

**Attitude to plagiarism and the personal information management behaviour of undergraduates at Babcock University, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated attitude to plagiarism and the personal information management behaviour of undergraduates in the Department of Information Resources Management, Babcock University. The descriptive research approach was used for the study. The population was made up of 214 students. Stratified sampling technique was employed for sample selection. A questionnaire titled “Attitude to plagiarism and information management behaviour questionnaire (PIMB)” was used for data collection. Data was analysed using percentage count, Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation and One-way ANOVA. Findings revealed that respondents have a positive attitude towards plagiarism. The most popular form of managing information was found to be the creation and tagging of related files in folders while the least used methods were the use of Cloud (e.g. Dropbox) and social bookmarking sites. A significant relationship was found to exist between attitude to plagiarism and personal information management behaviour. There was, however, no significant relationship between the level of study and attitude towards plagiarism. Based on the findings, the study concluded that education is necessary for curbing the menace of plagiarism in higher institutions and therefore, recommended that faculty should keep educating students’ on issues pertaining to plagiarism while students also endeavour to utilise Cloud and bookmarking applications as these would improve their management of personal information.

**Keywords:** Babcock University, Information Resources Management, information behaviour, Plagiarism.

### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described as “the information society” because of the abundance of information associated with technological advancement. Information is now easily accessible irrespective of

geographic location. The abundance of information opens a wealth of knowledge for university students, from where they could either learn or steal. Stealing the ideas of others otherwise known as plagiarism is recognised as a plague which

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must be expunged from academic institutions as most institutions now offer literacy programmes to educate students on the management and right attitude towards the use of information. Attitude to plagiarism is often reflected in the perception and behaviours associated with plagiarism (Pupovac, Bilic-Zulle, Mavrincac & Petrovecki, 2010). While some students perceive plagiarism as wrongdoing, others do not see it as a serious issue (Ryan, Bonanno, Krass, Scouller & Smith, 2009) and as such do not give serious thought to organising and managing information.

As future information professionals, students of Information Resources Management (IRM), are being trained to work as information providers and consultants and as such are exposed to techniques for finding, organising and managing information which is expected to aid their academic and professional life.

While much is expected of the student of IRM, they, like any other individual, could

have a negative or positive attitude towards plagiarism which could drive their disposition towards the management of personal information.

Personal information management is necessary for coping with the quantum of information in today's society as it ensures that information collected is well organized and stored for easy retrieval. Unfortunately, some personal factors such as attitude to plagiarism may affect the personal information management behaviour of students, thereby, adversely affecting their ability to organise and retrieve used information. This study, therefore, investigates attitude towards plagiarism and the personal information management behaviour of IRM undergraduates at Babcock University.

### Objectives of the study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Ascertain the attitude of IRM students towards plagiarism.
- Determine the personal information management behaviour of IRM students.
- Establish the relationship between attitude to plagiarism and the

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personal information management behaviour of IRM students.

- Ascertain the difference between students' level of study and their attitude towards plagiarism

## Research hypotheses

To aid the achievement of objectives, the following null hypotheses were stated:

H<sub>0</sub> Attitude to plagiarism will not be significantly related to the personal information management behaviour of IRM students

H<sub>0</sub> Students' level of study will not be significantly related to their attitude towards plagiarism

## Literature review

Though an old concept, plagiarism has been the focus of most recent studies, as the increase in plagiarism is associated with the ease of copy and paste of digital resources (Trinchera 2001; Cromwell, 2006; Underwood & Szabo 2003). Outlining the forms of plagiarism, Wilson (2007) points out that it entails copying and presenting other peoples' work as one's own, copying or paraphrasing other peoples' work without proper citation and buying essay/papers. A study carried out in Egypt by Nejati, Ismail and Shafaei (2011) found out that the most common forms of plagiarism behaviours among Egyptian

students are "giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation", with 40% of male and 41% of female students sometimes doing it, and "changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit", with 34% of male and 33% of female students doing it. Whitley (1998) in a study covering 25 year period, however, identified the major reasons why students cheat as i)perceiving that social norms allow cheating and ii) holding favourable attitude towards cheating.

Although some students may recognise plagiarism as a form of academic dishonesty thereby, refraining from it. Harris (2015) points out that some do not consider plagiarism as wrong doing but rather see it as an acceptable practice. Likewise, Ashworth, Bannister and Thorne (1997) reporting on plagiarism in the UK, affirm that plagiarism is a far less meaningful concept for students than faculty and ranks relatively low in their value system. In Singapore, a study by

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Lim and See (2001) revealed that students are morally ambivalent about academic cheating and are tolerant of dishonesty among their peers. Expressing similar opinion, Iyer and Eastman (2006) as cited in Egan (2008) noted high levels of cheating among peers. While studying the attitudes of pharmacy and medical biochemistry students towards plagiarism, Pupovac et al. (2010) found out that plagiarism is perceived as not very important (63%), harmless (59%), justified under special circumstances (42%), and sometimes necessary (35%). In another survey of college student attitudes towards Internet plagiarism by Scanlon & Neumann (2002) nearly 90 % of 698 students in nine universities agreed that copying and pasting text from the Internet or traditional sources without proper citation is wrong, yet about 25% admitted to having copied without proper citation. In Nigeria, the story is not different as Babalola (2012) while studying the awareness and incidence of plagiarism

affirmed negative attitude towards plagiarism as the majority of the respondents were found to have been involved in different forms of plagiarism. Among the respondents for the study, 69.2% admitted to copying and pasting portions of text from the internet; 65.7% often copied verbatim from a textbook or journal without using quotation marks; 58.5% often included references they did not use in their work and 46.7% submitted assignments without references. Adeniyi and Taiwo (2006) in a similar study involving students in Colleges of Education found out that 476 (34.3%) have copied material word for word from written source at least once while 407 (29.3%) have fabricated/falsified bibliography at least once.

Some studies have tried to relate formal learning to attitude towards plagiarism. Rathore, Waqas, Zia, Mavrinac and Farooq (2015) in their study which explored the attitudes of faculty members and medical students in Pakistan towards plagiarism

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found out that year of study did not affect attitudes towards plagiarism. Likewise, the study by Anderson et al. (2007) as cited in Rathore et al. (2015), revealed that there is no relationship between attending formal courses and academic dishonesty. On the other hand, Poorolajal, Cheraghi, Irani, Cheraghi and Mirfakhraei (2012) in their study which investigated knowledge, attitude and the practice of plagiarism affirmed that educational programme may increase knowledge and improve attitude towards plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism, Salde (2004) as cited in Sharma (2010) advocates proper documentation of sources. Documentation is an aspect of personal information management which deals with the organisation and maintenance of personal information collection for use and repeated re-use (Jones, 2008). The importance of personal information management is affirmed by Leicestershire County Council (2011) which asserts that personal information management ensures that

documents are preserved in a way that they remain reliable and remain useable. Kelly (2006) opines that students manage their information using a variety of spaces (e.g., home desktop, laptop, personal directory in the university network, personal USB flash drive). A study by Stewart, Basic & Erdelez (2012) on students' management of information found online revealed that retrieved documents are stored mainly by saving citations or URLs in the form of word documents and notes. Sending an email to self and printing copies of the work were found to be less popular. A similar study by Capra (2009) revealed that stored information mostly by saving as a bookmark/favourite (98%), sending email to self (57%), writing it down on paper (36%), copying the URL into a file (23%), saving the web page on a hard drive (17%) saving on del.cio.us or other bookmarking sites (11%). Majid, San, Tun and Zar (2010) in a more in-depth study, found out that students mostly organise retrieved online information using

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hierarchical folders and tagging/labelling. The majority of the respondents were found to retrieve stored information mainly by going through created folders, using free text search facilities.

## Methodology

The descriptive research approach was used for the study. The population was made up of 214 students listed in the Department of I.R.M for 1<sup>st</sup> semester 2015/2016 academic session. Stratified sampling technique was employed for sample selection. A questionnaire titled

“Attitude to plagiarism and Information Management behaviour questionnaire (PIMB)” was used for the study. To distribute the questionnaire, a compulsory course was identified at each level of study (100 – 400 level). Lecturers in charge of the identified courses were met by the researcher to coordinate the distribution and collection of the questionnaire after teaching. Data collected was analysed using percentage distribution, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation and One-way ANOVA.

## Findings and discussion

**Table 1: Respondents level of study**

Level of study	No. of students	Frequency of questionnaire returned	Percentage (%)
100	34	19	16.2
200	57	53	45.3
300	33	20	17.1
400	90	25	21.4
Total	214	117	100.0

The highest response rate came from students in the second year of study. While the least response rate was from 100 level students. Although, 400 levels had the highest number of the student population, most of them did not take part in the study.

While some 400 level students were out on field work for their final year research project, some of those who were around did not show interest and as such did not participate in the study.

## Table 2: Attitude to Plagiarism

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S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Student who plagiarize are not doing the society any harm	10(8.5%)	26(22.2%)	46(39.3%)	35(30.0%)
2	Plagiarism is a system of recycling and as such should be encouraged	12(10.3%)	28(23.9%)	49(41.9%)	28(23.9%)
3	Since plagiarism does not deprive the original author of his/her work, it should not be taken seriously	18(15.4%)	26(22.2%)	53(45.3%)	20(17.1%)
4	Plagiarism is not as bad as cheating in an examination	15(12.8%)	30(25.6%)	36(30.8%)	36(30.8%)
5	Plagiarism should not be a punishable offence	16(13.7%)	35(29.9%)	44(37.6%)	22(18.8%)
6	Plagiarism is justifiable under special circumstance	9(7.7%)	47(40.2%)	39(33.3%)	22(18.8%)
7	Submission deadliness are responsible for plagiarism	24(20.5%)	33(28.2%)	48(41.0%)	12(10.3%)
8	Plagiarism cannot be avoided	20(17.1%)	37(31.6%)	32(27.4%)	28(23.9%)
9	All student plagiarize	25(21.4%)	40(34.2%)	35(29.9%)	17(14.5%)
10	Someone who has the permission of his/her friend to copy their assignment cannot be said to have stolen	21(18.0%)	46(39.3%)	33(28.2%)	17(14.5%)

As indicated in Table 2 majority the respondents have a positive attitude towards plagiarism. This is affirmed through their rejection of statements which seemed to uphold plagiarism. A total of 69.3% of the respondents, for instance, rejected the idea that students who plagiarise are not doing the society any harm. This was also followed closely by

the rejection percentage (65.8%) recorded for plagiarism as a system of recycling which should be encouraged. Although most negatively worded statements were rejected by at least half of the respondents, 57.5%, however, accepted that copying a friend's work with permission does not qualify as stealing (plagiarism) while 55.6% affirmed that all students plagiarise.

**Table 3: Personal information management behaviour**

s/n	Personal information management behavior	SA	A	D	SD
1	I create and tag folders for related files on my computer desktop/my document	37(31.6%)	59(50.4%)	18(15.4%)	3(2.6%)

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2	I make conscious effort to note reference for materials I consult which I save as a file on my personal computer or write down on a piece of paper	33(28.2%)	60(51.3%)	18(15.4%)	6(5.1%)
3	I save documents as single files in my personal computer	33(28.2%)	54(46.2%)	24(20.5%)	6(5.1%)
4	I retrace used information by checking the download application on my desktop	26(22.2%)	60(51.3%)	25(21.4%)	6(5.1%)
5	I create a backup of my documents using external hard-drive, CD, flash drive, etc.	49(41.9%)	34(29.1%)	26(22.2%)	8(6.8%)
6	To retrace information retrieved online, I make use of the bookmark application on my personal or pin them to my browser	30(25.6%)	45(38.5%)	32(27.4%)	10(8.5%)
7	I e-mail important document to myself	30(25.6%)	44(37.6%)	29(24.8%)	14(12.0%)
8	I always make printed copies of materials I consider important	31(26.5%)	42(35.9%)	31(26.5%)	13(11.1%)
9	I transfer folders am working with to a cloud (e.g., Dropbox)	24(20.5%)	36(30.8%)	47(40.2%)	10(8.5%)
10	I use online bookmarking sites such as Del.icio.us or Diggo	17(14.5%)	23(19.7%)	60(51.3%)	17(14.5%)

The personal information management behaviour of the respondents as seen in Table 3 reveals that respondents employ a variety of methods for managing personal information. Most of the respondents (82%) create and tag folders of related files on their computers. Likewise, 79.5%

make a conscious effort to record references of consulted materials. The least used methods for managing information were seen to be the use of Cloud (e.g. Dropbox) and the use of social bookmarking sites such as Del.icio.us or Diggo.

**Table 4: Attitude to Plagiarism and Personal Information Management Behaviour**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Attitude to plagiarism	35.5965	6.37453	117	.675**	.001	Sig.
Personal information management behavior	11.4239	3.21353				

\*\*Sig. at .01 level

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The result of computed Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient shows that a positive correlation exists between the two variables- attitude to plagiarism and personal information management behaviour of IRM students ( $r = .675^{**}$ ,  $N= 117$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The result as shown in the bracket reveals the p-value as  $.001$  which implies that the null hypothesis is to be rejected.

**Table 5: Level of study and attitude towards plagiarism**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	165.860	3	55.287	1.914	.131
Within Groups	3263.952	113	28.885		
Total	3429.812	116			

The result of the One-way analysis of variance as indicated in Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference between students' level of study and their attitude towards plagiarism ( $F = 1.914$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

### Discussion

From the findings, it is evident that respondents' have a positive attitude towards plagiarism. However, the fact that a little above average are of the opinion that all students plagiarise calls for concern as it could imply an indirect admission of guilt on a personal or corporate level. Also worrisome, is the fact that majority of the respondents (57.3%) expressed the opinion

that someone who has the permission of his/her friend to copy their assignment cannot be said to have stolen as this represents a distorted view of plagiarism. The findings of this study, however, are in disagreement with the findings of Babalola (2012); Pupovac et al. (2010) whose studies revealed a negative attitude towards plagiarism. The findings, gives credence to the assertion of Iyer and Eastman (2006) as cited in Egan (2008) who noted high levels of cheating among peers. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that copying an assignment with permission was not regarded as cheating or stealing by

majority of the respondents. On the management of personal information, majority of the respondents were found to make conscious effort to record references of consulted materials. The method mostly used for managing personal information was found to be the creation and tagging of related files in folders while the least used methods were the use of Cloud (e.g. Dropbox) and the use of social bookmarking sites such as Del.icio.us or Diggo. The findings support Kelly (2006) who opined that students manage their information using a variety of spaces. The findings were, however, in partial agreement with the findings of Capra (2009), whose study revealed various methods through which respondents manage information, but noted that bookmark/favourite and sending email to self were mostly used.

A significant relationship was established between attitude to plagiarism and the personal information management behaviour of IRM students. The result is

not surprising as students of IRM take several compulsory courses in the use and management of information which would have given them sound understanding not only in the ethical use of information but also in the organisation and management of information. The finding partially supports Poorolajal, Cheraghi, Irani, Cheraghi and Mirfakhraei (2012) whose study revealed that educational programme may increase knowledge and improve attitude towards plagiarism. There was no significant difference established between respondents' level of study and their attitude towards plagiarism in this study. The finding gives credence to that of Rathore et al. (2015) in whose study it was also established that year of study did not affect attitude towards plagiarism.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Plagiarism continues to plague the academic community, therefore, making it a matter of discussion in academic circles. As a form of academic dishonesty that can cripple academic growth, urgent attention

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is, therefore, needed to curb plagiarism through personal information management practices as this could ensure that used information are handy when the need for re-use arises thereby, promoting ethical use of information

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Faculty members should continue to educate students on issues pertaining to plagiarism to sustain positive attitudes towards plagiarism.
- Lecturers should be more observant when marking assignments as this would give them the opportunity to discover cases of copied assignments when they occur. Such cases, if spotted, should not only be punished but should also serve as forums to educate students on the ills of copying others. Specifically, students should be made to realize that copying from their peers even

with their permission is an act of plagiarism.

- In managing personal information, students should explore the use of Cloud and online bookmarking applications as these would help them connect easily to online information saved on various devices.

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