

RELATIONAL ANALYSIS OF AWARENESS OF PLAGIARISM AND UTILISATION OF LIBRARY RESOURCES AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. The study was motivated by concerns regarding academic integrity and the effective use of scholarly information resources in postgraduate research. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 1,059 postgraduate students in Faculty of the Social Sciences in Federal universities within the South-South region of Nigeria. A sample of 318 postgraduate students representing 30% of the population was used for the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, of which 234 valid copies were retrieved and analysed, representing a response rate of 74%. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings revealed a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students ($r = 0.707$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that awareness of plagiarism plays a significant role in promoting responsible and effective utilisation of library resources. The study recommends the integration of plagiarism education into postgraduate training programmes and library user education initiatives to strengthen ethical research practices and enhance library resource utilisation.

Keywords: Plagiarism awareness, academic integrity, library resource utilisation, postgraduate students, information literacy.

Introduction

Academic libraries occupy a strategic position in postgraduate education because they provide the information resources and research support services required for advanced learning, scholarly inquiry, and knowledge creation. Postgraduate students depend on library collections and services to identify relevant literature, develop theoretical and conceptual frameworks, analyse existing knowledge, and produce original academic work. The ability of university libraries to support research therefore depends not only on the availability of information resources but also on the extent to which these resources are effectively utilised by students. Daniel (2022) and Francis (2023) similarly observed that academic libraries contribute significantly to postgraduate education by facilitating access to scholarly information required for research, teaching, and learning.

The utilisation of library resources remains a fundamental requirement for successful postgraduate research. Library resources include both print and electronic information sources such as books, journals, databases, institutional repositories, reference materials, and research support services that assist students throughout the research process. Effective utilisation of these resources enables postgraduate students to locate credible information, evaluate scholarly evidence, develop sound arguments, and produce quality research outputs. Consequently, the quality of postgraduate research is closely associated with the extent to which available library resources are appropriately accessed and utilised. This position is consistent with the findings of Muhammad and Ootobo (2022) and Agboke and Oladokun (2024), who reported that effective utilisation of library resources enhances research productivity and scholarly communication within universities.

Ethical issues associated with the use of scholarly information have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers and university administrators. Among these issues, plagiarism has emerged as one of the most persistent threats to academic integrity because it undermines originality, intellectual honesty, and the credibility of research outputs. As postgraduate students engage extensively with published literature during the preparation of theses, dissertations, seminar papers, and journal articles, they are expected to understand the principles of ethical information use and appropriate acknowledgement of intellectual sources. Montoneri et al. (2020) described plagiarism as a serious violation of academic integrity, while Singh et al. (2020) defined it as the use of another person's intellectual work without proper acknowledgement.

Awareness of plagiarism extends beyond merely recognising academic misconduct; it encompasses an understanding of proper citation practices, referencing conventions, ethical scholarly communication, and responsible information use. Students who possess adequate awareness of plagiarism are more likely to engage critically with scholarly literature, consult authoritative information sources, acknowledge intellectual contributions appropriately, and apply recognised citation standards in their academic writing. Consequently, plagiarism awareness has the potential to encourage more responsible and effective utilisation of library resources. This view is supported by Awasthi et al. (2024), who emphasised that plagiarism awareness promotes ethical academic writing and Nketsiah et al. (2024), who reported that increased awareness of plagiarism encourages responsible use of scholarly information resources.

The relationship between plagiarism awareness and library resource utilisation has become increasingly important within contemporary higher education because both

concepts contribute to responsible scholarship and academic excellence. Students who understand the consequences of plagiarism are more likely to rely on credible information sources, verify the authenticity of scholarly materials, utilise citation management tools, and participate actively in library-based research support services. Conversely, inadequate awareness of plagiarism may contribute to poor citation practices, inappropriate use of information resources, and reduced engagement with library collections.

Although several studies have investigated factors influencing library resource utilisation among postgraduate students, existing research has focused predominantly on technological infrastructure, information literacy, digital competence, and library service quality. Comparatively little empirical attention has been given to plagiarism awareness as a factor that may influence students' utilisation of library resources, particularly within federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Understanding this relationship is important because promoting ethical information behaviour may simultaneously enhance academic integrity and encourage greater use of scholarly information resources. It is against this background that this study examined the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing incidence of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct has become a major concern within higher education institutions worldwide. In Nigerian universities, postgraduate students are expected to conduct independent research and demonstrate high standards of academic integrity. However, evidence suggests that many students continue to experience difficulties in understanding

plagiarism and applying appropriate citation and referencing practices. At the same time, university libraries continue to invest substantial resources in the acquisition of print and electronic information materials to support research and learning. Despite these investments, concerns persist regarding the effective utilisation of available library resources by postgraduate students.

While previous studies have examined technological, institutional, and information literacy factors influencing library utilisation, limited attention has been given to the role of plagiarism awareness. It remains unclear whether students who possess higher levels of plagiarism awareness utilise library resources more effectively than those with lower levels of awareness. Although, previous studies have examined technological, institutional and information literacy determinants of library resource utilisation, empirical evidence on whether plagiarism awareness predicts utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria remains limited. This knowledge gap necessitated the present study.

Research Question

What relationship exists between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria?

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

Literature Review

Plagiarism Awareness

Plagiarism awareness has become an important aspect of academic integrity and responsible scholarship in higher education. As postgraduate students engage extensively in research, they are expected to demonstrate the ability to distinguish between original ideas and borrowed intellectual contributions while adhering to accepted standards of academic writing. Awareness of plagiarism therefore extends beyond merely recognising acts of academic dishonesty; it also involves understanding ethical information use, proper citation and referencing practices, attribution of intellectual property, and the consequences associated with academic misconduct. Consequently, plagiarism awareness has become an essential component of research competence and scholarly communication within universities. Singh et al. (2025) described plagiarism as the use of another person's intellectual output without proper acknowledgement, while Montoneri et al. (2020) viewed it as an act that compromises originality through the unacknowledged reproduction or imitation of another person's work.

A sound understanding of plagiarism requires knowledge of the various forms through which it occurs. Although plagiarism is often associated with direct copying of another person's work, the concept encompasses several practices that violate accepted principles of academic integrity. Direct plagiarism occurs when words, sentences, or ideas are copied verbatim from another source without quotation marks or appropriate citation and is generally regarded as the most obvious form of academic dishonesty (Montoneri et al., 2020). Paraphrasing plagiarism occurs when an individual rewrites another author's ideas without acknowledging the original source, even though the wording differs from the original text (Osman et al., 2015). Another commonly identified form is patchwriting, which involves combining phrases or sentences from multiple

sources with minimal modification while failing to provide adequate attribution. According to Awasthi et al. (2024), patchwriting is frequently associated with inadequate academic writing skills and poor understanding of citation practices.

Self-plagiarism also constitutes an important dimension of plagiarism awareness. This occurs when researchers reuse substantial portions of their previously submitted or published work without appropriate disclosure or citation. Although the material originally belongs to the author, its undisclosed reuse violates principles of academic transparency and publication ethics (Singh et al., 2025). Other forms of plagiarism identified in the literature include fabrication of references, falsification of sources, inappropriate collaboration, contract cheating, and misuse of citation management tools. These practices undermine scholarly credibility, diminish research quality, and weaken public confidence in academic outputs. Therefore, effective plagiarism awareness requires students to understand not only the definition of plagiarism but also its diverse manifestations within academic writing.

Awareness of plagiarism among postgraduate students has received considerable scholarly attention because of increasing concerns about research quality and academic misconduct in higher education institutions. Existing empirical evidence suggests that postgraduate students generally recognise plagiarism as an unethical academic practice and appreciate the importance of proper citation and referencing. However, studies consistently indicate that many students experience difficulties in identifying more complex forms of plagiarism, particularly patchwriting, inappropriate paraphrasing, self-plagiarism, and improper citation practices. Odongo et al. (2025) observed that although many postgraduate students possess a basic understanding of plagiarism, their practical ability to identify and avoid different forms of plagiarism varies considerably.

Similar observations were reported by Singh et al. (2025) and Awasthi et al. (2024), who concluded that conceptual knowledge does not necessarily translate into effective academic writing practices.

The level of plagiarism awareness demonstrated by postgraduate students is influenced by several educational and institutional factors. Information literacy competence, exposure to academic writing instruction, research methodology training, institutional academic integrity policies, supervisor guidance, and access to plagiarism detection technologies all contribute to students' understanding of ethical scholarly communication. Students who receive structured instruction on referencing techniques and responsible information use generally demonstrate greater awareness of plagiarism than those who rely primarily on personal experience. Nketsiah et al. (2024) reported that formal academic integrity training significantly improves postgraduate students' knowledge of plagiarism and citation practices. Likewise, Osman et al. (2015) found that systematic instruction in academic writing enhances students' ability to recognise and avoid plagiarism in scholarly work.

Universities have adopted several strategies to improve plagiarism awareness among postgraduate students. These include integrating academic integrity into postgraduate curricula, organising workshops and seminars on scholarly writing, providing access to plagiarism detection software, and strengthening institutional policies on research ethics. While plagiarism detection technologies have become increasingly important in identifying instances of academic misconduct, scholars argue that sustainable improvement depends more on continuous education than on punitive enforcement. Educational interventions that combine information literacy instruction,

citation management training, and academic writing support have been shown to produce more lasting improvements in ethical information behaviour. Mashaba and Pretorius (2024) as well as Vongkulluksn et al. (2024) therefore emphasised that plagiarism awareness should be viewed as an educational process that develops responsible researchers rather than merely as a mechanism for detecting academic misconduct.

Library Resource Utilisation

Library resource utilisation refers to the extent to which library users effectively access, retrieve, evaluate, and apply available information resources and services to satisfy their academic, research, and informational needs. Within university environments, utilisation extends beyond the physical use of books to include electronic databases, institutional repositories, online journals, reference services, digital collections, multimedia resources, internet-based information services, and specialised research support services. Effective utilisation of these resources enables postgraduate students to identify relevant literature, develop theoretical foundations, analyse existing knowledge, and produce credible research outputs. Daniel (2022) and Francis (2023) similarly noted that academic libraries provide essential resources that support teaching, learning, research, and scholarly communication.

The importance of library resource utilisation has increased considerably with the rapid expansion of digital information technologies and electronic scholarly communication. Modern academic libraries have transformed from traditional repositories of printed materials into hybrid information centres that provide both

physical and digital access to knowledge resources. Consequently, postgraduate students are expected to possess the competencies required to identify appropriate information sources, retrieve relevant scholarly materials, evaluate information critically, and use information ethically throughout the research process. Muhammad and Otobo (2022) argued that effective utilisation of library resources contributes significantly to research productivity and academic excellence by providing researchers with timely access to authoritative information.

Despite substantial investments in electronic information resources and digital library infrastructure, studies continue to report varying levels of library resource utilisation among postgraduate students. Several factors have been identified as influencing utilisation, including information literacy competence, awareness of available resources, digital skills, accessibility of library services, institutional support, internet connectivity, user education programmes, and research experience. Mukhtar and Maidabino (2021) observed that inadequate information literacy and limited awareness of available electronic resources continue to hinder effective utilisation among university students. Similarly, Agboke and Oladokun (2024) reported that technological advancement alone cannot guarantee effective utilisation unless accompanied by adequate user education and continuous capacity building.

Furthermore, effective library resource utilisation is closely associated with responsible information behaviour. Postgraduate students who appreciate the importance of academic integrity are more likely to consult authoritative information sources, evaluate the credibility of scholarly materials, and apply appropriate citation and referencing practices. Consequently, library resource utilisation should not be viewed merely as the frequency with which resources are accessed but also as the

quality, appropriateness, and ethical manner in which information resources are used to support scholarly activities.

Relationship between Plagiarism Awareness and Library Resource Utilisation

The relationship between plagiarism awareness and library resource utilisation is founded on the principle that responsible academic writing depends on the effective identification, evaluation, and ethical use of scholarly information resources. Postgraduate students who possess adequate awareness of plagiarism are more likely to appreciate the importance of consulting credible academic sources, acknowledging intellectual contributions appropriately, and adhering to accepted citation and referencing practices. These behaviours naturally encourage greater engagement with library collections and information services because libraries provide access to authoritative scholarly resources required for ethical research. Consequently, plagiarism awareness and library resource utilisation complement one another in promoting academic integrity and quality research outcomes.

Plagiarism awareness also encourages students to develop responsible information-seeking behaviours. Students who understand the implications of plagiarism are more likely to undertake comprehensive literature searches, compare information obtained from multiple scholarly sources, verify the authenticity of academic materials, and acknowledge all sources appropriately. Such practices require active utilisation of both print and electronic library resources, including books, peer-reviewed journals, institutional repositories, bibliographic databases, and citation management tools. As a result, greater awareness of plagiarism is expected to promote more effective and purposeful use of library resources throughout the research process.

From an information literacy perspective, plagiarism awareness represents an important dimension of ethical information use. Information literacy extends beyond locating and accessing information to include the ability to evaluate, organise, synthesise, and use information responsibly. Students who understand plagiarism are therefore more likely to demonstrate appropriate information literacy behaviours by selecting reliable information sources, avoiding unverified internet materials, applying recognised citation styles, and respecting intellectual property rights. These practices strengthen the quality of research and reinforce the educational role of university libraries in supporting ethical scholarship. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2000) similarly identified ethical use of information as one of the core competencies of information literacy.

Empirical evidence increasingly supports the existence of a positive relationship between plagiarism awareness and responsible information behaviour. Nketsiah et al. (2024) reported that postgraduate students with higher levels of plagiarism awareness demonstrated greater knowledge of academic integrity principles and were more likely to utilise plagiarism detection tools and scholarly information resources appropriately. Similarly, Mashaba and Pretorius (2024) observed that postgraduate students who participated actively in library instruction programmes and plagiarism awareness initiatives exhibited improved engagement with electronic library resources during their research activities.

Other empirical studies have also demonstrated that educational interventions aimed at improving plagiarism awareness contribute positively to students' research practices. Vongkulluksn et al. (2024) found that information literacy instruction significantly enhanced students' ability to identify credible scholarly information,

evaluate evidence critically, and apply ethical information use principles during academic writing. Likewise, Awasthi et al. (2024) concluded that increasing students' awareness of plagiarism improves citation practices and encourages greater reliance on authoritative academic information sources. These findings suggest that plagiarism awareness not only discourages academic misconduct but also promotes more meaningful utilisation of library resources.

Although previous studies have established positive relationships between academic integrity, information literacy, and responsible information behaviour, relatively few empirical investigations have specifically examined the relationship between plagiarism awareness and library resource utilisation among postgraduate students within Nigerian universities. Most existing studies have focused independently on plagiarism awareness, information literacy, or library use without explicitly examining how awareness of plagiarism influences students' utilisation of library resources. This creates an empirical gap, particularly within federal universities in South-South Nigeria, where postgraduate students increasingly depend on both print and electronic information resources to support advanced research. The present study was therefore undertaken to provide empirical evidence on this relationship and contribute to the growing body of literature on academic integrity and library resource utilisation.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was considered suitable because it enabled the investigation of the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students without manipulating any variable. The population of the study consisted of 1,059 postgraduate

students in Faculty of the Social Sciences in Federal universities located within the South-South region of Nigeria. A sample of 318 postgraduate students representing 30% of the population was selected for the study. A structured questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in Library and Information Science and related disciplines. A total of 318 copies of the questionnaire were administered, while 234 valid copies were retrieved and used for analysis, representing a response rate of 74%. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	152	65.0
Female	82	35.0
Total	234	100.0

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 152 (65.0%), while female respondents constituted 82 (35.0%). This suggests that male postgraduate students were more represented in the study than their female counterparts. Overall, the distribution reflects a gender imbalance in favour of male respondents.

Table 2: Programme Enrolled

Programme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
PGD	20	8.5
M.Sc.	114	48.7
M.Phil.	14	6.0
Ph.D.	86	36.8
Total	234	100.0

The results show that the majority of the respondents were enrolled in the M.Sc. programme (48.7%), followed by Ph.D. students (36.8%). Respondents in the PGD and M.Phil. programmes accounted for 8.5% and 6.0%, respectively. This indicates that most of the respondents were master's degree students.

Research Question: What relationship exists between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria?

Table 3: Pearson's r Between Postgraduate Students Awareness of Plagiarism and Utilisation of Library Resources

Variables	N	Awareness of Plagiarism	Utilisation of Library Resources	Decision
Awareness of Plagiarism	234	1	.707	Very Strong
Utilisation of Library Resources	234	.707	1	

Interpretation Guide: .00 to 0.30: Weak; 0.31 to 0.50: Moderate; 0.51 to 0.70: Strong; 0.71 and above: Very strong

The result presented in Table 3 revealed that the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria is very strong and positive. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient ($r = 0.707 \approx 0.71$) indicates a very strong positive relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students. This finding implies that as postgraduate students' awareness of plagiarism increases, their utilisation of library resources also tends to increase considerably. Students who are more knowledgeable about plagiarism are likely to rely more on credible academic sources available in the libraries rather than engaging in unethical academic practices.

Hypothesis: H01: There is no significant relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 4: Significance of Pearson's r Relationship Between Postgraduate Students Awareness of Plagiarism and Utilisation of Library Resources

N	Cal. R	P-value	Cal. p-value	Decision
234	+.707	0.05	0.00	S

S=Significant

The result in Table 4 showed that the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria ($r = +0.707$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$) is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Awareness of Plagiarism and Utilisation of Library Resources

The study revealed a very strong positive relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources among postgraduate students ($r = 0.707$). This implies that students who possess greater awareness of plagiarism are more likely to utilise library resources effectively in support of their academic work. The finding agrees with Nketsiah et al. (2024), Vongkulluksn et al. (2024), and Mashaba and Pretorius (2024), who reported that awareness of academic integrity promotes responsible information-seeking behaviour and greater utilisation of scholarly information resources. The finding also supports the Information Literacy Competency

Standards (ACRL, 2000), which emphasise ethical information use as a key component of effective information literacy.

Significance of the Relationship between Awareness of Plagiarism and Utilisation of Library Resources

The study further established that the relationship between awareness of plagiarism and utilisation of library resources was statistically significant ($r = 0.707$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that plagiarism awareness significantly influences postgraduate students' utilisation of library resources. The finding is consistent with Osman et al. (2015), Awasthi et al. (2024), and Odongo et al. (2025), who found that increased awareness of plagiarism enhances responsible scholarship and encourages greater engagement with academic information resources. The result underscores the importance of plagiarism education in promoting both academic integrity and effective utilisation of library resources.

Recommendations

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

1. Universities should integrate plagiarism education into postgraduate curricula, particularly within research methodology and academic writing courses.
2. Academic libraries should organise regular workshops, seminars, and orientation programmes on plagiarism awareness, citation practices, and academic integrity.
3. Librarians should provide continuous training on the use of citation management tools, referencing styles, and plagiarism prevention strategies.
4. Universities should strengthen policies on academic integrity and ensure that postgraduate students are adequately informed about plagiarism regulations and sanctions.

5. Library user education programmes should incorporate practical sessions on ethical information use, source evaluation, and responsible scholarly communication.
6. Institutions should encourage the formative use of plagiarism detection software as a learning tool rather than solely as a disciplinary mechanism.
7. Collaborative efforts should be strengthened among librarians, supervisors, and postgraduate coordinators to promote awareness of plagiarism and ethical research practices.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that promoting plagiarism awareness extends beyond preventing academic misconduct; it also encourages postgraduate students to engage more effectively with scholarly information resources. Strengthening plagiarism education may therefore improve both academic integrity and research productivity in Nigerian universities.

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