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## **Plagiarism, Academic Research and Internet Sources: Librarians as Umpire**

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### **Introduction**

Plagiarism, though not a new concept has become the topic of most academic discourse, especially with the advancement in technology, many students can now access the Internet using devices, such as laptops and mobile phones, making it easy for them to gather literature from any part of the world. Indeed, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) (2005) in a study of college students' perception of libraries and information resources, reported that search engines are the first choice for meeting information needs as many researchers consult Internet resources before considering other sources of information.

Despite the attraction to the Internet, a variety of problems have been associated with its use in academic research such as plagiarism (Trinchera 2001; Babalola 2012); information overload, difficulty in conducting precise searches, mixture of substantial and irrelevant sites, difficulty in evaluating the credibility and actual sources of data (Xuemei, 2010). Considering the problems associated with information seeking, Marchionini (1995) points out that successful information seeking is a process of problem-solving that requires problem recognition, source selection, query formulation, search execution, examination of results and extraction of required information. As information professionals, it, therefore, behoves librarians to ensure the provision, management and use of information resources, especially Internet resources, within the academic environment where students are heavily engaged in research.

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### **Plagiarism in the academic environment**

The Latin word, *plagiare* from which plagiarism is derived means to kidnap. It creates a perfect picture of the criminal use of information created by others. Another common definition of plagiarism is theft (Hexham, 1999). Plagiarism.org (2014) considers turning in someone else's work as your own; copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit; failing to put a quotation in quotation marks; giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation; changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit; copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not as plagiarism. Although plagiarism is not a new concept, incidents of plagiarism have however on the increase in recent times. Guiliano (2000) attributes this to the ease of access gained from home computers and the vast number of paper mills available online.

Several authors as seen in Onuoha, Unegbu, Ikonke, & Madukoma (2013) suggested different reasons for students/faculty involvement in plagiarism. Among them are: lack of time to complete tasks (Grantham, 2009); lack of awareness and understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (White 1993 as cited by Park 2003); lack of knowledge to do proper academic citation and referencing (Insley 2011). Lack of consequences for those who plagiarise and perception of the task as boring (Grantham, 2009).

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### **Librarians as umpire**

The umpire according to AFL community (2016) is expected to be knowledgeable and capable of applying the laws of a game to ensure that it is played safely and fairly. In today's information environment, where users are faced with information overload or infobesity due to the abundance of information at their disposal, an intermediary is needed to facilitate the ethical use of information. Corroborating this, Kulthau (2013) notes that without guidance, students tend to approach the research process as a mere collection of information thereby presenting assignments that lead to copying and pasting with little real learning. However, with proper guidance, Jones, Garber and Alligood (2014) affirm that individual seekers can avoid the pitfalls in research due to inappropriate resource selection, poor searching skills, etc. To effectively provide a guide for students' use of the Internet in academic research, it is, necessary that librarians, equip them with knowledge for identifying an information need, locating and making ethical use of information.

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## Identifying information need

Expressing one's need is crucial for the efficient identification of an information need. The information seeker, must thus, be taught to be precise about the real information needed. For instance, an information search for "funding higher education in Nigeria" must be stated as such to avoid the retrieval of irrelevant documents. In a situation where the information seeker decides to search for *education in Nigeria* with the hope that he or she will retrieve materials on "funding higher education in Nigeria," chances of achieving the desired result would be slim. This is because the search result for such a query would most likely produce results relating to aspects of education not limited to funding. To properly guide the information seeker, the librarian might want to teach him or her how to do the following:

- *Breakdown keywords*

Multi-concepts must be broken down when conducting a web search to ensure the retrieval of documents in each key area. For instance, a topic on "comparison of information seeking using search engines and social networks" would be broken down into:

- Information seeking
- Use of search engines
- Social network

This would ensure that each keyword or aspect of the topic is taken care of during the search process.

- *Use phrase searching*

The use of phrase searching ensures that two or more words can be retrieved when they appear next to each other as a phrase. To conduct a phrase search, quotation marks should be used around the phrase. To retrieve documents on higher education as a phrase, the search term should be "higher education". The use of quotation marks ensures that records or documents bearing higher education will be retrieved during the search. The use of phrase searching should, however, be used with caution as it limits recall. A search for "teaching of language" would eliminate materials on "language teaching".

- *Use of Boolean operators*

The Boolean operator "or" is specifically useful when there are alternative terms to describe the search term. A search using "or" would retrieve synonyms e.g. woman or female. This is particularly helpful in a search as it ensures that alternative terms used to describe the same concept are captured. A search for income can be stated as (income or wages or salary) to obtain various terminologies that authors may have chosen to describe the same concept.

Boolean operator "+" ensures that different aspects of a topic are linked in a search. A search for *injury as an outcome of car racing* can read, *car racing + injury* to bring them together in a search.

"Not" Using *not* narrows a search by excluding some search terms.

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## Internet sources for academic research

There are so many databases available to faculty and students on the Internet which librarians can provide guidance. This is necessary because a well-planned information search must be purpose-driven. A general search on Google on the topic of *maternal health in Nigeria* would gather information from different sources such as journals, books, dissertations, etc. The librarian conducting a reference interview can find out the most appropriate source to meet the research need. Sources for academic research include but are not limited to the following:

### *Dissertation*

Most educational programmes require the submission of a research project. For such academic writings, Dspace (an open-source repository software package used for creating open-access repositories for scholarly published digital content) becomes paramount bearing in mind that it is a platform where universities deposit dissertations.

### *Books*

The Internet is a good source for finding books in electronic format. Google Books, for instance, can be accessed when in need of books although some books may not enable reading online. Other sources such as Book Boon and Bookfi are excellent sources for locating electronic books.

### *Articles in peer-reviewed journals*

Google Scholar presents an invaluable platform for accessing articles in peer-reviewed journals. The beauty of Google Scholar is not just in its ability to provide information but also in its features that allow customization of a search. Google Scholar allows the saving of searches conducted using *my library*; it allows customized searches within a period. The alert feature which when activated informs the information seeker of new documents in his or her area of interest through personal email makes it an excellent source of information when carrying out a lingering research. Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is also useful when meeting students' information needs with peer-reviewed journals.

### *Open courseware*

Open courseware refers to lessons or lecture notes created by universities and made available via the Internet. These teaching notes enable students to read ahead of a class as well as assist lecturers in comparing their notes with those from other universities all over the world. Open courseware can be accessed using a search engine such as Google. Lesson notes from Nigeria can easily be located at [http://www.nou.edu.ng/NOUN\\_OCL/](http://www.nou.edu.ng/NOUN_OCL/)

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### Evaluating online resources

The abundance of online information no doubt calls for carefulness in educational research. There is a need to differentiate between what is written by a novice and a professional. Librarians can, therefore, educate students on the need to question the credibility of an author. Along with checking the credibility of the author, there is also a need to evaluate the tone of an information resource. This is necessary for identifying bias in writing. To guide the assessment of a website's Uniform Resource Locator (URL), librarians can also help students understand the meaning of terms such as .com; .edu; .gov; .org and .mil.

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### Ethical use of Internet resources

The fight against plagiarism goes beyond equipping researchers with the skills to find information by themselves. Brandt (2002) provides a model for librarians when addressing plagiarism. The model emphasises the need for librarians to define plagiarism in a way that it can be recognised and well understood using specific examples. It also points out the need to describe the consequences associated with indulging in plagiarism and the need to promote its prevention. Essentially, this indicates the teaching role of librarians in dealing with the plague of plagiarism. Students must, therefore, be taught to understand the meaning and implications of plagiarism. They must also be aware of strategies to avoid plagiarism before efforts are put into detecting and punishing plagiarism.

As moderators in the use of information, it is not enough to help students identify information needs and information sources without guiding them on the proper way to utilise information. As such, librarians must go the extra mile to ensure that students are skilled in referencing. To do this, librarians must make sure that practical exercises accompany tutorials on referencing. Information literacy modules and links to online citation management tools such as Mendeley and Zotero should be displayed on the library's website. The usefulness of online citation management tools is affirmed by Onuoha, Unegbu, Ikonne and Madukoma (2013) who point out that these tools manage resources as well as create instant bibliographies in different formats.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts put in by librarians to ensure the ethical use of Internet resources, some students may still engage in acts of plagiarism. As such it is necessary for librarians to put in efforts at detecting plagiarism. Plagiarism checkers such as Turnitin, Eagle scan, and a host of others should be available in libraries to assist librarians in this task. In situations, where this is not available, librarians can go the extra mile of manually imputing portions of a submitted work on the Internet to check for plagiarism.

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### Conclusion

Indeed, the Internet is a blessing to academic research as little can be done without referring to an Internet resource. However, to ensure the advancement of knowledge, it is necessary that researchers especially, students understand and build upon the resources found on the Internet. To this end, mediating between information users and resources to ensure the ethical use of information must be the primary focus of every librarian.

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