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Abstract

Plagiarism is an act that is capable of jeopardizing quality assurance in library schools. This academic crime if left unchecked can call into question the reputation and value of degrees conferred on students in Nigerian library schools. Even though technology has been employed to combat plagiarism in some library schools through the use of detection software like Turnitin, Copycatch, Plagscan etc., this unwholesome act seems to continue unhindered. This reveals the need to adopt a holistic strategy to combat this menace, especially as it applies to thesis writing in library schools. The strategy includes the use of effective quality assurance methods. This paper therefore discusses the role of plagiarism policy formulation and implementation, as well as the development of competencies in library and information science (LIS) students as quality assurance methods that can reduce the rate of plagiarism in Nigerian library schools. The content of such policy was explained and the various ways of building LIS students' competencies were sufficiently discussed. Finally, the paper recommended the formulation and/or strict application of institutional policy on plagiarism and the development of students' competencies in order to stem the tide of plagiarism and enhance quality assurance in LIS postgraduate education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Plagiarism policy, Competency, Quality assurance, Library schools, Nigeria
Word Count: 200

Introduction

The advent of the Internet, World Wide Web (www) and search engines in the early 20th Century has transformed information communication and accessibility. The Internet provides link to myriads of intellectual works produced all over the world, while the World Wide Web provides the channel of accessing these works on the Internet (Malik and Mahmood, 2009). With the help of the search engines, databases that contain thousands of intellectual works on the web are searched with the use of specific keywords. Thus, with an Internet-enabled device and an Internet connection, just with a click of a button, hundreds of pages of documents can be downloaded.

Despite the undeniable advantages of this advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), availability of electronic publications through the Internet has made it very easy for plagiarism to occur. According to Reitz (2004), plagiarism as a word originates from a Latin word plagiarius that means "kidnapper". This, on the surface, presents plagiarism as an illegality.

Plagiarism involves the act of taking the ideas, writings of another person and using these as if they were one's own, whether intentionally or not (Heriot-Watt University, 2008). Plagiarism is therefore an academic crime that is committed by not acknowledging the source of an idea or a piece of writing.

Plagiarism is an issue in the global academic community that raises concern about academic integrity of academics and students. Some lecturers also engage in this act, the reason some universities in Nigeria have come with stern statements on plagiarism such as the one in the University of Ibadan special bulletin release of December 23, 2014 on the sanction for any member of staff involved in plagiarism. However, of particular interest in this write up is the plagiarism committed by students in the course of writing their thesis. This is of serious concern as it is possible for a student to submit a PhD thesis done elsewhere with minor modifications for an award of his/her degree without being detected.

Library schools in Nigeria as institutions that train individuals to become highly knowledgeable, skilled and competent in all aspects of information services should take the issue of plagiarism more seriously. This is because plagiarism has relationship with unethical use of information, and information ethics fall conveniently in the domain of librarianship. So, cases of plagiarism in library schools will cast aspersion on the academics that are viewed as experts on issues such as this. Therefore, it is very important to stem the tide of plagiarism in thesis writing in library schools.

Thesis writing, Plagiarism and Quality assurance in Nigerian Library Schools

The higher degrees granted by library schools in Nigeria cannot be awarded without the completion of a thesis. A thesis is viewed as a product of lengthy research which is the result of a well thought out and rigorous analysis (Adebayo, 2008). A thesis is expected to show mastery of the topic of interest on the part of the students. The doctoral thesis is expected to go on for at least three years during which the student follows systematically the different stages of the write-up. In writing the thesis, students would have to come up with a topic of interest which must be library and information science based. The topic must be framed according to the guidelines provided by the faculty where the library school is housed.

When the topic has been approved by the relevant authorities, the thesis writing process starts. This process requires the writing to be systematic. In most library schools in Nigeria, a thesis consists of five chapters, even though the subheadings might not be the same due to in-house styles. In the particular example of Ibadan Library School, chapter one focuses on the introduction, where the candidate is expected to lay a background for the study. This is followed by the problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions and/or hypotheses, scope and/or limitation of the study, significance of the study and operational definition of terms. Chapter two focuses on literature review where the student is expected to locate his/her work within the context of existing works. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in carrying out the research. The student will have the opportunity to present his findings in chapter four and discuss them in relation to existing literature. While the final chapter captures the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

A thesis must include all these chapters and the content must be well written before the conferment of the higher degree. However, due to the rigorous and extensive nature of the research that must be carried out before a very good thesis can be produced, some students cower from doing a novel work. These students in an attempt to still fulfil this academic requirement may decide to plagiarize. There are different types of plagiarism. They include plagiarism of ideas, word for word plagiarism, plagiarism of sources and plagiarism of authorship (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2003). A student commits plagiarism of ideas when he/she claims the credit for inventions and ideas that originated from someone else. Word for word plagiarism deals with copying of the exact expressions of someone's writing. While a student that uses someone's citation without acknowledgement has committed plagiarism of sources. A very serious form of plagiarism is

plagiarism of authorship where a student claims the ownership of an entire piece of work belonging to someone else.

Plagiarism is an act that is capable of jeopardizing quality assurance in library schools. Quality assurance ensures that the proper and acceptable standards are followed in thesis writing. It connotes that at each stage of the thesis writing, acceptable procedures are not compromised in any way. If plagiarism is left unchecked, the reputation and value of degrees conferred on students in Nigerian library schools can be called into question. In an attempt to enforce quality in thesis writing in some universities with library schools, technology has been deployed to detect acts of plagiarism. Sutherland-Smith (2004) noted that the use of plagiarism detection software can be seen as a quality assurance method in the pursuit of high quality result.

There are different types of plagiarism software that are used to detect cases of plagiarism by students. Examples include Turnitin, Copycatch, Plagscan and the likes. The International School of Management (n.d) averred that virtually all (if not all) universities in Nigeria have access to Turnitin system and they know how to check cases of plagiarism amongst students. If universities in Nigeria indeed have access to Turnitin, invariably library schools in these universities also do. Thus, library and information science students may be persuaded to exhibit academic integrity when they are aware that they might be caught if they plagiarize.

However, the use of plagiarism detection software also has its own drawbacks. Martin (2004) stated that some software for detecting plagiarism can only detect word-for-word plagiarism for the documents in its database and as such they cannot determine plagiarism of ideas and sources. In addition, students who copy from sources such as printed texts, CD-ROMs and certain subscription databases may be undetected. This is because not all sources are captured in the plagiarism detection database. Olutola (2014) also added that the drawbacks of plagiarism detection software also included lack of knowledge on the part of some academics and the inability of the software to detect phantom papers. A phantom paper is an article that is not in existence but cited by students. In addition, free Internet-based software known as article-rewriter could inadvertently serve as another barrier militating against the effectiveness of the plagiarism detection software (Olutola, 2014). This is because this software has the ability to rewrite copied texts when pasted on it. This shows that plagiarism detection software may not be the answer to the detection of plagiarism, as some students still engage in this act. This brings the question: Are there other quality assurance methods that can be used to stem the tide of plagiarism apart from the use of plagiarism detection software? The answer to this question lies in the plagiarism policy and building the competence of students.

The Role of Plagiarism Policy in Combating Plagiarism in Nigerian Library Schools

Plagiarism policy is a formal document that presents the framework of action on issues regarding plagiarism. The policy states explicitly the acceptable standard of academic behaviour and conduct expected from students and how academic integrity can be achieved. It is important to note that library schools do not exist in isolation; as such, the plagiarism policy of their parent institutions should be utilized by them to reduce cases of plagiarism. It would be surprising to note that in this present age and time, most universities in Nigeria do not have plagiarism policies that can be accessed on the Internet by both staff and students. This assertion was made because a simple search on Google for plagiarism policies in Nigerian universities conducted in April 2016 returned no result of a single university with a plagiarism policy. When the same search was conducted on plagiarism policy of universities in Europe, the results of the search presented quite a number of universities with such policy.

However, some universities in Nigeria have a semblance of plagiarism policy in their intellectual property laws, but this is not the same as a plagiarism policy. Thus, educators in library schools in Nigeria need to advocate for the formulation and implementation of plagiarism policies in their various institutions if they do not have. A plagiarism policy helps to deter, detect and to deal with plagiarism issues. When students who are writing their theses know that there is an existing

policy on plagiarism that will not be compromised, they would be careful while writing not to plagiarize. But in a situation where there is no policy on plagiarism with its attendant sanctions, students may not see the call not to plagiarize as serious. The plagiarism policy removes any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism and consequences for those who plagiarize.

The components of a plagiarism policy include:

i.   Scope of the policy
ii.   Purpose of the policy
iii.   Main content
iv.   Revision of the policy.

The scope of the policy is an essential part of a plagiarism policy that identifies succinctly the individuals the policy is meant for. The policy can be made for staff and students or students alone. The scope could also highlight the focus of the policy in line with what it is set to achieve.

The purpose of the plagiarism policy presents the reason for its formulation in the first instance and what the policy is set to achieve. Most plagiarism policies are compiled to create the necessary awareness in students. This is very important as some students may claim that they plagiarize because of not knowing the criminal nature of the act. Plagiarism policy also outlines the various measures put in place to combat plagiarism and the consequences for those who in total disregard violate the terms of the policy.

The main content of the plagiarism policy provides the details on the definition of plagiarism, the avenues opened to students to learn about plagiarism and how to avoid it, ways of detecting plagiarism and penalties for those who plagiarize. The definition of plagiarism could be extended in the policy to include the spectrum of plagiarist behaviours so that students can be aware of the levels of plagiarism (Meacheam and Faifua, 2015). This will provide information on what constitutes gross academic misconduct, serious plagiarism, mid-level plagiarism and the likes. In the content part of the plagiarism policy, courses on information literacy, research methodology, information ethics and others that can bring to the notice of the students how to avoid plagiarism should be documented so that students can pay more than the usual attention to them. In addition, the plagiarism detection software that the university makes use of should also be revealed in the policy so that students may be motivated to be original in writing their theses.

Furthermore, the content part of the plagiarism policy should also highlight the penalties that will be meted out to violators of the policy based on the level of plagiarism committed in the course of the thesis writing. The consequences could include outright cancellation of marks, resubmission of thesis, no opportunity for resubmission, disciplinary hearing, suspension, rustication and the likes. The content part of the policy should be the most detailed, describing all that the students need to know on the institution's disposition towards plagiarism.

The revision part of the plagiarism policy should indicate when the plagiarism policy is to be revised and those who will be responsible for the revision. This is necessary because situation changes and the realities of the time may demand that certain details hitherto not captured be added to the policy. Revision of the plagiarism policy makes it effective and responsive based on the demand of the times.

Library schools that want to guarantee quality assurance in thesis writing will ensure that a plagiarism policy is in place in their library schools. The policy when formulated should not be kept in the university library or in a departmental office but must be circulated especially to higher degree students. Copies should also be available for download from the institution's website, library website and the postgraduate school website. Once the plagiarism policy is available and accessible to the students, they will not be able to claim ignorance when they are caught for plagiarism.

Building the Competence of Students: A quality assurance method that can stem the tide of plagiarism

Competence is synonymous with knowledge, skills and abilities; as such, a higher degree student who is not competent in the art of thesis writing may falter and eventually could plagiarize. Therefore, if library schools are to produce well written theses, the place of building the needed competence in the students should not be relegated to the background. Students can acquire the needed competence when the library school implements what is contained in the plagiarism policy. The various avenues opened to students to learn about plagiarism should be well utilized. Most library schools in Nigeria offer courses on research methodology at the higher degree level and such time should be devoted during this course to explain how a thesis can be written without plagiarizing.

The competence of library and information science students can be built when they are properly tutored on what to avoid and what should be done when writing a thesis. According to the University of Pretoria Plagiarism Prevention Policy, examples of what should be avoided include: direct copying without crediting the source, translating without crediting the source, paraphrasing someone else's work without giving credit, piecing together sections of the work of others into a new whole, and knowingly allowing another student to copy one's work. Others are resubmitting one's own or other previously graded work and collusion that symbolizes unauthorized collaboration, presenting a work as one's own independent work, when it has been produced in whole or in part in collision with other people's.

On the other hand, in order to build the competence of students when writing thesis, the Plagiarism Committee of the Southern Illinois University outlined what should be done. According to the committee, students need to be helped to understand how to appropriately quote, paraphrase and summarize sources of ideas and expression that they intend to incorporate into their work and how to correctly cite and reference these sources. In addition, students should also be provided with tips such as the need to always put quotation marks around quoted materials. They should also be reminded that full reference information must be recorded for sources used whether print or electronic.

It is also important that during research methods class or other avenues where issues of plagiarism are discussed. Library and Information Science (LIS) educators in Nigerian library schools should spend ample time in discussing how students can access information through various sources to write their theses. Students should also be taught how to evaluate their sources (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2003). This also has implication for the methods of instruction that educators use. In order to assist the students to be knowledgeable and adequately skilled in thesis writing, the instructions given must be lucid. At each stage of the research, the students should have the knowledge of what is to be done. A LIS student, who knows how to seek information for his thesis and how to put together the information retrieved from these sources without plagiarizing, might eventually produce a well written thesis.

Conclusion

LIS schools in Nigeria no doubt want to produce graduates who are not only academically and professionally sound, but also those who will appreciate and value the need to maintain academic integrity. In other to achieve this, all hands must be on deck to reduce to the barest minimum cases of plagiarism among students, especially those who are pursuing their higher degrees. Theses submitted to the library school must reflect original ideas and must in themselves be symbols of integrity. Due to this, LIS educators must advocate for and ensure that their institutions formulate and implement plagiarism policies if they do not already have. For those who already have the policy, continuous awareness creation must be done by LIS educators as soon as new higher degree students are admitted to the library school. Even though plagiarism may not be completely eradicated from the world of academic writings, its prevalence can be reduced. Institutions in Nigeria need to show their

seriousness by not only making use of plagiarism detection software but also developing a framework of action on plagiarism issues and empowering the students to uphold academic integrity at all times.

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