



Plagiarism – intentional or uninformed?

University World News published an article by Tunde Fatunde, on 14 June 2019, called *Plagiarism – What can curb the scourge?* This article is concerned with the apparent widespread occurrence of plagiarism in Nigeria. The author asks the question – is greater support and mentoring required for students, or further sanctions?

In Nigeria, the rising rate of plagiarism has become a cause for concern for Professor Peter Okebukola from the National Universities Commission, as he claimed that 60% of final year essays by undergraduates contained plagiarism, 15-20% at Master's level and 8% at Doctorate level (Fatunde, 2019). The author also quotes a number of university staff on their views on the increase in the plagiarism, where a lack of mentoring is cited as a cause and the taking of bribes, fuelling the situation. Confirmed plagiarism has resulted in certain publishers having to retract manuscripts, university staff being demoted and even dismissed.

The article states that a number of initiatives are taking place to curb plagiarism. Workshops are being run to educate people and sophisticated software is being developed to detect plagiarism.

According to the article, a researcher at Lagos State University suggests that some students are not "...intellectually equipped to engage complex concepts; this is an indispensable tool for an understanding of research methodologies" (Fatunde, 2019). He adds, that this factor, together with a poor reading culture makes these students inclined to take an easy route.

I would like to suggest that in answer to the author's question, greater support and mentoring is required. At Da Vinci we have grappled with plagiarism frustrations of our own. Every month, turnitin (anti-plagiarism software) identified a number of high similarity cases. In 2016, in looking for solutions to the problem, we decided to tackle the matter from a positive standpoint. Rather than reaffirming the penalties involved, we decided to create awareness on the subject. Our experience was, that the majority of high similarity cases were generally unintentional, owing to a lack of understanding on what the academic requirements are for essay writing and assessment in general.



So we started a campaign called #plagiarism must fall. For the student, it begins during admission, when students have to confirm, that they have read and understood the student contract, in which plagiarism is explained. The onboarding guide, which the student receives at the start of their studies, also provides information on the topic, and directs the student to the plagiarism policy and procedure document. In addition, during various tuition support sessions, our Information Officer/Librarian explains to the students, when to reference and how to reference correctly. Furthermore, the Lecturers are continually reminding students on the importance of submitting their own work and developing a logical argument when presenting their academic work.

The results have been astonishing. During 2017, Da Vinci had an average of seven cases of high similarity per month, in 2018 two, and up until May this year, none.

Yes, there are those few, who intentionally pass off another's work as their own, but it does seem as if our approach is discouraging even those few.

References

Fatunde, T., 2019. *Plagiarism – What can curb the scourge?*. [Online]
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