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Academic Corruption: Plagiarism

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Corruption Marring the Originality of Individuals in Academics

Corruption is a spiritual and moral impunity from an ideal. The word "corrupt" means utterly broken. The word was first used by Aristotle and later by Cicero. When we talk about corruption, what comes to our mind is the corruption taking place in social, economic and political spheres. But seldom has we come across the question as to why corruption is on increase and why it has become an integral part of the individual lives? Corruption is not a virus that enters into the bodies of humans when they become adults. It becomes a part of their personalities since their young age. Now the question arises as to how a young kid can be corrupt because at that age, he has nothing to do except study.

The kind of corruption which is found in the academic field is termed as plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined as,

A piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work. (Gibaldi 45).

Usually when we read about this kind of academic dishonesty, we think that it is generally the research scholars who commit the crime of plagiarism. But we are wrong when we think this. The habit of copying the words and ideas of others is not developed automatically at the age of 25 or after. It is a gradual process that becomes a part of an individual's personality by and by. In schools, when the children are asked to write essays or some other prose writings, they prefer to copy their material from some books or other sources. They do so in order to avoid committing errors and consequently avoid getting rebuked by their teachers. When the students write something, their writings are replete with errors and as a result, the teachers scold the students for committing such mistakes. Teaching and education are very noble professions because their aim is to reform the personality of the individual. Teachers usually get happy when they find the writings of their students free from of all kinds of errors. But this is completely wrong because the duty of the teacher is to focus on the mistakes committed by their students. Instead of feeling happy on seeing the error free writings of their students, they should try to find out the reason as to how the students at such a tender age, are able to use such high flown vocabulary. But they by shirking their duty, promote dishonesty and mars the originality of the individual. This kind of plagiarism is called unintentional plagiarism.

Every person is bestowed with the faculties of reason and thought. But these faculties can develop only if the individual himself makes efforts to do so or if the people around him encourage him to think on his own. But the drawback of the situation is that neither the person himself endeavors to think on his own nor his relatives encourage him to develop his own thought process. Thus, the very education which should aim at promoting the personality of an individual leaves no stone unturned in creating obstacles in his path. If the young student will

depend thoroughly on the available material, how can he progress in his life? What kind of education is that which teaches one to become a dishonest and a corrupt individual? Such a type of dishonesty hampers the overall growth of the students and consequently of society as a whole.

Plagiarism is the dishonesty that develops with the birth of the child and remains with him till the end of his life. The term plagiarism is derived from the Latin word 'plagiarius' which means committing literary theft by presenting someone else's ideas as one's own ideas. Plagiarism consists of two kinds of wrongs----

(i). When a person uses another's ideas and information without acknowledging them, they are guilty of committing an intellectual theft.

(ii). When a person passes off another's ideas, information or expressions as one's own in order to get a good grade, he is guilty of committing a fraud which is more of moral and ethical nature than a legal one.

Plagiarism is looked upon as a form of cheating by copying. If a student makes use of material which is taken from the works of another writer, without clearly and explicitly giving credit to that writer, he commits the blunder of plagiarism. The material which he borrows from other sources can be text, pictures, graphs, statistics, diagrams, photographs or facts that are not common knowledge. If the material is taken from some other source, that source must be cited at the point where it is used.

Although plagiarism is not a criminal offence, its consequences can be as bad as those of criminal offense. The charge of plagiarism is a serious one for all the writers. Plagiarists are looked upon as incompetent persons who feel themselves at a loss to develop and express their own ideas and thoughts. The charge of dishonesty and corruption is leveled against such people and it spoils their image in society completely. The serious consequences of plagiarism reflect the value that the public places on trustworthy information. When students are exposed as plagiarists, they suffer severe penalties ranging from their failure in the assignment or in the course to expulsion from his educational institution. Their one mistake ruins their entire life. The shortcuts that they make use of in their lives can land them in great trouble. Moreover, plagiarists, especially students, break a thin thread of trust that they share with their teachers or mentors. They not only spoil their images but also those of their guides. By doing so, they hamper man to man relationship which should be based on the pillars of love, care, affection and trust. Most importantly, students as plagiarists lose the golden opportunity of exposing their talent and originality through their works. Just getting a degree is not enough; what matters is the procedure as to what difference we feel in us before and after getting a degree. Students who plagiarize obstruct the growth of their development of their personality. Knowing how to collect and analyze information and reshape it in the academic writing is very essential to the success of the student. Education aims at teaching the student to think novel ideas but by imitating and copying, students deviate from the real path of education. Such a shortcut can help students in obtaining degrees but not in achieving success.

The major consequence of plagiarism is that students who engage in it hurt themselves greatly. Good research and writing consists of a host of skills like evaluating sources, taking careful notes, selecting good quotations, paraphrasing and giving credit to others for their ideas and words. Students who plagiarize are at a loss to learn such great skills and their lives remain

deprived of achieving true perfection. Usually, in schools, colleges and universities, it is a habit among students that if they have not done their works, they tend to copy from the copies of their classmates in order to avoid getting punished. This is also the act of plagiarism. Such students hurt other students as well who have done their work. Turning in plagiarized work is unfair to the students who do their work. Students by copying the ideas of their classmates, lower the value of their works. It also jeopardizes the integrity of the whole grading system. Plagiarism tends to violate the whole atmosphere of the classroom--- by violating student to student relationship and student to teacher relationship. Schools, colleges and universities are meant for providing knowledge to the students. It is a place where teachers work hard in order to alleviate the educational standards of their students but plagiarism brings an end to all the efforts that teachers resort to in order to polish the future of the students.

Plagiarism undermines the whole notion of academic integrity on which the academic world is grounded. Sharing knowledge is something different from copying ideas. Teachers share knowledge with one another and with their students. Students share knowledge with one another. There is no offense as far as sharing knowledge is concerned. For writing a research paper or an essay, we can depend upon the previous knowledge. For example: if we want to write an essay on Mughal Period or on Shakespeare, there is no harm in seeking help from the books related to our topic. Depending upon something or copying down something is two different acts. Students are not wrong if they refer the books that are valid for their subject matter but if they are copying down the material word by word from those books, they are at fault. All knowledge depends on the knowledge that comes before it as Sir Isaac Newton has opined, "If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants" (Bartleby Quotes). By borrowing the knowledge from the works of great writers, we can reform our writing as well as our mental abilities. But by copying their ideas, we try to make their ideas our own, which is an unpardonable offense.

While referring sources whether books or web, we tend to prepare notes. There are 3 main types of note taking----

(i).Summary

(ii).Quotation

(iii).Paraphrase

When we read a passage, we need to give ourselves time to consider as to what information may be helpful to us. Sometimes a source may provide us more detail than we actually need. At that point, we think of summarizing the whole information in our own words. At other times, the whole passage may be important for us and we need to take detailed notes on it. To do so, we read the whole passage carefully, and then jot down all the important points. We make use of our own ideas and sentence structure to prevent ourselves from committing the act of plagiarism.

Quotation is another technique used in writing research papers or other prose works. While scripting our papers, we sometimes feel the need of quoting other writer's words in order to support our personal ideas. There can be similarity between the ideas of two persons but the problem arises when the similarity occurs not between the ideas but between the words of two persons. While quoting a writer's words, we need to transcribe that material exactly as it appears, word by word and comma by comma. If any small detail is missed out, the writer will be accused

of committing the crime of unintentional plagiarism. While quoting, it is very important to make use of quotation marks in order to distinguish the quotation from summary and paraphrase.

Paraphrasing is that when we do not need the exact wording of the passages we read, we wish to paraphrase it i.e. restate the whole material in our own words. In paraphrasing, we write in our own words the sentences. In this case, the sentence structure is completely different from the sentence structure of our sources. Robert Harris has quoted UNC Writing Centre Handout on Plagiarism which says,

Paraphrasing does not mean changing a word or two in someone else's Sentence, changing the sentence structure while maintaining the original words, or changing a few words to synonyms. If you are tempted to rearrange a sentence in any of these words, you are writing too close to the original. That's plagiarism, not paraphrasing.(87)

The following example is indicative of the various ways a student commits plagiarism. The original sentence is taken from page 921 of Baylor's U.S. History text book, The American Pageant by Thomas Bailey, et al:

“The burly Khrushchev, seeking new propaganda laurels, was eager to meet with Eisenhower and pave the way for a summit conference with Western leaders”.

By changing a word or two, by using synonyms or by quoting fewer words from the above sentences, we commit the crime of plagiarism. Sometimes we tend to rearrange the sentence structure as follows---

“Seeking new propaganda laurels, Khrushchev was eager to meet with Eisenhower. He wanted to pave the way for a summit conference with leaders from the West.”

By doing this, the student is accused of committing the plagiarist act. Therefore, we can say that paraphrasing does not mean that the student should not acknowledge the writer whose ideas he has made use of in his work. Even if he paraphrases, he needs to cite the author as well as the text from where he has borrowed the material.

It is so unfortunate that a person by copying ideas does not realize that he is not only cheating others but also himself. He is being hypocritical to himself. He tries to believe that what he has done is perfectly alright because everybody does the same. But this justification of his act is not at all sufficient. He tries to shut his eyes to heinous corruption that he adds to the academic field. This kind of corruption encourages many others to do the same. They also feel like adopting easy paths to get their assignments done. Students are considered to be the nation builders. Such students who develop the taste of corruption since their school times, will definitely build the nation but not on the pillars of honesty and progress. They will work towards the development of such a world in which the only ruling element will be corruption. They will not hesitate in passing off their corrupt mental states to the subsequent generations. Some of them may become academicians and they too will not leave any stone unturned in ruining the sacred image of education. Such people will develop the habit of cheating and they will continue to cheat themselves and others throughout their lives.

The true personality, the talent of the plagiarists never gets a chance to come before others. They themselves fail to realize their hidden talent that can help them in achieving heights of success. How unlucky these people are! By plagiarizing, they mar their originalities. By cheating from others works, they tend to relegate themselves to an inferior status. This kind of corruption is difficult to be detected because it is committed by those who have claimed respect in the society by using designations like Dr. before their names. But if seen at a deeper level, this type of corruption is very dangerous as it is prevalent in that sphere which is considered to be the motivating force behind the success of every individual. Until and unless, students will not make use of their own ideas, there can be no development in educational field.

This paper has presented a journey of a person from the stage of unintentional plagiarism to intentional plagiarism. Such a mindset, which has become accustomed to cheating and adopting shortcuts, is very much capable of committing higher degree of plagiarist acts like copyright infringement. It is the crime of reproducing and distributing an entire copyrighted work without obtaining the permission to do so from the copyright holder. This is an infringement of copyright law and is a legal offense as well. In the 21st century, we associate the terms “piracy” and “theft” with copyright infringement. All the three terms are the product of a corrupt mind. A corrupt individual is capable of committing such crimes because for them the only thing that matters is more gain without pain.

The issue here is that corruption has become such an integral part of our lives that we take it for granted if we hear about someone accused of doing a corrupt act. Corruption is as serious a crime as murder is. While murder kills an individual, corruption kills the originality of an individual and a cheater is far worse than a dead person. Although many laws have been made to punish those who do corruption, but still this vice is prevalent in every nook and corner of the society. The main reason is that the world has become so fond of achieving success through easy means that they are ready to pay any price for this. They do not show an inclination to renounce their comfortable lifestyle. They do not want to labour hard in their lives. They just want to copy the ideas and paste them in their own works. If the very roots of a person are not strong, how in life can he turn out to be a true individual?

As it is well said, prevention is better than cure, similarly, people should prevent resorting to corrupt means in their lives. No doubt, laws are made to end corruption but the purpose will remain unachieved if people fail to realize their responsibilities of rooting out corruption. In educational field, there is an availability of a procedure by which plagiarism can be checked. There is a plagiarism checker which will check as to whether the contents of the individual's article/ dissertation/ essay are his own or copied. But the purpose of my research paper is not to make people aware of the laws and policies made to check corruption.

My point is that people should themselves consider it their responsibility to remain honest throughout their lives. Laws, policies and punishments cannot transform the nature of an individual. They cannot bring about any positive change in his personality. All that they can do is to threaten an individual and that too for some time. Just as the fear of whip can make an animal fearful for sometime but fail to tame it through and through, similarly, the fear of laws cannot root out the corruption which has entered in our blood and is flowing through our veins. We

themselves do not know when from the unintentional acts of corruption, we move to the intentional ones and then with the passage of time, we get so much accustomed to corrupt ways that we do not falter in committing heinous crimes of corruption. As Robert Harris has opined, “The truly scary thing about undiscovered lies is that they have a greater capacity to diminish us than the exposed ones. They erode our strength, our self-esteem, our very foundation”(33).

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