

## Exploration of Plagiarism Practices in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

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### Abstract

Open and distance learning (ODL) system is unique, flexible, less costly and preferable mode of education across the world. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) concept, and its related laws and procedures particularly plagiarism are new in the education system of Pakistan. The objectives of the study were to find out the causes of infringement of intellectual property rights especially plagiarism and compare the opinions of faculty members and learners on implementation of plagiarism policy. The population of the study was all enrolled research students (Ph.D) of Education (2013-2014) and the faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University. Sample consisted of all 35 scholars and 25 faculty members. Self-developed five-point Likert scale was used to collect data for the study. The research instrument was validated through expert opinion (face validity). The overall analysis of the first part of the questionnaire revealed about various causes of plagiarism including fear of failure to cope with others' intellectual work and poor time management skills of students. The results of the study recommended that a policy about using various sources may be included in the course syllabus. Plagiarism detection services may be used cautiously and, in case of violation of plagiarism policy, disciplinary actions may be taken against the involved learner and advisor.

**Keywords:** Open distance learning, intellectual property rights, plagiarism policy.

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## Introduction

Distance learning is a system and a process that connects students with distributed learning resources. It takes a wide variety of forms; distance learning takes place without the physical presence of the teacher with the students as in traditional learning system the benefits of distance learning are cost-effectiveness, quality of instruction, flexible and self-directed. Plagiarism policy and Intellectual property rights are equally implemented on distance educational intellectual work and learning material.

According to World Intellectual Property Organization, (2004) intellectual property is defined as names, images, symbols, literary and artistic works and innovations, researches or intellectual activity in commerce, literary, industrial, scientific and artistic field. This property has two descriptions; one is property element other is objects related to property elements. It is non-physical, intangible rights and legal rights. IPRs have been recognized as human rights in article 27(2) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 that everyone who is the author of any scientific, literary or artistic production has the right to its protection.

Higher Education Commission, the regulatory authority of universities in Pakistan published a document called HEC Plagiarism Policy 2009. The preamble of HEC policy defines the plagiarism menace is necessary for punitive actions to give recognition to scholarly work. The aim of this policy is to bring awareness, behavior changes among the researchers, academicians, learners and public about the process of investigation, disciplinary action to prevent researches and publications from plagiarism and about plagiarism. This policy authorized all institutions to make ensure awareness and apprise all stakeholders.

Open educational practices use and produce high quality of educational resources with innovative teaching learning methods and techniques (ICDE, 2013). In this scenario, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad Pakistan, a mega Asian Open university was established to provide affordable and accessible education through open distance learning at the door steps of learners without geographical and time restriction (AIOU, 2013). As public body, Universities are fair and just implementers of rules and procedures, so any plagiarism allegation must be considered with prudent (Saunders & Partners, 2007). Open distance learners have limited opportunities to interact or face to face interaction with academicians and supervisors. Students were not formally informed and guided about the concept of plagiarism in their coursework

ultimately quality of research suffered a lot. Plagiarism practices may be avoided by the development of research courses and study guides (Mahmoud, 2013). Learners were failed to acknowledge others' work in a good faith. Burden lay on teaching and learning. It is a collective responsibility of learners, teachers and administrators to provide a climate of academic honesty. The best practices are explanations of plagiarism policy, quality of assignments and tasks, development of reading and writing habits and proper disciplinary actions (CWPA, 2003).

## **Literature Review**

The term "Distance Learning" or "Distance Education" can be referred to as 'an approach where there is an apparent distance or gap between the educator and the learner in terms of time and space' (Simonson, 2012). In distance learning, the teaching learning practice is carried out through transfer of learning material (commonly known as study guide), which is thought to be self-explanatory and easier to understand and is self-directed also. Usually, the review of this material requires minimal guidance from the instructor to understand the content. "Open Learning" is a philosophical concept that requires removal of hindrances from the knowledge sharing and learning to the learner so that the learner can get good quality education throughout his/her life. In developing countries like Pakistan, easy education at initial and continuing level is important for the growth and development of the individuals as well as the country. Through open learning education, many social issues like population control, women empowerment, employment creation, and issues related to health or environmental conditions can be addressed (UNESCO, 2002).

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Article 17(1) of the general right of property proclaimed the recognition of the interests of owners in UDHR (Drahos & Smith, nd). Paris Convention 1883(PCPIP) and Berne convention1886 (BCPLAW)

were two treaties to recognize the value of intellectual property and administered by WIPO (WIPO, 2004). Copying the idea or textual material from authors' work dishonestly, unacknowledged and without citation is known as plagiarism which leads to litigation. Following situations are considered as plagiarism: Stealing another's paper, buying something written, intellectual work of someone else, borrowing phrases and ideas and calling it as one's own work (Clabough & Rozychi, 2001).

Researchers have identified two major forms of plagiarism or plagiarism practices i.e. a) directly copying another writer's content, b) low quality of paraphrasing (Martin, 1994). Educators and scholars are on a consensus that rather than fighting with the plagiarism practices, it would be of more value if learners or students are appreciated for knowledge building, provision of acknowledgement to the previous writers for their contribution, and development of existing knowledge rather than teaching them and making them understand why not to plagiarize (Hunt, 2003). Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) provided that education should involve development of individual's behavior and enhancement of his/her moral values. It is the responsibility of the educator to address the plagiarism issues more seriously rather than shielding the learners for the copyrights infringements. Development of academic moral and integrity is the key element that is needed to be addressed by every educator at every level (Dark & Winstead, 2005).

In case of ODL, the factor of dishonesty along with its subsidiary factors has become a point of major concern for the academicians especially for those who are teaching at higher education level. Park (2003) indicated in his study that 40% to 90% of the students have accepted for being engaged in some kind of dishonesty at their higher education level. Bennett, Beherendt & Boothy (2011) pointed out that in academic scenario, dishonesty is represented in four different ways i.e. students paraphrase a source and don't cite it, students submit totally copied text, students present someone else's work as their own without citing the work, and lastly students get help from someone else to get their work done and make its submission in their own name. Lanier (2006) witnessed that in case of ODL, dishonesty is like an epidemic.

ODL provided new opportunities for the struggling learners, but this opportunity came with a very high price. He also suggested that in case of ODL, it is not possible to stop plagiarism and dishonesty practices totally. Steps should be taken to minimize these malpractices and students should be encouraged or appreciated for their originality as well

as for their acknowledgement regards for original writers. Furthermore, the moral values of the students of ODL should be boosted and enhanced for not getting involved in such malpractices. Every student should have the sense of responsibility, integrity and honesty to not opt for any conveniently available plagiarism option.

According to HEC Plagiarism Policy, In case of infringement of right, complaint may file in HEC or respective universities. In simple words this policy covers the reporting, investigation, penalties, right to appeal for plagiarism. (HEC Policy, 2009) HEC policy document defined responsibilities and procedures to protect the intellectual property rights as time bound standard operating procedures for plagiarism cases. It is also necessary to understand the causes of cheating among students for proper enforcement and educate the academicians and learners about plagiarism. Meanwhile, precaution measures may be taken by giving clear and specific assignment to the learners, make oral presentations about the assignments, find the problems of learners while creating writing and help them to overcome (Harris, 2012). Open and distance learning is an approach and an educational process which provides freedom from time and place boundaries with flexible education opportunities (UNESCO 2003). Tennant, McMullen and Kaczynski(2010) provided that the outburst of technological advancement and the increase in the competition among the educational institutes has provided new opportunities for unethical and dishonest practices in case of ODL. The use of World Wide Web has made copying and pasting text easier and sometimes even untraceable especially in the case of higher education through ODL.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Intellectual property Rights have been recognized as human right in article 27(2) of universal Declaration of human rights 1948. It is plagiarism when an author is copying the idea or textual material dishonestly, unacknowledged and without citation of author's work. Therefore, Higher Education commission of Pakistan established plagiarism policy in 2009 to administer the intellectual property law. This study was to explore the plagiarism practices in open and distance learning system.

## **Objectives of the Study**

Following were objectives of the study:

- i. To find out the causes of infringement of intellectual property rights especially plagiarism.
- ii. To compare the opinions of faculty and learners on implementation of plagiarism policy.

## **Research Questions**

The main research questions were

- i. What are the causes of plagiarism in open distance learning?
- ii. What practices may be applied to eliminate plagiarism?

## **Delimitation of the Present Study**

Due to time and financial constraints, the study was delimited to faculty of education; all the faculty members and research students of education (Ph.D) enrolled in 2013-2014 in Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad Pakistan, were included in this study.

## **Methodology**

The study was descriptive in nature, quantitative approach was used. All 35 learners and 25 faculty members of AIOU were the respondent of the study. Self-developed (Martin, 2005; Marsh, 2007 & Roberts, 2008) five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Un-certain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was used for academicians of education and prospective PhD scholars on the basis of the objectives of the study to explore the causes of plagiarism and proposed the practices for to eliminate plagiarism. It consisted of 19 statements which covered two areas (i) Causes of plagiarism and (ii) Practices to eliminate plagiarism. The tool was validated through five expert opinions (face validity). All the data were tabulated and analyzed which lead to recommendations and suggestions for effective implications of plagiarism policy in academic research work. The population of the study was all enrolled research student of education in PhD 2013-2014, and the faculty of education Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad.

## Application of Statistical Techniques

The primary sources of data collection were questionnaires administered to faculty members and learners. Secondary sources of data collection were review of literature in local and global perspective. The data were analyzed in the light of objectives of the study. The percentage of each item under each statement was calculated for meaningful interpretation; then t- test for comparison of two respondents was applied. The data were further presented and illustrated in the form of tables.

## Data Analysis

Data collected through the questionnaire consisted of 19 questions and five sub-scales which were as under:

Table 1

### *Subscales of Research Instrument*

S.No	Sub Scales Implications of IPR in ODL Statements	No of
1.	Causes of Plagiarism	10
2.	Practices to Eliminate Plagiarism	09

Table 2  
*Analysis of Opinion of Respondents on Causes of Plagiarism (N=60)*

S.No	Statements	Results	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Causes of Plagiarism							
1.	Fear of failure to cope others intellectual work	Frequency %age	05 08	38 63	12 20	04 06	01 02
2.	Fear of taking risks	Frequency %age	05 08	32 53	11 18	12 20	- -
3.	Poor time management skill	Frequency %age	22 37	29 48	06 10	- -	03 05
4.	No choice other than plagiarize	Frequency %age	42 70	- -	07 12	- -	11 18
5.	Student views the consequences of cheating as unimportant	Frequency %age	36 60	- -	12 20	11 18	01 02
6.	So generic assignment and tasks	Frequency %age	36 60	- -	07 12	08 13	09 15
7.	Less knowledge about how to integrate other ideas and work	Frequency %age	23 38	27 45	- -	05 08	05 08
8.	define plagiarism differently and strangely	Frequency %age	12 20	35 58	13 22	- -	- -
9.	Wrong assumption about students' knowledge of rules for research and documentation	Frequency %age	21 35	33 55	06 10	- -	- -
10.	Geographical and Environmental diversity of ODL students causes an infringement of IPR	Frequency %age	06 10	24 40	15 25	08 13	07 12

It is evident from the Table 2 that 71% respondents are agreed with the statement that fears of failure to cope others intellectual work, 61% agreed that fear of taking risks, 85% agreed that poor time management skill, 70 % agreed that no choice other than plagiarize, 60 % agreed that student views the consequences of cheating as unimportant, 60% agreed that So generic assignment and tasks, 83% agreed that less knowledge



about how to integrate other ideas and documents in appropriately, 78% agreed that define plagiarism differently and strangely, 90 % agreed that wrong assumption about students' knowledge of rules for research and documentation, 50% agreed that geographical and environmental diversity of ODL students causes an infringement of plagiarism policy. Majority of respondent were agreed that statements about the causes of plagiarism in the ODL.

Table 1

*Analysis of Opinion of Respondents on Practices to Eliminate Plagiarism (N=60)*

S.No	Statements	Results	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
	Practices to Eliminate Plagiarism						
1.	Include a policy about using sources in the syllabus	Frequency %age	32 53	20 33	08 13	- -	- -
2.	Establish horror code for all students	Frequency %age	22 38	37 62	- -	- -	- -
3.	Scholarly discussion, thinking analytical and independently	Frequency %age	11 18	44 73	05 08	- -	- -
4.	Assignment to explore a subject in depth	Frequency %age	30 50	25 42	- -	05 08	- -
5.	Establish course theme and then allow to define a specific issue or problem	Frequency %age	35 58	25 42	- -	- -	- -
6.	Support on each step of the research process	Frequency %age	30 50	30 50	- -	- -	- -
7.	Use of computer, email etc.	Frequency %age	30 50	24 40	- -	05 08	01 02
8.	Use of plagiarism detection services cautiously	Frequency %age	49 82	08 13	02 03	01 02	- -
9.	Use of disciplinary actions	Frequency %age	32 53	23 38	03 05	02 03	- -

Data placed and illustrated in Table No. 3 indicates the statement about practices to eliminate plagiarism and it is evident that 86%

respondents agreed that to include plagiarism policy about using sources in the syllabus or part of teaching. 100% respondents agreed that establish honor code for all students, 91% agreed that scholarly discussion, thinking analytical and independently may be practice during teaching learning process. 92% agreed that assignment may be as to explore a subject in depth. 100% agreed that establish course theme and then allow defining a specific issue or problem for critical and analytical thinking development. 100% respondents agreed that support on each step of the research process either from the department and supervisor is necessary. 90% respondent agreed that use of computer, email etc skill will helpful avoiding infringement of copy rights. 95% agreed that it use of plagiarism detection services cautiously may be reduced that plagiarized practices. 91% respondent agreed with the statement that use of disciplinary actions may help to eliminate the plagiarism and implement the IPR in ODL.

Table 4

*Comparison Analysis of Opinion of Respondents on Causes of Plagiarism (N=60)*

Respondent	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig
Learner	35	23.5	9.04	.107	58	.915
Faculty	25	23.3	8.93			

Table 4 indicates  $p=.915$  which are greater than the significance value of 0.05, it means that there is no significance difference in the views of respondents regarding Causes of Plagiarism,  $df= 58$  as well as the mean score of the learner and the faculty views are 23.5 and 23.3 respectively.

Table 5

*Comparison Analysis of Opinion of Respondents on Practices to Eliminate Plagiarism (N=60)*

Respondent	Number	Std. Deviation	Mean	t	df	Sig
Learner	35	5.0	14.5	-.222	58	.825
Faculty	25	5.2	14.4			

Data placed and illustrated in Table No.5 indicates the  $p= .825$  which is greater than the significance value of 0.05, it means that there is no significant difference among the views of the respondents regarding

Practices to Eliminate Plagiarism,  $df = 58$  value is significance at  $t = -.222$  which more differences seen in learner category to the statements that practices given in statements 01 to 09 may help to eliminate the plagiarism and implement the IPR in ODL.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that higher education plagiarism policy on plagiarism consist of laws, rules and appropriate disciplinary actions and the mechanism for enforcement of intellectual property rights. Major causes of plagiarism are that students have fear of failure to cope others intellectual work, taking risks, poor time management, less or no skill to integrate others intellectual work and idea. The idea about the plagiarism was defined by faculty as well as students differently and strangely, especially student's perception about rules, ethics of research and referring others intellectual work were wrong (Table2). Following recommendations of the study have been proposed on the basis of analysis of the data to eliminate or lessen the plagiarism practices. A policy about using sources may include in the course syllabus. Honor code may be established for all students. Scholarly discussions may be arranged during course workshops for the development of analytical and independent thinking. Plagiarism detection services may be used cautiously and in case of violation of plagiarism policy taken disciplinary actions against learner and advisor (Table 3).

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the conclusions drawn from the research following suggestions were recommended:

- A mandatory pre-program course either an online or existing mode of distance education may be introduced.
- For awareness IPR day may be celebrated in university campus.
- Course coordinators may develop scholarly thinking and guide to maintain proper documentations among the learners while conducting course workshops, assignment development and course revision.
- Support services for learners may be established either online or region-based research cell.
- Communication of the convention on plagiarism may be initiated for implementation and to stop the violation of intellectual property rights in the open distance learning.

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***Citation of this Article:***

Bibi, T., & Hafeez, A. (2018). Exploration of plagiarism practices in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). *Pakistan Journal of Distance and Online Learning*, 4(1). 49-62.