Expanding Plagiarism Policies for Doctoral Theses in India

Posted by [*Jonathan Bailey*](http://www.ithenticate.com/plagiarism-detection-blog/author/jonathan-bailey) on Sep 20, 2013 9:49:00 AM

In October of last year, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India [*proposed new regulations for the awarding of MPhil/PhD degrees in the country*](http://ibnlive.in.com/news/mandatory-software-to-detect-phd-plagiarism/297432-60-118.html). Among the requirements were that all schools must begin “using well-developed software” to detect plagiarism and other forms of “academic theft” and also provide an electronic copy to the UGC for inclusion in the organization’s Information and Library Network Centre ([*INFLIBNET*](http://www.inflibnet.ac.in/)), which is open to the public.

In addition to those changes, the UGC also added a requirement that all theses not on language subjects also have at least one copy submitted in English and that research supervisors must also attest to the originality of the work, including that no plagiarism has taken place.

The new regulations, which are required of all universities in the country that award PhDs, took effect this academic year and impacts all who registered for PhD on or after November 30, 2009. However, implementation has been somewhat slow though Universities are starting to implement the policies locally.

For example, [*Gujarat University in Ahmedabad recently announced their policy*](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-28/ahmedabad/39579066_1_gu-officials-copy-gujarat-university), which not only implements the UGC policies, but also threatens to blacklist any guide who has a PhD student that is discovered to have committed plagiarism.

This, according to most experts, [*is something of a cultural departure for India*](http://www.epw.in/web-exclusives/phd-theses-and-online-availability-india.html). Historically, the country has not required English-language submissions and PhD theses were very rarely, if ever, available to other researchers, much less the public.

Kailash Balani is the managing director for iGroup Infotech India, a provider of electronic resources across the region, including plagiarism detection. He says that, while the move was drastic, it was necessary.

“There have been cases of plagiarism and the government was concerned. The idea was to improve writing so that articles sent from India to overseas publishers have more acceptance and improve the quality of PhDs,” Balani said.

India is hoping to curtail and avoid many of the academic plagiarism scandals that have plagued other nations, such as Romania and Hungary. In that effort, according to Balani, *[iThenticate](http://www.ithenticate.com/products/overview%22%20%5Co%20%22iThenticate%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self)* and [*Turnitin*](http://www.turnitin.com/) are essential.

“Both iThenticate and Turnitin will play very important roles as there are no other such effective tools in the market,” Balani stated.

By using this software nationwide, India is working to ensure that only deserving candidates are granted PhDs and that, in turn, raises the value of such a degree from an Indian university. Over 100 Universities and Colleges and nearly 80 K-12 schools are using Turnitin and iThenticate in India.

However, it may be some time before this commitment pays off fully. As we’ve seen in Germany and elsewhere, it can take decades before plagiarism scandals come to the surface. The impact will not be immediate and it will only be through consistent use of the software that it will begin to have the desired effect.

Fortunately, Balani believes that Indian government has both the commitment and interest in expanding the project.

“They (the government) will have to extend this facility to all educational and research institutions. We have recently sold this service (plagiarism detection) to the Defense Research Development Organization and many other research institutions under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research,” Balani said.

In the end, the UGC policy on plagiarism in PhDs was a huge step forward for the nation and, though there will obviously be some roughness in implementing the plan, seeing large universities like Gujarat applying the policy shows that it is taking effect and will soon start helping universities filter out dishonest PhD candidates. That can only mean good things in the long term for the universities and their honest, hard-working PhD candidates.

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# **Rise of academic plagiarism in India: Reasons, solutions and resolution**

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Sir,

The process of disseminating the scientific information has undergone paradigm shift. Publishing research studies has become important for the academic promotions and to seek further research funding. With the desire to further the professional aspirations, misconduct has crept in the scientific research. The Office of Research Integrity (ORI), US, defines research misconduct as “fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.”[[1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref1)] Along with “fabrication” and “falsification", plagiarism is one of the “big three” crimes of the research fraud.[[1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref1)] A form of cheating, plagiarism is morally and ethically repugnant and is intellectually deceitful. The ORI defines plagiarism as being “theft or misappropriation of intellectual property and the substantial unattributed textual copying of another's work.”[[1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/%22%20%5Cl%20%22ref1)]

Academic plagiarism is on the rise in India also. Increasing pressure to publish, deficient training in ethical scientific writing, ignorance, oversight and lack of statutory controls and clear policies to deal with scientific misconduct in academics has led to the rise of research misconduct[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref2)] which can severely impact growth of India's higher education system.

Linking publications to individual's professional growth, academic promotions, and pay cheques have resulted in unethical publishing and indulgence in plagiarism. This is evidenced by dramatic rise in multiple authorship papers over the past few years, that too not only in low profile journal but also in some high profile journals.[[3](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref3)] Many substandard, new publications also referred as ‘*predatory publishers*’ have started where authors pay to get their manuscripts published; least realizing that publishing in such journals does not have any scientific value as these publications are not indexed in the approved indices. The manuscripts published in such journals are not peer reviewed and not cited, so there is no check on plagiarism, pre-print or post-print. Such publishers aim to dupe researchers especially those inexperienced in scholarly communication.[[4](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref4)] The Indian rules demand that all institutional/independent ethics committees (IEC), review boards (IRBs) should be registered with Central Drugs Standard Control Organization of Government of India but many have ignored the directives, hence there is no control over their functioning. The members of these ethics committees (ECs) are not appropriately trained and do not know what to look for in the research protocols before granting them the EC approvals. After granting approvals, these ECs do not bother about monitoring the progress of research approved by them. While there are some ECs in India doing good work, most are farcical and a blot on scientific research. What plagiarism they are going to check is anyone's guess.

Unlike ORI, India lacks an effective statutory body to deal with research misconduct in the academia and the cases are often dealt in *ad-hoc* fashion. The Society for Scientific Values (SSV) is an independent body of scientists with the goal of upholding ethics in the Indian Scientific community and is India's only watchdog group against research misconduct.[[5](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref5)] The SSV does not have legal powers and cannot go ahead until the university acknowledges it or the scientist accepts misconduct.[[5](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref5)] The society has been active in recent past over several cases involving plagiarism and has observed that when a case of plagiarism is brought to the notice of the institution, the usual practice of the institution is to ignore it and not respond to it. Even the prestigious institutions try to sweep the misconduct under the carpet and hesitate to come overboard against their faculty who is accused of plagiarism. Hence, those who indulge in plagiarism and go scot free, become bold to perpetuate it.

It is important to create awareness among the scientific writers toward what constitutes academic misconduct and plagiarism. Universities, journal editors and academia must educate the young researchers to follow the ethos and values of academic honesty and integrity.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref2)] The young researchers and scientific writers should not start their publishing career by plagiarizing and should rely on the tenets of ethical education, scientific self-confidence, sound knowledge and scientific curiosity.[[6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref6)] Cheating and plagiarism deprives the researchers from the learning experience that would have been possible otherwise. Lack of awareness about research ethics and lack of language skills lead to indulgence in plagiarism. In India the editor of *Current Science* found over 80 cases of plagiarism in articles submitted during 2006-08 due to author's poor understanding of what they should and shouldn’t do.[[7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref7)] Young researchers need better focused training to avoid research misconduct and they should be taught how to communicate scientifically.

Usually journal editors are the first to detect plagiarism but they lack resources, expertise and more importantly authority to conduct the confirmatory investigations. Investigating research misconduct is not only tough but time consuming necessitating scientific, administrative, legal expertise and the will to act. It calls for establishment of a formal, autonomous, functional ethics body with a clear policy on misconduct and plagiarism, but sadly India still does not have one. Database of all cases of plagiarism is required to be maintained with disclosure of all blacklisted plagiarists to name and shame them. A combined concerted effort on the part of authors, reviewers and editors is needed to maintain the originality in scientific literature.[[8](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/%22%20%5Cl%20%22ref8)]

If India wishes to emerge as global player in science and technology, it is important to achieve international credibility and integrity of the scientific research being reported, which currently is much below par.[[7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref7)] Indian scientific community has to seriously consider the issue of academic integrity and evolve norms, guidelines and code of conduct to curb the plagiarism. A national plan of action to combat plagiarism needs urgent and serious consideration.[[7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref7)] Plagiarism is merely the tip of the scientific fraud iceberg, but is one of the better known ‘worst practices’.[[1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/#ref1)] Now is the time for scientific journals to prevent plagiarism, before they are forced and compelled to cure it. Let us all join hands to keep the scientific community clean. It has to be remembered that cheats never prosper and we cannot afford to have the foundation of research which is based on cheating.

[Go to:](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4587026/)

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