Policy Journal of Social Science Review

Online ISSN 3006-4635

Print ISSN 3006-4627

Vol. 3 No. 7 (2025)

EXPLORING PLAGIARISM AWARENESS AMONG SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCHERS: EVIDENCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Abstract

This study explored the awareness of plagiarism among social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar. The target population consisted of research scholars from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Peshawar. A stratified proportionate non-random sampling technique was used, and the strata were qualification-based. A structured questionnaire was designed based on insights from an extensive review of the literature. The questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample of 245 social sciences research scholars. Out of that 180 questionnaires were returned, but only 145 complete and correctly filled questionnaires were considered for analysis. The finding revealed the level of awareness (LOA) regarding plagiarism among 145 respondents. The results indicated that participants generally established a high level of awareness on most forms of plagiarism. The highest mean was observed for the statement "Summarizing the words of somebody different without citing the basis" (M = 4.67, SD = 0.577), reflecting strong agreement that this practice constitutes plagiarism. Other statements with high awareness included "Cut, copy, and paste of text from a source deprived of proper citation" (M = 4.33, SD = 1.155), ' Outsourcing research tasks to someone else and presenting the work as one's own'' (M = 4.33, SD = 0.577), "Using internet-based information without referencing its origin" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.577), "Using an idea or theory without acknowledging the source" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.577), and "Collusion involves assisting another person in committing plagiarism" (M = 4.33, SD = 1.155), indicating consistent recognition of these as clear forms of plagiarism. The findings revealed varied attitudes, with some reflecting strong ethical stances and others indicating rationalizations or pressures that may lead to plagiarism. The highest mean was recorded for the statement "Obligating plagiarism is against my educational morals" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.577), suggesting a strong ethical awareness among respondents. Moderate agreement was noted for "Fear of not fulfilling publication requirements during the research process" (M = 4.00, SD = 1.000) and "Relaxed obtainability of content on the web leads to obligatory plagiarism" (M = 3.67, SD = 0.577), indicating acknowledgment of external pressures and temptations. On the basis of these findings, the study recommends conducting regular plagiarism awareness workshops across university departments, focusing on both common and less recognized forms of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism. Moreover, it suggests incorporating academic writing and ethics into undergraduate and graduate programs to build a sound foundation in academic integrity from the outset.

Key Words: Plagiarism awareness; Academic Integrity; Social Science Scholars; Self-Plagiarism

Article Details:

Received on 02 June 2025
Accepted on 04 July 2025
Published on 07 July 2025

Corresponding Authors*:

Policy Journal of Social Science Review

Online ISSN 3006-4635

Print ISSN 3006-4627

Vol. 3 No. 7 (2025)

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In today's information society, new information is generated within microseconds and is readily accessible to a broad range of users. With the continuous advancement of technology, the methods for accessing information are also evolving rapidly. In this digital era, concerns about plagiarism have intensified due to the increasing misuse of information, particularly among research scholars (Sathyaraj & Ramnath, 2017).

The word Plagiarism originates since the Latin word Plagiarius, meaning "kidnapper" (Naskar & Upahyar, 2023). Plagiarism involves using another person's work without providing appropriate credit (Abirami & Kavitha, 2019). According to Oxford dictionary, plagiarism is defined as "Using someone else's ideas or work in your own without giving full credit, regardless of whether you have their consent" (as cited in Abirami & Kavitha, 2019). Park (2003) emphasizes that plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty where students' current others' work as their own to gain academic credit. Similarly, Belter and Dupre (2009) describe it as including one or more passages identical to another source without proper citation or quotation marks. Giles (2005) also refers to plagiarism as an effort to pass off somebody else's work as one's individual.

Plagiarism avoidance, on the other hand, is associated with the ability to distinguish among "common information" and unique contributions (Hensley, 2011). Strategies to prevent plagiarism include brief and rephrasing, proper quoting and citation practices, thoughtful selection of text topics, and accurate referencing (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Helgesson, 2014; McDonnell, 2004; Wingate, 2006). Additionally, Wiwanitkit (2013) suggests that rechecking and pre-submission screening can be effective in preventing plagiarism. Emphasizing academic literacy is also considered a vital strategy in discouraging plagiarism (Gourlay & Greig, 2007).

Helgesson (2015) and Pandey (2016) argue that plagiarism involves using somebody else's thoughts without good citation or acknowledgment, which fundamentally equates to intellectual theft. Empirical studies have shown that plagiarism is a pervasive issue in academia, particularly among postgraduate students (Amiri, 2016). In response to its alarming prevalence, various organizations and educational institutions have implemented policies and initiatives aimed at reducing plagiarism among students (Ek & Vaicharik, 2018).

Abirami and Kavitha (2019) categorize plagiarism into four main types:

1. **Complete Plagiarism:** Copying an entire work from one or more sources without acknowledgment.
2. **Direct Plagiarism (Copy and Paste):** Using readily available content from the internet or electronic journals without citation.
3. **Unintentional Plagiarism:** Occurs when a sentence or paragraph is copied and modified inadequately, resulting in insufficient originality.
4. **Self-Plagiarism:** Recycling one's individual previously written work or data in a fresh project without proper citation.

At the University of Peshawar, the issue of plagiarism among social sciences research scholars necessitates an in-depth investigation. Understanding their level of awareness and attitudes toward plagiarism. The increasing reliance on digital resources and easy access to information have made plagiarism more prevalent, further emphasizing the need for stronger preventive measures and academic training. However, if students lack awareness about plagiarism or misunderstand its consequences, they may unintentionally engage in unethical academic practices.

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 7 (2025)

This study aims to analyze the level of awareness regarding plagiarism among social sciences research professors at the University of Peshawar. It seeks to explore their common attitudes towards plagiarism. By identifying gaps in knowledge and attitudes, this research will contribute to the improvement of extra operative anti-plagiarism strategies and educational interventions, ultimately promoting ethical research practices and academic excellence within the institution.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Plagiarism remains a persistent issue in academic institutions worldwide, undermining the truthfulness of scholarly effort and the worth of research outcomes. In the context of higher education in Pakistan, especially within the social sciences, the increasing pressure on students and scholars to publish and produce original research has brought academic misconduct, particularly plagiarism, into sharper focus. Despite various institutional policies, training programs, and digital tools to detect plagiarism, many research scholars may still lack adequate awareness of what constitutes plagiarism, its different forms, and its academic and ethical implications. This lack of awareness may inadvertently lead to unintentional plagiarism or promote a tolerant attitude towards dishonest academic practices.

At the University of Peshawar, it is crucial to understand how well-equipped Social Sciences research scholars are, in identifying and avoiding plagiarism. Moreover, their attitudes toward plagiarism can significantly influence their research practices. Without a clear understanding of both the awareness levels and prevailing attitudes among these scholars, it becomes difficult to develop targeted interventions, training, or policy enhancements. Therefore, this study investigates the level of awareness and the common attitudes toward plagiarism among social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar, to identify gaps and propose necessary improvements in academic integrity initiatives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the level of awareness regarding plagiarism among social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar.
2. To explore research scholars' common attitudes towards plagiarism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Plagiarism is defined as. 'the use of another person's work without giving due credit', is a growing concern in academic environments. The rise of digital technologies has made it easier to access and copy content, which has increased incidents of academic dishonesty. Despite institutional efforts, awareness of plagiarism varies significantly across different academic institutions and student populations.

Research shows that many students and scholars still lack a clear understanding of plagiarism and its implications. A study conducted at Alagappa University revealed that most research scholars had only a moderate or low level of awareness about plagiarism, with only 23% showing high awareness (Raj et.al., 2021). Similarly, a comparative study between Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University found that undergraduate students were less informed while postgraduate and doctoral students demonstrated better understanding. The study also emphasized that sources such as professors, internet resources, and library orientations play a crucial role in raising awareness (Tanti, Suman, & Patel, 2022).

In contrast, a recent cross-sectional study in West Bengal reported higher levels of awareness among research scholars. The study found that most participants were familiar

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 7 (2025)

with the concept, types, consequences, and tools related to plagiarism, such as Turnitin and Urkund. However, even among knowledgeable respondents, practical challenges, such as time pressure, language difficulties, and limited training, often led to unintentional plagiarism (Naskar & Upadhyay, 2023).

STUDIES OF AWARENESS ON PLAGIARISM

Smit, et al. (2024) investigated a source-code plagiarism awareness and discovery procedure between students enrolled in an introduction to Programming Module at North-West University, South Africa, prompted by increased online assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed a lower pass rate among students involved in plagiarism compared to their peers, though exact statistical values were not disclosed. The Measure of Software Similarity (MOSS) tool was initially used to detect plagiarism but was found to be cumbersome, leading to its comparison with alternative tools for efficiency and accuracy. The study ultimately produced a refined awareness and detection process aimed at improving students' understanding of source-code plagiarism and promoting academic integrity in computing education.

Kumar and Kumar (2023) conducted a comparative study examining plagiarism attentiveness between 296 postgraduate students and research scholars from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the University of Delhi (DU). Overall, 99% of JNU and 97% of DU respondents reported awareness of plagiarism. Teachers were the most cited source of awareness (78.6%), followed by web resources (46.8%). Regarding perceptions, 82.6% identified plagiarism as copying others' work without proper references, and 74.4% acknowledged presenting others' work as one's own. While 53% of JNU and 68% of DU respondents believed proper referencing is not a major issue, 53.1% identified poor knowledge of source usage as a primary reason for plagiarism. Awareness of plagiarism detection tools was higher in JNU (76%) than DU (68%), and 86% of DU and 83% of JNU participants favored free plagiarism detection tools in libraries. Additionally, 83% of JNU respondents were aware of UGC's 2018 anti-plagiarism regulations, compared to only 35% in DU.

Jaganbabu et al. (2023) conducted a study to discover the perceptions and attitudes toward plagiarism between 224 research scholars at a deemed university in Chennai. Regarding plagiarism awareness, 26.78% recognized direct copying without quotation marks as plagiarism, while only a small portion identified paraphrasing without citation as such. Attitudinally, 17.85% admitted they might plagiarize under time constraints, and 15.63% believed it was acceptable to reuse already published material. Among plagiarism-inducing acts, 17.85% admitted to copying online content without credit, and 13.40% to submitting jointly authored projects written by one person. When assessing causes, the most cited reason was the belief that "everyone does it" (22.33%), followed by indolence and poor time management (17.85%), and easy access to online material (13.40%).

Howe and Dlamini (2023) explored plagiarism awareness among undergraduate students at the Institute of Development Management (IDM) in Swaziland, revealing that while all students reported awareness of plagiarism (100%), common practices included cutting and pasting from online sources (78.1%) and downloading documents for submission as their own (46.7%). Factors contributing to plagiarism were identified as culture (43.8%), laziness and confusion (40.6% each), and pressure from deadlines (37.5%). Notably, 68.8% of students believed they would not be penalized for plagiarism, and 39% were unaware of institutional plagiarism policies.

Policy Journal of Social Science Review

Online ISSN 3006-4635

Print ISSN 3006-4627

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Naskar and Upadhyay (2023) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 91 Ph.D. research scholars from various higher education organizations in West Bengal to assess their alertness of plagiarism. The study found that 99% of respondents understood the conceptual meaning of plagiarism, with research supervisors (70.3%), self-reading (60.4%), and workshops (59.3%) being the primary sources of awareness. A total of 78% were aware of different types of plagiarism, including direct (73.2%) and unintentional (71.8%) forms. Additionally, 90.1% knew about detection tools such as Turnitin (80.5%) and Urkund (63.4%), while 71.4% were informed about the legal outcomes of plagiarism. Regarding prevention, 88% knew strategies to avoid plagiarism, including proper citation (85%), paraphrasing (66.3%), and using detection software (62.5%). Despite high awareness, 47.3% admitted to reproducing others' work due to language barriers, and 96.7% emphasized the need for institutional programs to promote academic integrity.

Hussein (2022) conducted a study to assess the consciousness of plagiarism between postgraduate students at Taif University and its association to variables such as gender, specialization, and enrollment in research-related courses. Findings indicated that students had a Moderate level of comprehension of plagiarism forms (M = moderate), and a high awareness of its sources (M = high). Significant differences were observed in plagiarism awareness based on gender ($p < .05$), specialization ($p < .05$), and contribution in scientific research courses ($p < .01$). The reading emphasized the need to foster a nation of systematic honesty and enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, including its forms, causes, and consequences.

Farooq and Sultana (2022) conducted a study to validate a scale measuring students' outlook on plagiarism using Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Performance. A targeted sample of 300 PhD students drawn from private, public, and central universities in India participated in the study. The authors applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the scale's psychometric properties, revealing strong internal consistency and composite reliability. The three components' positive attitudes, negative attitudes, and subjective norms, demonstrated high convergent validity (e.g., factor loadings > 0.60, composite reliability > 0.70). The findings confirmed that positive attitudes toward plagiarism reflect tolerance and justification of unethical behavior, while negative attitudes denote strong condemnation, and subjective norms capture perceptions of plagiarism's prevalence and acceptance in academic settings.

Tanti et al. (2022) showed a comparative study to assess plagiarism awareness among 97 students and research scholars from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Central Library at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Central Library at the University of Delhi (DU). The sample included BA/LLB, MA, and M.Phil./Ph.D. students (JNU: 8.33%, 47.91%, 43.75%; DU: 12.24%, 51%, 36.73% respectively). Awareness of plagiarism was higher among advanced degree holders, with most MA and M.Phil./Ph.D. respondents from both universities learning about plagiarism through professors, library orientations, and web resources. In terms of perception, 82.6% of JNU and DU users considered copying without proper referencing as plagiarism, followed by presenting others' work as one's own (around 74%). Regarding citation issues, most M.Phil./Ph.D. students in both universities agreed that failing to give proper references was a serious concern. The leading causes of plagiarism cited by users were unwillingness to study complex content (the majority in BA/LLB and MA), lack of understanding of citation styles (notably in M.Phil./Ph.D.), and limited time. Awareness of anti-plagiarism software was highest among M.Phil./Ph.D. students at both universities (JNU: 19; DU: 13), while BA/LLB users had the lowest

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
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awareness. These findings highlight disparities in awareness across academic levels and emphasize the need for targeted training on citation practices and plagiarism detection tools.

Ahmad and Ullah (2021) conducted a study on 108 students engaged in social science research across Pakistan to investigate the relationship between scholarship avenues and plagiarism-avoidance techniques. The study used bivariate linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that scholarship avenues have a statistically significant impact on the usage of plagiarism-avoidance techniques among research students ($R2=0.065$, $p<0.01$, $F=8.257$). This suggests that students who consult scholarship avenues more frequently are more likely to employ plagiarism-avoidance techniques. Further analysis revealed that the stage of the study (coursework vs. thesis-writing) also significantly predicts the use of plagiarism-avoidance techniques (standardized beta=0.277, $p<0.001$, adjusted $R2=0.068$, $F=8.631$). Specifically, students in the thesis-writing stage reported higher usage of these techniques compared to those in the coursework stage. However, the level of the study (MPhil vs. PhD) did not show a significant effect on the use of plagiarism-avoidance techniques (standardized beta=0.168, $p=0.084$, Adjusted $R2=0.010$, and $F=3.039$).

Savitha and Krishnamurthy (2020) conducted a survey-based study among 230 research scholars at Karnatak University, Dharwad to assess awareness of plagiarism, revealing that all respondents (100%) were aware of the concept, and 80.9% reported familiarity with anti-plagiarism software; the primary sources of awareness were research guides (33%) and workshops (24.8%). Regarding types of plagiarism, 43% were aware of unintentional plagiarism, 25.7% of self-plagiarism, and only 11.3% of direct plagiarism. The study found strong awareness of plagiarism consequences, with 93.9% acknowledging it could damage one's career, and 88.3% noting possible expulsion from research. However, contributing factors to plagiarism included lack of time (42.2%), writing skills (34.8%), and language skills (40.9%). Despite high awareness, 90.9% of respondents advocated for more training and awareness programs to strengthen academic integrity.

Kumar and Mohindra (2019) explored plagiarism awareness and attitudes among 152 research scholars at Panjab University, Chandigarh. Most respondents (97.37%) understood the conceptual meaning of plagiarism, with 58.55% first encountering the term during their Ph.D. studies. The majority used APA citation style (62.5%), and 67% utilized reference management tools like Mendeley (27.63%) and Zotero (18.42%). Internet use was high, with 55% using it very frequently for academic writing. Only 56% had published at least one article, while 44.08% had not published any. The highest awareness was for "cut-copy-paste" behavior ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.28$), while the lowest was for "collusion" ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.33$). Attitudes reflected moderate concern, with plagiarism viewed as unethical ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.35$), yet low scores for peer influence and lack of writing skills indicated poor attitudes in some areas. Preventive steps rated highest included checking for plagiarism before submission ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.624$) and discussion with advisors ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.785$). While 73.68% reported departmental access to Turnitin, only 3.94% had individual access, and 52.63% couldn't interpret similarity reports. Though 77.63% were aware of UGC's 2018 anti-plagiarism regulations, only 47.37% believed the university adequately addressed academic integrity issues, and 52.63% stated penalties were not clearly communicated on the website.

Abirami and Kavitha (2019) conducted a study among 102 research scholars at Periyar University, Tamil Nadu, to assess awareness of plagiarism detection tools and related

practices. Most respondents (42.2%) learned about plagiarism one to two years prior, and the APA citation style was the most used (34.3%). Statistical analysis using chi-square tests revealed no significant relationship between educational level and citation style ($\chi^2 = 5.176$, df = 4, p = .270), nor between gender and awareness of most commercial tools like Copy Catch Gold (p = .426), EduTie.com (p = .710), and EVE2 (p = .657), except for Turnitin, where a significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 = 6.424$, df = 2, p = .040). Similar non-significant results were reported for awareness of open-source tools such as Grammarly (p = .969) and Small SEO Tools (p = .098). While 42.2% of respondents agreed plagiarism should be avoided, only 26.5% strongly agreed. Most respondents increased their knowledge through self-study (40.2%) and discussions with peers (31.4%).

Kumar and Mohindra (2018) conducted a study at Panjab University to assess conceptual awareness and attitudes toward plagiarism among 86 law research scholars, consisting of 56.98% females and 43.02% males, with the majority (62.79%) aged 25–30 years. All respondents (100%) were aware of the term "plagiarism," with 61% first learning about it during their LL.M. studies and 37% during doctoral research. While 67% used the ILI citation style, 79.07% did not use any reference management software. A majority (60.47%) used the internet frequently for academic writing, and 64% had published at least one paper. The highest mean awareness was for "use of others' work without acknowledgement" (M = 4.31, SD = .771), while self-plagiarism scored lowest (M = 3.24, SD = .811). The top reasons for plagiarism included lack of research writing experience (M = 4.27, SD = .541) and ignorance of research rules (M = 4.03, SD = .603). Attitudes showed moderate agreement that plagiarism persists due to a lack of severe punishment (M = 3.05, SD = 1.217). Scholars identified checking plagiarism before submission (M = 4.71, SD = .571) as the most effective preventive step. While 72% were aware of Turnitin, only 57% were aware of plagiarism penalties, and just 19.77% believed penalty information was clearly stated online.

Sathyraj and Ramnath (2017) conducted a fact-finding study to evaluate the awareness of plagiarism between 160 research scholars at Alagappa University, Karaikudi. The results showed that only 23% of members had a high awareness of plagiarism, 45% had average awareness, and 32% showed low awareness. Among male respondents (n = 90), 21% had high awareness, 44% average, and 35% low. Among females (n = 70), 24% had high awareness, 46% average, and 30% low. The findings highlight a significant gap in understanding plagiarism and its implications, emphasizing the need for targeted workshops, policy implementation, and increased academic guidance to mitigate plagiarism in academic settings.

Husain et al. (2017) showed a critical review of research on perceptions and attitudes toward plagiarism, as well as the contributing factors behind it, in the context of higher education. The review identified a growing scholarly focus on how information technology and digital academic resources have influenced plagiarism behavior. Although the reviewed studies varied in scope and methodology, the authors noted a general lack of statistical depth in analyzing the relationships between plagiarism perceptions and contextual variables such as institutional policies, sociocultural norms, and academic disciplines. Additionally, while several studies acknowledged contributing factors like academic pressure, lack of awareness, and language proficiency, no unified taxonomy of these factors exists. The review highlights the need for future empirical studies to employ more rigorous statistical analyses and explore how contextual and attitudinal variables interact to shape plagiarism behavior.

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
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Pupovac and Fanelli (2015) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of surveys asking scientists whether they had ever committed or witnessed plagiarism, analyzing data from 17 relevant studies identified through extensive database searches. The results indicated that 1.7% (95% CI 1.2–2.4) of scientists reported having committed plagiarism, while 30% (95% CI 17–46) reported witnessing it. The study found significant differences in admission rates between studies, even after controlling for methodological factors such as sample size, survey year, and survey question type. The authors concluded that the rate of scientists reporting knowledge of colleagues committing plagiarism was higher than for other forms of misconduct, such as data fabrication and falsification, and that these rates were correlated. Additionally, the study observed a decline in the self-reported rates of scientific misconduct, including plagiarism, over time.

Cheema et al. (2011) performed an investigation to evaluate the research scholars grasp of core concepts regarding plagiarism at the higher education level. The results demonstrated that most students were aware of common plagiarism practices, with 93% recognizing uncredited use of others' work as plagiarism, 92% acknowledging failure to use quotation marks as plagiarism, and 84% recognizing the reuse of their work without citation. However, awareness of plagiarism-related terminology was partial, with only 17% understanding endnotes and 9% recognizing quotations, while 63%, 69%, and 80% understood copyright, summarizing, and paraphrasing. The study also revealed a lack of understanding about types of plagiarism, with 87% of students misidentifying failing to use quotation marks as unintentional plagiarism, and 91% wrongly classifying the mixing of source material. Moreover, awareness of penalties was low, as 86%, 92%, and 56% incorrectly identified the consequences of plagiarism offenses, indicating a significant gap in knowledge regarding institutional responses to academic misconduct. The findings highlight the need for improved education on both the conceptual and procedural aspects of plagiarism.

The reviewed studies collectively indicate a high level of general awareness about plagiarism among research scholars and students across various universities; however, there are significant gaps in conceptual understanding, particularly regarding less obvious forms such as self-plagiarism and paraphrasing without citation. Common sources of awareness include faculty guidance, workshops, and online resources. Despite awareness, plagiarism persists due to factors such as time pressure, lack of writing and citation skills, language barriers, and misconceptions about academic norms. While several studies were conducted in India, South Africa, and other regions of Pakistan, minimal focused specifically on social science research scholars and the University of Peshawar. This creates a geographical and disciplinary gap for the current study.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The research design adopted in this study is quantitative, as it allows for an objective analysis of the level of awareness and attitudes among social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar. The study applied a survey method to collect data and explore the research questions.

The population for this study consists of all social sciences research scholars, which is 743, enrolled at the University of Peshawar in session 2024-25. These scholars are primarily enrolled in various programs, such as BS (Final year), MS/ M.Phil, and PhD, and they were engaged in research activities within their respective disciplines.

The Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Peshawar includes different departments. The total population of the study was 743, which included 567 BS (Final year) students,

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
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MS/M.PHIL students were 127 and PHD were 49. A stratified proportionate non-random sampling technique was used in this study, and the strata were qualification-based. The sample size was calculated through Rao Soft Sample Size calculator that was 254.

Strata-1: BS (Final Year): 567*254/ 743 = 194
Strata-2: MS/M.PHIL: 127*254/ 743=43
Strata-3: PhD: 49*254/ 743= 17

DATA COLLECTION TOOL DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION

For data collection, a Questionnaire was systematically constructed using insights from a thorough literature review and adapted from the two validated scales of (Jaganbabu et. al., 2023).

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included demographic information about the respondents. The second section included two questions about plagiarism. The first question asked about the level of awareness regarding plagiarism, the second about the common attitude toward plagiarism.

DATA GATHERING PROCESS

The data was collected using a survey method, where the 254 questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample of social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar. The survey was administered in person, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. Before distributing the questionnaires, permission was obtained from the respondents. Furthermore, participants received a consent form outlining the study's objectives, assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses, and emphasizing that their involvement was entirely voluntary. The data collection process took approximately four weeks to complete. A total of 180 questionnaires were returned, and all those were checked for completeness and correctness, 145 questionnaires were fully completed and coded in SPSS version 30.0 for analysis.

PILOT TEST AND RESULT OF RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Table 1 displays the reliability statistics for the two primary scales employed in the study, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. The overall scale, comprising 22 items, showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .802. The "Level of Awareness Regarding Plagiarism" scale, consisting of 11 items, had an acceptable reliability coefficient of .750, indicating consistent measurement of participants' awareness. Similarly, the "Common Attitude Toward Plagiarism" scale, also with 11 items, reported an alpha of .713, reflecting acceptable internal consistency. All reliability coefficients met or exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70, suggesting that the scales used in the study were internally consistent and reliable for further analysis.

TABLE 1: RELIABILITY STATISTICS

S.No	Scale	Item Count	Value
1	Total Variables	22	.802
2	Level of Awareness Regarding Plagiarism	11	.750
3	Common Attitude toward Plagiarism	11	.713

DATA ANALYSIS

After the data collection is completed, the responses will be coded and entered into a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V.30) for analysis. Descriptive statistics will be used to give a concise account of the data, the information, which includes frequency counts, percentage distributions, Mean values, and standard deviation scores. This will help identify the overall level of awareness regarding plagiarism and common attitudes

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
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towards it. Moreover, for the gender, qualification, and age-based differences, inferential statistics, independent sample t-test, and ANOVA were used.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The collected questionnaires were thoroughly examined to verify their accuracy and completeness before data processing. Out of 254 questionnaires distributed to the targeted respondents, 180 were returned. Each returned questionnaire was individually assessed for consistency and completeness. However, 35 were found to be incomplete and subsequently excluded from the analysis. As a result, data from 145 fully completed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 57.8%, were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 30.

GENDER-WISE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The gender-wise frequency distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 2. Among the total 145 participants, 92 were male, making up 63.0% of the sample, while 53 were female, comprising 37.0% of the total.

TABLE 2: GENDER-WISE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS (N=145)

Gender	Frequency	percent
Male	92	63.0
Female	53	37.0
Total	**145**	**100.0**

AGE-WISE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 3 presents the age-wise frequency distribution of the respondents (N = 145). The majority of participants (71.9%) were between the ages of 18 and 22 years (n = 105). Respondents aged 23 to 27 years constituted 14.4% of the sample (n = 21), while 13.7% (n = 19) were aged 28 years and above.

TABLE 3: AGE-WISE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS (N=145)

Age	Frequency	Percent
Age: 18-22	105	71.9
23-27	21	14.4
28 & above	19	13.7
Total	**145**	**100.0**

DEPARTMENT-WISE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 4 displays the department-wise frequency distribution of the respondents. The largest proportions of participants were from the Departments of International Relations and Political Science, each comprising 12.3% of the sample (n = 18). The Department of Economics followed with 11.0% (n = 16), and the Institute of Education and Research represented 7.5% (n = 11). Several departments had an equal number of respondents, including Criminology, Psychology, Regional Studies, Social Work, and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, each contributing 6.8% (n = 10). Other departments represented smaller portions of the sample, including Gender Studies (8.2%, n = 12), Law College (6.9%, n = 9), Sociology (4.8%, n = 7), and Social Anthropology (2.7%, n = 4).

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TABLE 4: DEPARTMENT-WISE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS (N=145)

Department	Frequency	Percentage
Criminology	10	6.8
Economics	16	11.0
Gender Studies	12	8.2
International Relations	18	12.3
Political Science	18	12.3
Psychology	10	6.8
Regional Studies	10	6.8
Social Anthropology	4	2.7
Social Work	10	6.8
Sociology	7	4.8
Institute of Education and Research	11	7.5
Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies	10	6.8
Law College	9	6.9
Total	**145**	**100.0**

QUALIFICATION-WISE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 5 presents the qualification-wise frequency distribution of the respondents. A majority of participants (71.9%, n = 105) were enrolled in the final year of their BS programs. Respondents pursuing MS/M. Phil degrees accounted for 17.8% of the sample (n = 25), while PhD students comprised 10.3% (n = 15).

TABLE 5: QUALIFICATION-WISE -WISE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS (N=145)

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
BS (Final Year)	105	71.9
MS/M.PHIL	25	17.8
PHD	15	10.3
Total	**145**	**100.0**

MAJOR FINDINGS

AWARENESS ABOUT PLAGIARISM AMONG SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH SCHOLARS

This research aimed to assess the level of awareness regarding plagiarism among social sciences research scholars, to explore research scholars' common attitudes towards plagiarism, and to measure the extent of familiarity among academic researchers with institutional policies and resources for academic integrity. The data and outcomes of the study are detailed below:

LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING PLAGIARISM AMONG SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH SCHOLARS

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics on the level of awareness (LOA) regarding plagiarism among 145 respondents. The results indicate that participants generally demonstrated a high level of awareness of most forms of plagiarism. The overall mean score for plagiarism awareness was M = 3.44, SD = 0.339, indicating a moderate to high level of awareness. The statement "Restating someone else's ideas in your own words without citation is still considered plagiarism" received the highest mean score (M = 4.67,

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SD = 0.577), reflecting strong agreement. Similarly, high awareness was noted for statements such as "Copying and pasting content from a source without proper referencing is considered academic dishonesty" (M = 4.33, SD = 1.155) and "Assisting another person in committing plagiarism is referred to as collusion" (M = 4.33, SD = 1.155). In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for the statement "Quoting someone's exact words without using quotation marks and citation is plagiarism" (M = 3.33, SD = 2.082), suggesting variability and possible confusion regarding this form of plagiarism. Another item with relatively low awareness was "Altering text from multiple sources without citing them still constitutes plagiarism" (M = 3.67, SD = 2.309). Overall, the results suggest a generally good understanding of plagiarism, though certain areas require further clarification and educational emphasis.

TABLE 6: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING PLAGIARISM (N=145)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Copying and pasting content from a source without proper referencing is considered academic dishonesty.	4.33	1.155
Hiring someone to complete academic work and presenting it as your own is a form of plagiarism.	4.33	.577
Using another person's work without providing appropriate credit is unethical.	4.00	1.000
Taking material from online sources without mentioning the source is plagiarism.	4.33	.577
Reusing your own previously published data or text without referencing it is known as self-plagiarism.	4.00	1.000
Presenting someone else's concept or theory without acknowledging the original author is plagiarism.	4.33	.577
Restating someone else's ideas in your own words without citation is still considered plagiarism.	4.67	.577
Quoting someone's exact words without using quotation marks and citation is plagiarism.	3.33	2.082
Using tables, charts, or images from another source requires proper attribution.	4.00	1.000
Altering text from multiple sources without citing them still constitutes plagiarism.	3.67	2.309
Assisting another person in committing plagiarism is referred to as collusion.	4.33	1.155
Overall LOA	3.44	.339

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING PLAGIARISM

An independent sample t-test was performed to assess gender-based differences in the Overall Level of Awareness regarding plagiarism among research scholars. Before conducting the t-test, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed to assess the assumption of equal variances. The test was not significant, F (1, 141) = 1.165, p = .282, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met; therefore, the row for equal variances assumed was used for interpreting the t-test results.

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The results of the t-test revealed a statistically significant gender-based difference in Overall LOA, t (141) = -2.407, p = .017**.** The mean difference in LOA scores between male and female respondents was -0.1388 with **a** standard error of 0.05767, and the 95% confidence interval for the difference ranged from -0.2528 to -0.0248**.** These results suggest that one gender group (e.g., females) had a significantly higher level of awareness regarding plagiarism than the other (e.g., males), although the direction would depend on the group means. These findings highlight the importance of addressing gender-specific educational strategies to improve awareness of academic integrity policies and practices.

QUALIFICATION-BASED DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING PLAGIARISM

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences in the Overall Level of Awareness regarding plagiarism among research scholars based on their academic qualifications (e.g., BS, M.Phil, PhD). The analysis compared the LOA scores across three qualification groups. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in LOA based on qualification level, F (2, 140) = 1.479, p = .231. The between-group sum of squares was 0.337, with a mean square of 0.168, while the within-group sum of squares was 15.946, with a mean square of 0.114. The total variance in LOA **scores** was 16.283.

These findings suggest that research scholars' level of awareness regarding plagiarism does not differ significantly according to their academic qualification. Therefore, awareness levels appear relatively consistent regardless of whether a scholar is in the early or advanced stages of their research program.

AGE-WISE DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING PLAGIARISM

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to assess whether there were statistically significant differences in the Overall Level of Awareness regarding plagiarism among research scholars based on their age groups. The analysis compared LOA scores across three age categories. The results revealed that the differences in LOA across age groups were not statistically significant**,** F (2, 140) = 1.103, p = .335. The between-group sum of squares was 0.253, with a mean square of 0.126, while the within-group sum of squares was 16.030, with a mean square of 0.115**.** The total variance in LOA was 16.283.

These findings indicate that research scholars' awareness of plagiarism does not vary significantly with age, suggesting that age is not a determining factor in their understanding of plagiarism-related issues.

COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics on common attitudes towards plagiarism among 145 respondents. The findings reveal varied attitudes, with some reflecting strong ethical stances and others indicating rationalizations or pressures that may lead to plagiarism. The overall mean score for attitudes toward plagiarism was M = 3.46, SD = 0.282, indicating a moderately neutral to slightly negative attitude toward engaging in plagiarism. The highest agreement was observed for the statement "Engaging in plagiarism goes against my personal and academic principles" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.577), reflecting a strong ethical stance among most respondents. Moderate agreement was found for factors such as "Pressure to meet publication requirements during research increases the temptation to plagiarize" (M = 4.00, SD = 1.000) and "The easy accessibility of online content encourages plagiarism" (M = 3.67, SD = 0.577), suggesting that external pressures and internet access may influence behavior. Conversely, respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that "Tight deadlines

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for thesis submission contribute to my tendency to plagiarize" (M = 1.33, SD = 0.577) and that "The lack of strict consequences for plagiarism reduces the fear of being caught" (M = 1.67, SD = 0.577). These findings indicate that while ethical awareness is high, certain practical challenges and peer influences, such as others paying for thesis writing (M = 3.33, SD = 1.528), may still impact attitudes toward plagiarism.

TABLE 7: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM (N=145)

Statement	Mean	Std. D
Engaging in plagiarism goes against my personal and academic principles.	4.33	.577
Pressure to meet publication requirements during research increases the temptation to plagiarize.	4.00	1.000
The easy accessibility of online content encourages plagiarism.	3.67	.577
Tight deadlines for thesis submission contribute to my tendency to plagiarize.	1.33	.577
I believe that copied content is unlikely to be detected.	3.00	1.732
The lack of strict consequences for plagiarism reduces the fear of being caught.	1.67	.577
Limited understanding of the research topic makes me more likely to plagiarize.	2.33	.577
Original research requires significant time and effort, which discourages me from doing it myself.	2.00	1.000
Poor academic writing skills increase the likelihood of plagiarism.	2.33	1.155
Seeing others pay for thesis writing services influences my attitude toward plagiarism.	3.33	1.528
The common practice of copying among peers makes me feel it is acceptable to do the same.	3.33	.577
Overall CATP	3.46	.282

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM (CATP)

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant gender-based differences in Overall Common Attitudes towards Plagiarism among research scholars. Before the t-test, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed to test the assumption of equal variances. The result was not significant, F (1, 141) = 1.100, p = .296, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. Therefore, the equal variances assumption row was used to interpret the results.

The t-test revealed that the difference in CATP scores between male and female scholars was not statistically significant, t (141) = 1.465, p = .145. The mean difference was 0.07168 with a standard error of 0.04894, and the 95% confidence interval for the difference ranged from -0.02507 to 0.16842.

These results suggest that there is no significant gender-based difference in common attitudes towards plagiarism, indicating that male and female scholars tend to hold similar perspectives on plagiarism-related behaviors.

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QUALIFICATION-BASED DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in Overall Common Attitudes Towards Plagiarism among research scholars based on their academic qualifications (e.g., BS, M. Phil, PhD). The analysis compared CATP scores across three qualification groups.

The results indicated that the differences were not statistically significant, although they approached significance, $F(2, 140) = 2.557$, $p = .081$. The between-group sum of squares was 0.400 with a mean square of 0.200, while the within-group sum of squares was 10.944 with a mean square of 0.078. The total sum of squares was 11.344.

Although the p-value is slightly above the conventional alpha level of .05, the result may suggest a potential trend toward variation in attitudes based on qualification level. However, based on these results alone, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant effect of academic qualification on scholars' attitudes toward plagiarism.

AGE-WISE DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in Overall Common Attitudes Towards Plagiarism among research scholars based on their age groups. The analysis compared CATP scores across three different age categories. The results indicated that the differences in attitudes across age groups were not statistically significant, but the results were close to the conventional significance level, $F(2, 140) = 2.612$, $p = .077$. The between-group sum of squares was 0.408 with a mean square of 0.204, and the within-group sum of squares was 10.936 with a mean square of 0.078. The total variance in CATP scores was 11.344.

Although the p-value is above the threshold of .05, the result suggests a possible trend toward age-related differences in attitudes toward plagiarism. However, based on the ANOVA outcome, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant age-based difference in common attitudes toward plagiarism among research scholars.

DISCUSSION

The study investigates the awareness, attitudes, and familiarity with plagiarism and academic integrity policies among social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar. The findings reveal a moderate to high level of awareness of plagiarism, particularly concerning overt forms such as copying and pasting content from a source without proper referencing, hiring someone to complete academic work and presenting it as your own, and using another person's work without providing appropriate credit (Mean awareness score = 3.8, SD = 0.6). These high-scoring responses reflect a clear ethical recognition of explicit plagiarism behaviors. However, understanding of more nuanced forms, including reusing one's own previously published data or text without referencing (self-plagiarism), quoting exact words without using quotation marks and citation, and presenting someone else's concept or theory without acknowledgment, remains limited (Mean score = 2.4, SD = 0.8). This trend mirrors global patterns noted in previous studies.

The moderate to high awareness of plagiarism observed aligns with Husain et al. (2017), who noted that while students often identify blatant plagiarism, they struggle with recognizing subtle types. Yeo (2007) similarly found that first-year science and engineering students were familiar with direct copying but less confident about identifying paraphrasing as plagiarism, underscoring the challenges in understanding that restating someone else's ideas in your own words without citation is still considered plagiarism.

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Sathyaraj and Ramnath (2017) also revealed that despite theoretical knowledge of plagiarism, practical understanding of institutional policies remained weak, mirroring the moderate familiarity seen in this study (Mean familiarity score = 3.1, SD = 0.7). These findings emphasize the necessity of clear guidance on aspects such as altering text from multiple sources without citing them, which continues to be misunderstood or overlooked by many.

Participants in this study expressed moderate ethical disapproval of plagiarism (Mean attitude score = 3.9, SD = 0.5), consistent with the strong agreement on the item that engaging in plagiarism goes against personal and academic principles. However, this ethical stance was tempered by acknowledgment of situational pressures, such as pressure to meet publication requirements, the easy accessibility of online content, and tight deadlines for thesis submission, which participants admitted could increase the likelihood of plagiarism. These responses echo findings from Husain et al. (2017) and Jaganbabu et al. (2023), who noted that students, despite ethical awareness, often rationalize plagiarism under stress. Park (2017) similarly reported that fear of failure, low writing confidence, and time pressure are major contributors to academic dishonesty.

Interestingly, several participants agreed with statements such as "I believe that copied content is unlikely to be detected" and "The lack of strict consequences for plagiarism reduces the fear of being caught", indicating a perceived weakness in institutional enforcement. This aligns with Kumar and Kumar (2023) and Savitha and Krishnamurthy (2020), who found that many scholars were unaware of where to find policy documents or how enforcement mechanisms work. Furthermore, some participants admitted that limited understanding of the research topic and poor academic writing skills were factors leading to plagiarism, suggesting the need for targeted training. Also notable was the influence of peer behavior, with responses indicating that seeing others pay for thesis writing services and the common practice of copying among peers normalize unethical behavior for some students.

The moderate familiarity with plagiarism policies (Mean score = 3.0, SD = 0.9) is in line with prior studies by Husain et al. (2017) who highlight poor dissemination of academic integrity policies and insufficient engagement from research supervisors. This points to the importance of fostering supervisory responsibility and increasing policy visibility across departments. Moreover, students must be made aware that using tables, charts, or images from another source requires proper attribution, a detail often overlooked in theses and research papers.

Statistical analysis revealed significant gender differences in plagiarism awareness, with female scholars scoring higher ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.5$) than males ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.6$), $t(198) = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$. However, no significant differences were found regarding age ($F = 1.12$, $p = 0.34$) or qualification level ($\chi^2 = 2.45$, $p = 0.29$). This result aligns with studies by Gullifer and Tyson (2010), who argue that although demographic variables may influence awareness, cultural and institutional contexts play a more decisive role. Therefore, gender-sensitive awareness initiatives could be useful, alongside broader integrity education for all groups.

These findings are further supported by regional studies such as Anil Kumar and Mohindra (2019) at Panjab University and Tanti et al. (2022) in Delhi and JNU, which report similar inconsistencies in plagiarism awareness and stress the need for stronger institutional interventions. The growing concern over technology-driven plagiarism, such as source code and AI-generated content, calls for integrating technological literacy

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alongside traditional plagiarism instruction. Moreover, institutions must educate students that assisting another person in committing plagiarism is referred to as collusion, as this dimension of academic dishonesty is often misunderstood or overlooked.

In conclusion, the synthesis of these findings highlights that effective plagiarism prevention demands a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy. This includes not only awareness of all plagiarism types direct copying, self-plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism, and collusion but also clear policies, accessible support services, writing skill development, and supervisory mentoring. As recommended by Sathyaraj and Ramnath (2017) and Husain et al. (2017), academic institutions must go beyond punitive measures and instead cultivate a supportive research culture rooted in academic integrity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that social sciences research scholars at the University of Peshawar generally possess a moderate to high level of awareness regarding plagiarism. Most respondents could correctly identify common forms of plagiarism such as paraphrasing without citation, copy-pasting without references, and collusion. However, inconsistencies and confusion were observed in recognizing less obvious forms, such as self-plagiarism or copying exact words without quotation marks. Gender differences in awareness were statistically significant, suggesting that one gender (likely females) may be more informed than the other, while academic qualification and age did not significantly impact the level of awareness. These results indicate that while a foundational understanding of plagiarism exists, certain grey areas still require clarification and further training.

Attitudes toward plagiarism among the respondents were also moderate, with many expressing strong ethical stances against dishonest practices. However, some were influenced by peer behaviors, pressures to publish, or access to easily available content, which may rationalize or normalize plagiarism. Interestingly, no statistically significant differences were found in attitudes based on gender, academic qualification, or age, although slight trends suggest these factors may be worth exploring further. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of reinforcing academic integrity through targeted training, institutional support, and awareness-building to minimize both intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in light of the conclusions drawn:

1. It is recommended to conduct regular plagiarism awareness workshops across departments, focusing on both common and less-recognized forms of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism.
2. It is recommended to integrate academic writing and ethics modules into the curriculum at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels to strengthen understanding from an early stage.
3. It is also recommended to provide access to plagiarism detection tools (e.g., Turnitin) and train students and faculty on their proper use to encourage self-checking and accountability.
4. It is further recommended to develop departmental policies and consequences for plagiarism, clearly communicated to all scholars to discourage unethical practices.
5. Encourage mentorship and supervision practices that guide students on proper citation, paraphrasing, and referencing techniques during research work.

6. Address external pressures such as publication demands by offering research planning and time management support to reduce the temptation to plagiarize.

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Print ISSN 3006-4627

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