

**\*Correspondence:**

Dr. Suraksha Subedi  
Department of Periodontology and  
Oral Implantology  
Gandaki Medical College Teaching  
Hospital and Research Center, Pokhara,  
Nepal  
Email: surakshya691@gmail.com  
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1949-5440  
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# Plagiarism in academia: A persistent ethical challenge

Suraksha Subedi<sup>1\*</sup>, Rebicca Ranjit<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Periodontology and Oral Implantology, Gandaki Medical College Teaching Hospital and Research Center, Pokhara, Nepal

Academic writing begins with existing knowledge developed by previous scholars. The distinction between scholarship and plagiarism lies not in the use of existing ideas, but in the proper acknowledgment of their sources. By citing and building upon the work of others, researchers contribute to the ongoing development of knowledge while maintaining academic integrity. Among the various forms of academic misconduct, plagiarism is one of the most common and serious violations of ethical and scholarly standards. It is a form of intellectual theft that occurs when an individual presents another person's ideas, words, or work as their own without providing appropriate credit to the original source.<sup>1</sup>

Plagiarism undermines the principles of honesty, fairness, and trust that are fundamental to academic and professional work. It can result in significant academic, professional, and legal consequences, including loss of credibility, disciplinary action, and damage to one's reputation. Therefore, understanding plagiarism and its various forms is essential for maintaining ethical standards and ensuring the credibility of both academic and professional endeavors.

Commonly observed types of plagiarism include:<sup>2,3,4</sup>

- a) Direct plagiarism:** occurs when a person intentionally copies another author's work and presents it as their own.
- b) Self-plagiarism:** occurs when writers reuse their own previously published work without proper acknowledgment or citation.
- c) Mosaic plagiarism (patchwriting):** Contents are taken from multiple sources and combined into a single piece of writing without proper attribution.
- d) Accidental plagiarism** occurs when a writer unintentionally fails to cite sources, misquotes information, or paraphrases material too closely to the original text without proper acknowledgment.

Understanding the causes of plagiarism is important because it helps address the underlying issues and develop effective prevention strategies. Plagiarism does not always result from a deliberate attempt to deceive. In many cases, it stems from factors such as time constraints, poor time management, inadequate research skills, fear of failure, lack of knowledge about proper citation methods, cultural differences, and the ease of accessing information through modern technology.<sup>5</sup>

The damage caused by plagiarism extends beyond a single manuscript or assignment; it weakens confidence in the academic system itself. Individuals found guilty of plagiarism may suffer damage to their academic or professional reputation, face legal action for copyright infringement, and incur financial penalties. In educational institutions, plagiarism can result in failing grades, suspension, or even expulsion.<sup>1,5</sup>

Preventing plagiarism requires a combination of education, awareness, and

responsible writing practices. Effective prevention strategies include managing time efficiently, developing strong research skills, understanding citation styles, learning proper paraphrasing and summarizing techniques, seeking guidance from instructors, and reviewing examples of ethical academic writing. Educational institutions also play a crucial role in promoting academic integrity through training and awareness programs.<sup>1,5</sup>

Additionally, plagiarism-detection tools such as iThenticate, Turnitin, Grammarly, SmallSEOTools, PlagiarismChecker.co, and PlagiarismDetector.net can help writers identify and correct unintentional similarities before submitting their work. However, the increasing dependence on plagiarism-detection software has changed how we approach academic writing, yet originality cannot be measured by a percentage alone. True scholarship requires critical thinking, transparency, and respect for intellectual contributions. Although such softwares have become an important screening tool, reliance on technology alone cannot replace ethical judgment. Similarity reports identify matching text but cannot determine intent, originality of thought, or academic honesty.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, plagiarism takes many forms, ranging from obvious acts of copying to more subtle forms of intellectual appropriation. Its consequences extend beyond individuals, affecting institutions and communities by eroding trust, compromising fairness, and damaging reputations. Preventing plagiarism requires more than rules and software; it demands a commitment to originality, critical thinking, and ethical conduct. Academic integrity must be cultivated as a professional value, where originality, transparency, and respect for intellectual contribution

become fundamental principles of scholarship. By fostering a culture of academic integrity and encouraging responsible scholarship, students, educators, researchers, and institutions can work together to uphold the credibility and trustworthiness of the academic community.

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