Awareness and Perception of Plagiarism by Undergraduates in selected Faculties in University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Plagiarism is a highly debated issue that institutions of higher learning across the world must tackle. Yet, the rate of plagiarized work is alarming. This study examines the perception and awareness of plagiarism among undergraduates in selected faculties in University of Ilorin. The sample consists of 324 undergraduates selected from two (2) out of the twelve (12) faculties in the university. Data was collected, using a questionnaire distributed to the 324 respondents and responses were received from 314 of the respondents. Analysis revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of what constitutes plagiarism but they have negative perception about plagiarism. The reasons alluded to plagiarism are lack of referencing skills, laziness and lack of time management, assignment is difficult, everybody is doing it and poor writing skills. The study concluded that undergraduates in University of Ilorin have an average level of awareness of plagiarism and they still engage in the act of plagiarism. The study recommends that emphasis should be placed on educating students on what constitutes plagiarism through faculty workshops and that students must be given exercises on academic writing and they should also be taught the various referencing styles.

Keywords: Awareness, Plagiarism, Undergraduates, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Background to the study

The word plagiarism has been derived from the latin word plagiarius, which means kidnapping, marauding or plundering. Plagiarism is an act or instance of

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using or closely impersonating the thoughts and language of another author without authorization and the representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not crediting the original author (Kumari & Lakshmi, 2015). In addition, Kumar and Mohindra (2019) describe plagiarism as an act of research misconduct as it involves stealing of intellectual property of someone else. Therefore, plagiarism could be defined as the act or process of using or passing off another person's work or idea or information as your own. The utilisation of information has always been a common phenomenon among every person, especially in the academia. Students, irrespective of their status (undergraduate or postgraduate) use information to write their assignments, reports, and their research works. Also, the academia make use of information for their scholarly activities. Hence, individuals have ethical responsibility in the manner in which they use information (Bothma, Erica, Ina & Cecilia, 2011). The emergences of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have made it possible for free access to abundant information by information users. Now, large amount of information and knowledge are available in many sources due to the enormous development of ICTs. This has led to a significant increase in opportunity for research misconduct that resulted to plagiarism (Sarwar, Mohammed &Jabeen 2016). Several studies (Bothma et al., 2011; Sarwar et al.,2016) report that plagiarism is becoming more evident as technology enables easy access to online resources. Apparently, the information evolution has exposed students and researchers to the intellectual creations of other people without geographical constraints. The intellectual works include all forms of written and visual texts, multimedia products, music, spoken text, and audio text. It is only appropriate that when these intellectual creations (information) of other people are incorporated into students' works (writing assignments, reports, research projects) the appropriate acknowledgement and due credits are expected to be given in return (Abukari, 2016).

Similarly, Ramzan, Munir, Siddique and Asif (2012) stress that, the academia and scholarly society should be founded on ethics and integrity where new ideas are generated, research works are produced, and publicized for mankind to derive the maximum benefit with an expectation of acceptance. Universities and other tertiary institutions of learning exist not only to develop and create ideas through research but also to produce highly skilled and competent graduates with high standard of integrity, ethics, and professionalism to serve their community.

However, it is unfortunate that this is often not the case, mainly because students often present or use other people's published and unpublished ideas or intellectual products as if it is their own original work without acknowledging or crediting the source of information and thereby committing plagiarism (Bothma et al., 2011). This atrocities might be committed without knowing the inferences.

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Several studies (Wright &Newton, 2014; Voelker, Love & Pentina, 2012) point to the lack of student knowledge and skills as significant contributors to the overall problem of plagiarism in higher education. In view of the various studies, institutions have recognized that plagiarism has become endemic among students, therefore policies to curb plagiarism and to create awareness among students must be developed and adopted.

Reinhardt, Mletzko, Sloep and Drachsler (2015) define awareness as the cognitive ability of a person to identify, interpret and judge a given phenomenon. It refers to the knowledge about an object or event, the competences or skills, as well as the methods of operation, and any other phenomenon. Awareness plays an essential role, which might affect the perception and action towards plagiarism. So, awareness and perception levels of undergraduates could have effects on their involvement in plagiarism. The opinion formed by undergraduate towards plagiarism could be negative or positive which could be referred to as perception. Thus, perception towards plagiarism could be described as understood, interpreted or impression they have about it.

Undergraduates of University of Ilorin could not be exempted from plagiarism being one of the higher institutions in Nigeria that trains and equips students with the necessary skills and ability to become professionals in their various fields of specialisations. The University supports its students, lecturers, and community members by providing a well-equipped library and e-library facilities where Internet access is freely available. However, students abused the privilege of using electronic library to heighten the incidences of plagiarism in their coursework, where information is downloaded at will. Although, the university has a clear policy on plagiarism yet, majority of the students are not duly oriented about plagiarism. It remains unclear whether students are adequately aware of the issue of plagiarism. Therefore, this study investigates the awareness and the perception of plagiarism by undergraduates in some selected faculties of University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Plagiarism is a highly debated academic crime that institutions of higher learning across the world try to tackle yet, the rate of plagiarized work is alarming. Despite series of efforts that put in place to curb this ugly situation, the high rate of plagiarism still persists. Babalola (2012) stresses that academic misconduct undermines the principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Several authors (Chen & Chou, 2014; La, Jerebic, Urh & Jereb, 2018)report that the Internet has increased the potential for plagiarism, since information can now be easily accessed through the use of new technologies. So, one of the factors that

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influences plagiarism could be that students do not have a clear understanding of what constitute plagiarism and how it can be avoided.

In spite of series of studies (Šprajc et al.,2017; Babalola,2012) carried out on plagiarism, the problem of plagiarism still persists and, eating deep into our educational system. This has brought about various forms of academic misconduct that sabotage efforts towards academic integrity, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in one's work (Babalola, 2012). Sing and Guram (2014) report that a significant figure (93%) participants report that they are not aware and that plagiarism is never mentioned to them before they graduate. Selemani et al. (2018) investigated postgraduate's knowledge of plagiarism. The findings revealed that, a high level of them report that they have plagiarized both intentionally and unintentionally. Similarly, Mbilinyi (2018) examined academic employee and students' knowledge of plagiarism in University of Dar es Salaam Tanzania. The results of the study revealed that there is insufficient knowledge about plagiarism and the strategies for raising awareness. Despite the fact that plagiarism is not often acknowledged in most of the developing countries (Carnero et al.,2017). This might be as a result of peoples' perceptions on plagiarism. Mohamed, Mohy and Salah (2018) investigated the perceptions of undergraduate pharmacy students towards plagiarism. The findings show that the students' attitude towards plagiarism are satisfactory.

Based on the knowledge of researchers, it seems that there are little studies on awareness of plagiarism among undergraduates in University of Ilorin. Therefore, the study investigated the perception and awareness of plagiarism by undergraduates in selected faculties in University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study
The study investigates awareness and perception of plagiarism among undergraduates in selected faculties in University of Ilorin. The specific objectives of the study are to:
1. examine the level of students awareness of plagiarism in selected faculties in University of Ilorin;
2. determine the level of perceptions of students towards plagiarism in selected faculties in University of Ilorin;
3. identify the reasons for students engagement in the act of plagiarism in some selected faculties in University of Ilorin; and
4. identify strategies for preventing plagiarism in selected faculties in University of Ilorin.

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Methodology

The study has used a descriptive survey design. The total population of undergraduates in the two selected faculties (Communication and Information Sciences & Agriculture) in University of Ilorin is 1,718 (Unilorin Annual Report, 2019) Out of this, 324 respondents were selected as sample size for the study. The selection of this sample size is determined by using Taro Yamane (1969) formula which is states that:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N = population size

n = sample size required

e = allowable error (5%)

Based on the formula above,

$$n = \frac{1,718}{1+1,718(0.05)2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,718}{1+4.295}$$

$$n = \frac{1,718}{5.295}$$

n= 324.45

Therefore, the simple size is = 324.Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study from the two selected faculties.

Table 1: Table of Population of the Study

S/N	Name of Faculty	Population
1	Agriculture Sciences	1,260
2	Communication and Information Sciences	458
	TOTAL	1,718

Source:(Unilorin Annual Report, 2019)

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Results of the findings
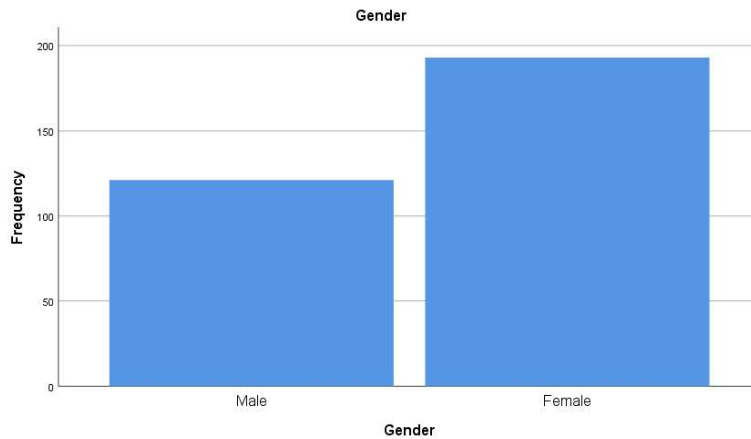### Demographic Information of Respondents

Figure 1: Respondents by Gender Status (n=314)

Figure 1 shows that 121(38.5%) of the respondents are male while 193(61.5%) are female. This means that the majority of the respondents are female.
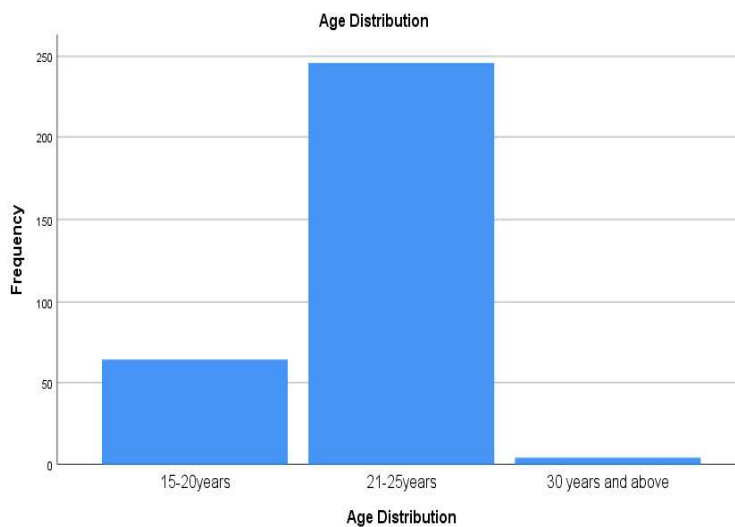

Figure 2: Age distribution by respondents(n=314)

Figure 2 shows that 246 (78.3%) respondents are between the age of 21-25years. 64 (20.4%) of the respondents are between the ages of 15-20 while 4 (1.3%) are between the ages of 30 years and above. This implies that majority of the respondents are between the ages of 21-25 years.
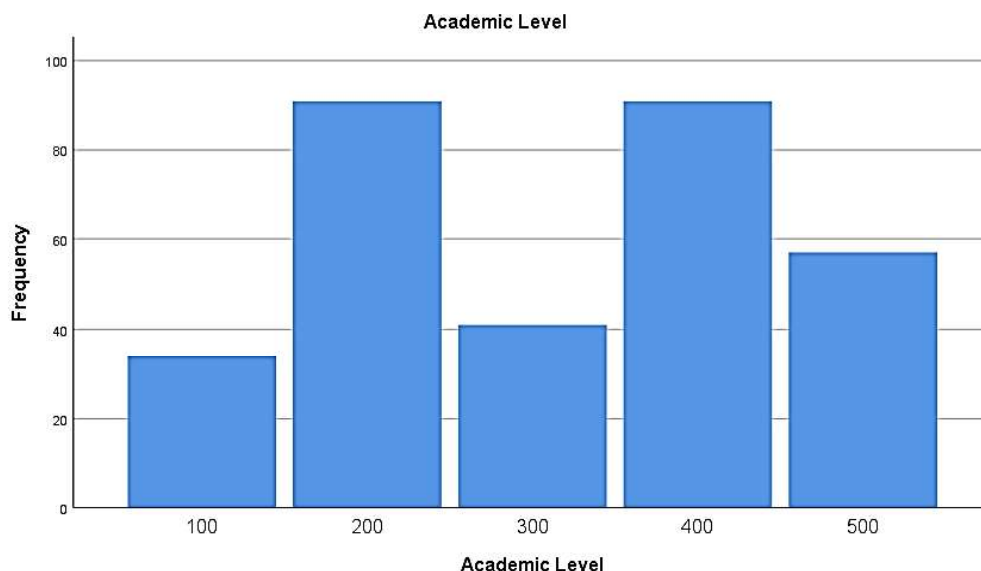
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Figure 3: Academic level by respondents (n=314)

Figure 3 shows that 34 (10.8%) of the respondents are 100 level students, 91(29.0%) are 200 level students while 41(13.1%) are 300 level students. In addition, 91(29.0%) are 400 level students and 57(18.2%) are 500 level students. It can be deduced that majority of the respondents are 200 level students

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of plagiarism among undergraduates in selected faculties in University of Ilorin?

Table 2: Level of Awareness of Plagiarism (n=314)

Research findings in 2 show the level of awareness of plagiarism among undergraduate students.

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree; SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree

S/N	Level of Awareness of Plagiarism	SA	A	SD	D
1	I am aware that copying word for word from a book or journal without acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism.	61 (19.4%)	248 (79.0%)	4 (1.3%)	1 (0.3%)
2	I am aware that copying verbatim from another person's work without using quotation marks.	46 (14.6%)	258 (82.2%)	5 (1.6%)	5 (1.6%)

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3	I am aware that paraphrasing a text without acknowledging the source.	22 (7.0%)	280 (89.2%)	1 (0.3%)	11 (3.5%)
4	I am aware that summarizing a text without acknowledgement.	36 (11.1%)	246 (78.3%)	4 (1.3%)	28 (9.0%)
5	I am aware that copying from a colleague's assignment.	49 (15.6%)	243 (77.4%)	13 (4.1%)	9 (2.9%)
6	I am aware that copying from the Internet without citing the source.	42 (13.4%)	243 (77.4%)	8 (2.5%)	21 (6.7%)
7	I am aware that not including reference in one's work constitutes plagiarism.	47 (15.0%)	239 (76.1%)	- -	28 (8.9%)

Source: (Author's Field Survey, 2021).
Merging of keys: SA+A=Agree; SD+D=Disagree

Table 2 shows that 309(98.4%) of the respondents have agreed that they are aware that copying word to word from a book or a journal without acknowledging the sources amounts to plagiarism while 5 (1.6%) have disagreed.… Furthermore, 282 (89.4%) have agreed that summarizing a text without acknowledgement is plagiarism while 32(10.3%) have disagreed. In addition, 292 (93.0%) have agreed that they are aware that copying from a colleague's assignment constitutes plagiarism while 22(7.0%) have disagreed. The result shows that 286(91.4%) have agreed that they are aware that failure to include references in one's work is a plagiarism, while 28(8.9%) have disagreed. It can be noted that the majority of the respondents are aware of the concept of plagiarism.

Research Question 2: What are the levels of perceptions of plagiarism among undergraduates in selected faculties in University of Ilorin?

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Table 1: Students' perceptions towards plagiarism(n=314)
Research findings in Table 3 show the undergraduate perceptions towards plagiarism.

Key: SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree; SD- Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree

S/N	Perception of Plagiarism	SA	A	SD	D
1	Copying word for word from a book or journal without acknowledgement is good.	8 (2.5%)	178 (56.7%)	70 (22.3%)	58 (18.5%)
2	Paraphrasing and summarising a text without acknowledgement should not be regarded as plagiarism.	29 (9.2%)	258 (82.2%)	4 (1.3%)	23 (7.3%)
3	Copying from a colleague's assignment with or without his/her permission is no plagiarism.	5 (1.6%)	188 (59.8%)	64 (18.2%)	64 (20.4%)
4	Copying portions of text from electronic sources isno plagiarism.	1 (0.3%)	210 (66.9%)	58 (18.5%)	45 (14.3%)
5	Submitting assignments without references is not plagiarism.	1 (0.3%)	231 (73.6%)	48 (15.3%)	34 (10.8%)
6	Including references one did not use in my project is not plagiarism.	6 (1.9%)	183 (58.3%)	64 (20.4%)	61 (19.4%)
7	Altering data or statistics isno plagiarism.	6 (1.9%)	191 (60.8%)	63 (20.1%)	54 (17.2%)
8	Submitting a work as an individual while it is written by a group is not bad in my view	6 (1.9%)	178 (56.7%)	89 (28.3%)	41 (13.1%)

Source: (Author's Field Survey, 2021).Note: SA+A=Agree; SD+D=Disagree.

Table 3 shows that 186 (59.2%) of the respondents have agreed that copying word to word from a book or a journal without acknowledging the source and equally using quotation marks is good, while 128 (40.8%) have disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 287(91.4%) have agreed that paraphrasing and summarizing a text without acknowledgement should not be regarded as plagiarism while 7(8.6%) have disagreed.... Furthermore, 189(60.2%) have agreed that including references that are not used in a project is not plagiarism while 125(39.8%) have disagreed. Also, 197(62.7%) have agreed that altering data or statistics in a work is no plagiarism while 117(37.3%) have disagreed. In addition, 184(58.6%) of the

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respondents have agreed that submitting a work as an individual while it is written by a group is not bad at all, while 130(41.4%) have disagreed with this statement. It can be deduced that the majority of the respondent have a negative perception about plagiarism.

Research Question 3: What are the reasons for undergraduates' engagement in plagiarism in the selected faculties in the University of Ilorin?

Table 4: Reasons for plagiarism (n=314)
Research findings in Table 4 reveal the reasons for undergraduates' engagement in plagiarism in some selected faculties in the University of Ilorin.

Keys: SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree; SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree

S/N	Reasons for Plagiarism	SA	A	SD	D
1	Poor writing skills	34 (10.8%)	258 (82.2%)	12 (3.8%)	10 (3.2%)
2	Lack of referencing skills	20 (6.4%)	286 (91.0%)	4 (1.3%)	4 (1.3%)
3	Laziness and poor time management	43 (13.7%)	256 (81.5%)	4 (1.3%)	11 (3.5%)
4	Class assignment is usually difficult to accomplish.	22 (7.0%)	252 (80.3%)	4 (1.3%)	36 (11.5%)
5	There much materials to be downloaded free of charge from the Internet	45 (14.3%)	233 (74.2%)	26 (8.3%)	10 (3.2%)
6	I do not know how to cite Internet sources and so make no citations	8 (2.5%)	284 (90.4%)	8 (2.5%)	14 (4.5%)
7	Pressure to succeed	21 (6.7%)	271 (86.7%)	- -	22 (7.0%)
8	Lecturers have never complained about plagiarism and so I find nothing with it.	9 (2.9%)	211 (67.2%)	38 (12.1%)	56 (17.8%)
9	Those who plagiarize often have better grades.	25 (8.0%)	243 (77.4%)	- -	46 (14.6%)
10	Everybody is plagiarizing, so why not join them?	24 (7.6%)	269 (85.7%)	- -	21 (6.7%)

Source: (Author's Field Survey, 2021).Note: SA+A=Agree; SD+D=Disagree

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Table 4 shows that 292(93.0%) of the respondents have agreed that poor writing skills is one of the courses of plagiarism while 32(7.0%) have disagreed. Also, 306 (97.4%) have agreed that lack of referencing skills is a reason why they engage in the act of plagiarism while 8(2.6%) have disagreed. Furthermore, the study shows that 299 (95.2%) have agreed that laziness and poor time management are also causes for plagiarism, while 15(4.8%) have disagreed. Similarly, 277(87.2%) have agreed that the reason why they engage in plagiarism is because class assignment is usually difficult to accomplish while 40(12.8%) have disagreed. ….Also, 293(93.3%) have agreed that the reason why they plagiarize is that everyone is plagiarist, so why should they not join the game while 21(6.7%) have disagreed with this statement. Thus, the findings suggest that majority of the respondents sees lack of referencing skills, laziness and poor time management, class assignment is usually difficult to accomplish, as everybody is plagiarizes, so why should they not. Again, poor writing skills, as they do not know how to cite and pressure to succeed as their reasons for engaging in plagiarism. (revise

Research Question 4: What are the strategies for preventing plagiarism among undergraduates in selected the faculties in University of Ilorin?
Table 5: Strategies used to prevent plagiarism (N=314)
Key: SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree; SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree

S/N	Strategies Used to Prevent Plagiarism	SA	A	SD	D
1	Information literacy	26 (8.3%)	20 (6.4%)	10 (3.2%)	258 (82.2%)
2	Orientation seminars	18 (5.7%)	41 (13.1%)	2 (0.6%)	253 (80.6%)
3	Academic writing training	13 (4.1%)	34 (10.8%)	7 (2.2%)	260 (82.8%)
4	Classroom lectures	19 (6.1%)	25 (8.0%)	5 (1.6%)	265 (84.4%)
5	Research Methods course	6 (1.9%)	260 (82.8%)	15 (4.8%)	33 (10.5%)

Source: Author's Field Survey (2021). Note: SA+A=Agree; SD+D=Disagree

Table 5 reveals the strategies used for preventing plagiarism among undergraduates in University of Ilorin. The result shows that out of 314 respondents, 46(14.7%) agree that information literacy is a strategy used to prevent plagiarism while 268(85.3%) disagree with this statement. ….. Moreover, 266(84.7%) of

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respondents agree to research methods course as a strategy used for preventing plagiarism on the one hand, on the other hand, 48(15.3%) disagree to this view. Therefore, the findings indicate that majority of the respondents agree that research methods course is one of the major strategies used to prevent plagiarism among the undergraduates in university of Ilorin.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of what constitutes plagiarism. The finding corroborates with the work of Cheema, Mahmood, Mahmood and Shah, (2011) who hve reported that most of the respondents are aware of the concept of plagiarism. In addition, the study has revealed that majority of the respondent have a negative perception towards plagiarism. This findings is in contracts with the findings by Mohamed, Mohy and Salah (2018)who have reported that the students' attitude towards plagiarism are satisfactory. Moreover, the study hs revealed that the majority of the respondents plagiarize because of various reasons such as lack of referencing skills, laziness and poor time management, for instance.. This study agrees with the work of Guo (2011) and Razera (2011) who has reported that laziness and lack of interests in the subjects are the most common reasons of plagiarism. Also, the result has showed that majority of the respondents have agreed that research methods course is one of the major strategies used to prevent plagiarism among undergraduates in University of Ilorin. The findings of present study contradicts the work of Mbilinyi and Msuya (2018) who have reported that communication skills course and orientation seminars. are the most common strategies used for preventing plagiarism. The reason for the contrary results of the two studies might be due to different study locations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that undergraduates in University of Ilorin have an average level of awareness of plagiarism. Although their level of perception of plagiarism is in no way in correlation to their level of awareness, they still engage in the act of plagiarism. This might be due to lack of referencing skills, laziness and lack of time management, poor writing skills, and pressure to succeed, as the major reasons why undergraduates in the University of Ilorin engaged in plagiarism.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are rendered:

1. Majority of the students are aware of what plagiarism is but their level of perception does not match up to the right academic conducts. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on educating students on what constitutes plagiarism through faculty workshops.
2. Appropriate guidelines should be given from the university regarding plagiarism to all undergraduates.
3. Students must be given exercises on academic writing and they should also be taught the various referencing styles and how to paraphrase correctly by faculty librarians.

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