of an academic integrity community.

As stated in the institutional policy, all institutions expect their students to follow the laws and regulations of the university and to refrain from plagiarism. Academic integrity regulations have also resulted in a number of sanctions and punishments targeted at plagiarists. Institutions of higher learning have established specific sanctions for violations of academic integrity policies. The majority of respondents 182(91%) stated that expulsion, suspension, cancellation, credential withdrawal, obtaining a zero, and damage to the student's reputation and career are all potential penalties for engaging in plagiarism. A small percentage of respondents 18(9%) said they were unaware of any disciplinary measures that were directed to the students. These findings concur with Hutchings (2014) who state that plagiarism has serious repercussions that could harm a student's academic and professional opportunities. Some of the participants demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding the disciplinary actions they would face if they were discovered to have plagiarized.

Additionally, if a degree has already been awarded, it is withheld or revoked. These results are in agreement with the study by Wanzala, (2019) who indicated that Kenyatta University revoked a PhD degree awarded to a lecturer in 2018 after he was found guilty of having plagiarized a thesis of a senior lecturer at Usmanu University in Sokoto, Nigeria. Moreover, some of the postgraduate students mentioned the legal, professional, personal and financial consequences to anybody who breaches the copyright laws through plagiarism. Additionally, plagiarism has also lead to one's position being terminated as evident from the Kenyatta university lecturer, who was fired and the certificate revoked since his PhD thesis was found to contain plagiarized work

## 5. Conclusion

The study comes to the conclusion that postgraduate students' current awareness levels of forms of plagiarism was inadequate. It concludes that awareness on plagiarism forms was low. The study also concluded that postgraduate students recognized a variety of possible consequences. These include expulsion from university, suspension from studies, and rejection of a proposal or thesis, assignment failure, repeating coursework, registration cancellation, and academic probation were among the academic sanctions referenced. Loss of present or prospective job, harm to one's reputation, restrictions on career progression, revocation of academic credentials, and trouble obtaining references were among the professional effects noted.

In summary, the students' basic understanding of forms of plagiarism fell short of offering a thorough description of the many forms. Institutions of higher learning ought to entrench various units' elements on plagiarism so as to bring the levels down.

## 6. Recommendations

In the view of study's conclusions, a series of control and prevention measures may be put in place to reduce plagiarism in all its forms. Through lectures, workshops, conferences, seminars, and other media, postgraduate students and faculty may be routinely trained on the principles of scientific research, the concept of plagiarism, and the detrimental effects it has on researchers, postgraduate students, and universities. They may also be warned about the ethical and legal ramifications of violating intellectual property rights. For postgraduate courses, the scientific research and documentation ethics scale may be applied at every level. Courses involving research curriculum may be incorporated and trained in an applied manner, the content on plagiarism forms, causes, and repercussions.

University managements to make information literacy program common units undertaken every semester so as to keep students abreast with developments on plagiarism. Universities to inform the offenders upon the commission of the offence so that they can remedy the anomalies and if there are any penalties, the university may administer the as per the policy, procedures, rules and regulation.

Ministries of Higher Education world-wide in conjunction with commissions of university education and individual universities may come together and develop policies and standards to be applied on AIs across board for its proper adoption and utility. Universities to subscribe to more information resources so as to enable access to more variety of resources. This will be unable the users to have access to more resources hence more likely to avoid plagiarism.

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