



# Using Vignettes to Study Nigerian Undergraduates Cyber-ethical Behaviors

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## Abstract

Students' unethical academic practice on the internet is a global concern. The disquiet raises how well students understand cyber-ethical issues beyond what a few quantitative studies have revealed. This study investigates the undergraduate students' perception and comprehension of these issues in Nigeria using the qualitative approach, focusing on plagiarism and copyright infringement. Fifty students of the University of Ibadan and Lead City University responded to the questions. The data were analyzed using the Nvivo software tool. The vignettes generated helped significantly to expose the upshots. Although most participants reported their familiarity with the two cyber-ethical issues, many could not correctly explain them. Some respondents mixed up their perceptions of plagiarism and copyright infringement. The majority exhibited a relatively high level of comprehension of the issues. Half of the respondents would engage in plagiarism when faced with no other choice, even though overreaching copyrights seemed unattractive to them. These findings suggest that both students and their instructors need some enlightenment on cyber-ethics. The study created the enlightenment trajectory during the investigation by presenting the respondents with scenarios that enabled them to understand cyber-ethics.

**Keywords:** Vignettes, cyber-ethics, perception, perception, comprehension, undergraduate students, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Cyber-ethics is a broad term for the responsible actions in cyberspace that influence social, legal, political, and business activities and the guidelines for such actions (Srivastava, 2014). It is the study of ethics relevant to computer networks. It covers the users' behavior and its impact on individuals and society. Some issues related to cyber-ethics include copyright, plagiarism, cyber-bullying, and software piracy (Igwe & Ibegwam, 2014).

Ethics in cyberspace is essential as information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become part of life. Educational activities depend significantly on these technologies (Varlan & Tomozei, 2018). Students now use the computer and internet more for academics, entertainment, and social networking than ever before (Iyadat, Iyadat, Ashour, & Khasawneh, 2012; Amodu et al., 2019; Okorie et al., 2018).

While many users derive benefits from their use, cases of abuse, crime, and fraud are also growing concomitantly (Parks, Lowry, Wigand, Agarwal, & Williams, 2018; Varlan & Tomozei, 2018). For example, students' plagiarism practices have continued to concern researchers, faculty members, and higher institutions' management (Buraimo, Oyedokun,

Olusanya, & Adekunmisi, 2019; Idiegbeyan-ose, Ifijeh, Segun-Adeniran, Esse, & Owolabi, 2018). The Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC), in partnership with a United Kingdom Information Technology firm, agreed on the deployment of software that helps to tame the problem. Many Nigerian universities now carry out originality checks on students' dissertations and theses to ensure credible intellectual contribution to scholarship.

Although this vice-chancellors' initiative has succeeded in creating awareness among students, the problem has not abated (Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko, & Osinulu, 2016; Adeyeye et al., 2020; Yartey et al., 2021). Studies on higher institutions have also reported high levels of awareness of cyber-ethical issues, which are however not matched with avoidance (Adum, Ekwenchi, Odogwu, & Umeh, 2019; Amiri & Razmjoo, 2016; Babalola, 2012; Hosny & Fatima, 2014; Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2016; Maina, Maina & Jauro, 2014; Oyewole, 2017).

This situation raises how well students perceive and comprehend cyber-ethical issues, considering that most cyber-ethics studies adopted the quantitative approach, featuring only the questionnaire as the research instrument.

The quantitative approach cannot fully explore why students

behave unethically because of broader issues beyond the numbers. The qualitative approach, adopted in this study, helps understand meanings, motives, beliefs, values, and attitudes behind those numbers and the operationalization of variables (Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, the vignette technique for this study helped to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject.

### **The Problem Statement and Objectives of the Study**

Cyber-ethical issues continue to raise concerns among institutions of higher learning. The fact of students' awareness of cyber-ethical issues has not translated into high moral standards in academics. It appears that students do not have a clear understanding of the issues involved, meaning that their comprehension of those issues is also limited (Kashem 2016; Okafor, Imhonopi & Urin, 2011). Based on this background, this study used the vignette technique to elicit a more holistic view of students' perception and understanding of cyber-ethical issues.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the level of perception and

comprehension of cyber-ethics by undergraduate students of Nigerian Universities.

2. To investigate the influence of their comprehension on their intention towards cyber-ethical practices.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the level of perception of cyber-ethics by undergraduate students of Nigerian Universities?
2. What is the level of comprehension of cyber-ethics by undergraduate students of Nigerian Universities?
3. How does their comprehension influence their intention towards cyber-ethical practices?

### **Significance of the study**

The need to curb the prevalence of unethical academic practices in cyberspace makes it imperative to use a different approach in understanding how knowledgeable students are on cyber-ethical issues. An accurate understanding of these issues is the first step towards helping students to avoid them. Hence, for researchers, faculty members, and management of educational institutions, findings from this research would expose them to more critical areas they need to give attention to in reducing unethical

academic practices among students. Study outcomes on the perception and comprehension of undergraduate students can help formulate institutional policies on cyber-ethics. Findings from this study can also benefit Nigeria's copyright observers, including the country's copyright commission seeking to replace the obsolete Copyrights Act of 2004. According to Al-Ameen (2020):

There is something wrong with a law that routinely threatens teenagers and students with astronomical penalties for an activity whose implications they may not have fully understood (p. 185).

## **Literature review/Theoretical framework**

Plagiarism and copyright infringement are two cyber vices that have attracted much attention among information professionals. The plagiarist uses material without citing and referencing its source (Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2016). Word processing programs that allow students to cut smoothly and post materials electronically have heightened the proclivity for plagiarism (Hinman, 2002). A copyright is an exclusive right granted by the government to

reproduce, publish, and distribute the substance and form of something or an item over some time. Items such as literary works, movies, musical works, sound recordings, paintings, photographs, software, and industrial designs are a few examples (Intellectual Property, 2011).

A few studies have investigated students' awareness and perception of plagiarism and copyright infringement. Lindahl and Grace (2018) reported that over 98 percent of both students and supervisors were knowledgeable about plagiarism in two institutes in Europe and Africa. A similar high level of awareness was documented for undergraduates in Nigeria (Oyewole, 2017). Idiegbeyan-ose et al. (2016) reported that awareness and perception were unremarkable among the postgraduate students in federal, state, and private universities in the Ogun State of Nigeria.

Investigation (Sambo & Ojei, 2018) conducted on a Nigerian federal institution showed that students' remarkable level of plagiarism awareness did not translate to not practicing the vice. Adum et al. (2019) examined the awareness of copyright laws among Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduate students in Nigeria. They reported that most students had

a high level of awareness of copyright law violations and the attendant consequences. However, this awareness did not translate into copyright law compliance. These studies have shown that awareness does not translate into compliance (Osman, Ahmad, Rashidah, Yatim, & Saud, 2019; Starovoytova & Namango, 2016). What is more, these studies relied primarily on quantitative data without exploring the potential of qualitative exploration.

Vignettes are becoming visible in both quantitative and qualitative research designs. In quantitative research design, they are “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond” (Finch, 1987, p.105). In this case, the researcher presents them as a series of predetermined responses (Wilks, 2004). However, in qualitative research designs, vignettes are short scenarios about hypothetical characters and their behavior on which research participants can express their opinions and beliefs (Hazel, 1995; Hill, 1997; Hughes, 1998). Usually, participants are presented with a particular story or situation, often a moral dilemma. They respond by stating what they would do or how they expect the character to react, thus exploring the participants’

subjective belief system (Hazel, 1995). Participants are allowed to define a particular situation in their terms. Vignettes are thus valuable in exploring people’s beliefs, perceptions, and understanding of specific situations (Barter & Renold, 1999).

Moreover, according to Jenkins et al. (2010), vignettes enable an indirect and non-confrontational data collection method, especially when sensitive issues are involved. Vignettes are visible in research from various disciplines (Barter & Renold, 2000; Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000; Wainwright, Gallagher, Tompsett, & Atkins, 2010). The current study adopted the qualitative approach, using vignettes to understand students’ perception of cyber-ethical issues, anchoring it on the Situation Awareness (SA) theory (Endsley, 1988).

Endsley (1995) defines situational awareness as a three-point sequence. The order is the perception of elements in the environment within a volume of time and space, the comprehension of their meaning, and the projection of their status. The progression depicts perception, comprehension, and projection. The meaning here is that, beyond just being aware of the state of events, situational awareness also involves the ability to contextualize these events to facilitate their current and

future understanding. The SA theory is preponderant in studies with quantitative orientation.

Starovoytova and Namango (2016) adapted the theory in investigating the engineering students of a Kenya university. In Nigeria, Idiegbeyan-ose et al. (2016) used this theory to study the perception of plagiarism among postgraduate students in Ogun State. Oyewole, Rasheed, and Ogunsina (2018) adapted the theory to examine the perception and attitude of distant learners of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The current study dealt with perception and comprehension components in the context of qualitative tradition.

### Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to unveil the respondents' characteristics, opinions, and beliefs. The study

population comprised the University of Ibadan (UI) and Lead City University (LCU) undergraduate students, both located in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. UI had 15 faculties with a population size of 14,778, while Lead City University had ten with a population of 2,885 as of 2019.

Respondents' selection came via the multistage sampling method. The faculties that shared similar features emerged in the first stage. Faculties of Education, Science, Law, and Social Sciences – purposively materialized because they shared similar characteristics. A total of 50 respondents (30 from UI, 20 from LCU) emerged via convenience sampling, making any of the students eligible for investigation. Having more than 50 was not likely to produce any additional data or insight on the subject matter. Table 1 displays the selection.

**Table 1: Sample size for selected faculties**

Faculty	University of Ibadan		Lead City University	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Education	2,199	8	489	
Science	2,168	8	874	5
Law	775	7	530	5
The Social Sciences	1,070	7	992	5
Total	6,212	30	2,885	20

Structured interviews took place, and data collected using vignettes in short scenarios about a hypothetical character. According to Lorents, Maris, Morgan, and Neal (2006), scenarios are most helpful in understanding ethical issues. A scenario describes a situation and the resulting action (Pierce & Henry, 1995). Respondents will analyze the individual's actions in the scenario and state their opinion on any identified ethical issue. Plagiarism and copyright infringement were the issues in focus in the current study.

#### Scenario One - Plagiarism

Alfred's business management lecturer gives him a take-home assignment for submission in six weeks. Five weeks down the line, Alfred has been busy with other subjects. He also works after school, making it difficult to get started on the paper. The assignment is essential, up to 20 percent of the course grade. If Alfred fails the class, he may lose his scholarship and, subsequently, his studentship. This lax unsettles Alfred as the paper requires more than one week of effort. His solution is to photocopy pages from sources that deal with his topic. Using whole paragraphs from these pages, he hurriedly puts together his paper. He completes the

assignment, including a reference list with the sources he used.

#### Scenario Two – Copyright infringement

Alfred, a literature student, gets an assignment to write a short play to be staged in a state inter-school competition. However, he has access to foreign novels online, purchased by his father, a publisher. He picks one of the plays in a portable format, digests the content, changes the characters' names, and adds more characters to make the play more enjoyable. The set does not allow the coercing or cajoling of respondents. They have sufficient information about the purpose of the research before the commencement of the interviews. They respond to any noticeable ethical issue in each scenario by identifying it and stating their thoughts and opinions if they find themselves in such a scenario.

#### **Analysis and Results**

All interviews were recorded. Transcripts were analyzed thematically using the qualitative software tool Nvivo (Vers. 12). Table 2 shows the data.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents  
 Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of the participants. The table shows an equal representation

of the respondents' gender. Most of the participants were aged 21 to 25 years (60.0%), followed by 34.0 percent of respondents who were 20 years and below.

**Table 2: Demographic distribution of respondents**

Demographics	Variable	f	(%)
Gender	Male	25	50.0
	Female	25	50.0
Faculty	Science	13	26.6
	Social Sci.	12	24.3
	Education	13	26.6
	Law	12	24.3
Age (years)	20 and below	17	34.0
	21 - 25	30	60.0
	26 – 30	3	6.0

Perception of cyber-ethics  
 The first stage was to examine the participants' understanding of the concepts of plagiarism and copyright infringement. Participants responded to how they understood the two concepts, and their responses provided insight into their perception of these issues.

**Plagiarism**

The Nvivo word count (Table 3) shows that nearly half of the participants could not explain the

meaning of plagiarism at all. The sentence "I don't know" occurred 16 times (weighted percentage of 17.28), and "not heard of it before" occurred four times (weighted percentage of 4.94). Concerning students who offered explanations, some explained the concept clearly. In contrast, a few others reduced plagiarism to copying someone else's work without citing the source. Still, others confused it with copyright infringement. Figure 1 depicts these representations.

**Table 3: Word count for the perception of plagiarism**

Word	Length	Count	Weighted %
I don't know	10	16	17.28
Copying someone else's work	22	12	9.88
Not giving credit	15	7	8.64
Without adding reference	22	6	7.41
Not heard of it before	18	4	4.94
Copy and pasting	14	3	3.70
Presenting work as your own	23	3	3.70
Stealing someone's idea	21	2	2.47
Without acknowledging source	29	2	2.47
Copying verbatim	15	1	1.23
Copying without permission	23	1	1.23
Copying word for word	18	1	1.23

**Figure 1. Word cloud for the perception of plagiarism**

Below are some of the responses on plagiarism as perceived by the students.

“Plagiarism is copying someone else's work without adding all references, like copying and

pasting.” (Female, 20 years and below, Social Sciences, LCU)

“Plagiarism is, I have a creative work, I have not registered it, and somebody comes and steals it.” (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI)

*“Plagiarism means you're copying something that does not belong to you directly word for word. You're not changing anything; you're just bringing everything directly the way it is”* (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI)

“Plagiarism is stealing someone's original idea and making it look as if *it's actually your original work*. It's mostly common with students when they're doing their project”. (Female, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

“Plagiarism is a theft of another person's information, when you lift another person's information to copy it for your own use without informing the person.”

(Male, 26 – 30 years, Education, LCU)

#### Copyright infringement

As seen in Table 4, “I don't know” occurred 10 times, “using without consent” occurred 10 times, “copying someone else's work” occurred seven times, “related to plagiarism” occurred four times, “produce without authorization” occurred three times, “without permission” showed up three times.

**Table 4: Word count for the perception of copyright infringement**

Word	Count	Weighted %
I don't know	10	11.76
Using without consent	10	11.76
Copying someone else's work	5	5.88
Related to plagiarism	4	4.71
Produce without authorization	3	3.53
Without permission	3	3.53
Copy someone else's work	2	2.35
Intellectual right	2	2.35
Not heard of it before	2	2.35
Breaking terms of law	1	1.18
Copying without permission	1	1.18

Although almost a quarter of the students could not give their perception on copyright, many others made reasonable attempts, as shown in their responses below:

“I'm an author, and I just published a book and then someone now republishes the book without my consent. I think that's what it means, like using without the consent of the author”. (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

“Copyright infringement is maybe I photocopied your book, a published book, I photocopied and then went to publish it and sell or distribute without legal authority.” (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, LCU)

“I just know that, like let's say somebody writes a book or makes a movie or something and then

somebody else takes something out of it without the author's permission or the person that made the movie, that's *Copyright infringement*” (Female, 20 years and below, Science, UI)

**Comprehension on cyber-ethical issues**

This section investigated how well the participants understood the two cyber-ethical issues by presenting them with two scenarios: plagiarism and copyright. Each participant was asked two questions which are, 1) “Are there ethical issues in these scenarios?” and 2) “What are the ethical issues identified in the scenarios?”

Scenario one – Plagiarism

Thirty-nine responded, “Yes, there is” an ethical issue. At the same time, 11 believed there was no ethical issue in the scenario (Figure 2).

SCENARIO 1	0
AWARENESS RQ1	0
ETHICAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED	39
NO, THERE IS NOT	11
YES, THERE IS	39

**Figure 2: Awareness of ethical issues in scenario 1.**

The 39 students who said, “Yes, there is” an ethical issue were also able to

identify the ethical issues in the scenario. Nvivo word cloud (Figure

3) shows that most participants identified photocopy pages, whole

paragraphs, and plagiarism as ethical issues in the scenario.

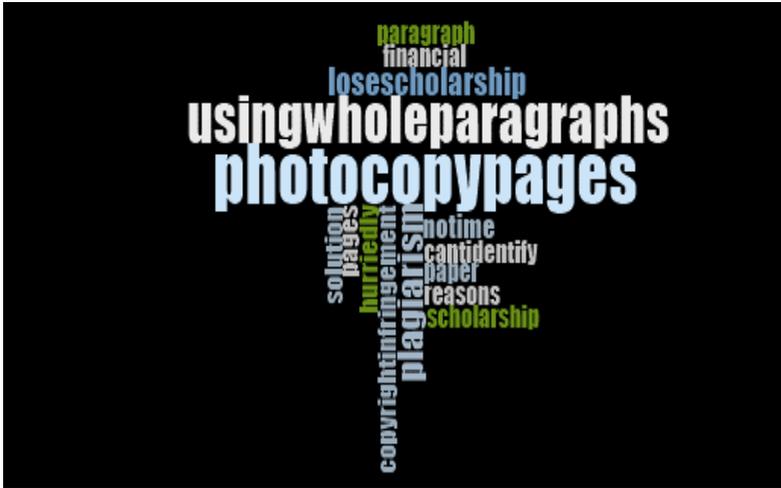


Figure 3: Word cloud for ethical issues in Scenario one.

Below are some of the responses showing the ethical issues identified by the students.

“That’s Plagiarism, it said, ‘his solution is to photocopy pages from sources that deal with his topic. Then using the whole paragraphs from these texts, he hurriedly puts together his paper.’” (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, LCU)

“He lifted whole paragraphs, even though he acknowledged his sources, *he lifted, that’s intellectual theft!* If you want to, you can just get the meanings or quote them, if you use

their work, you can just replace them with your words, and then acknowledge that this person is the creator of this idea.” (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

“Alfred photocopied pages from sources that deal with his topic, and he put the materials directly; no editing, no reading and digesting, nothing! It’s just like carrying it and putting it under his name, not like he picked something of his interest, not like he read and, you know, rephrased; he just carried it directly. I don’t think he’s supposed to do

that." (Female, 20 years and below, Education, UI)

"Ok, the phrase I want to bring out from there is 'using whole paragraphs from the pages' and he just put everything together, and the ethical issue here is that he was not supposed to photocopy everything directly just like that. He was supposed to interpret it in his way, but he just lifted everything the way it is and just pasted it like that, that is the only ethical issue." (Male, 26 – 30 years, Education, LCU)

In the case of the participants who said there was no ethical issue in the scenario, some claimed that Alfred had no other choice since the assignment was urgent and did not want to fail.

"No. I mean, he didn't have a choice, he just had less than a week to finish the assignment. If that was the only way he could actually finish the assignment, then fine!" (Female, 21 – 25 years, Education, LCU),

"No. Because I feel Alfred, okay let me say he's this kind of guy that is actually serious with his studies; he doesn't want to fail, and at the same time he's also like into something that is fetching him money, so it's kind of difficult for him to balance the two." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

Other participants, especially those in the range of 20 years and

below, believed that providing a reference list vindicated Alfred from any unethical practice.

I do not think so because Alfred added references to it from the sources *he used*. *I don't think there is an issue; he did the right thing* (Female, 20 years and below, Social Sciences, LCU)

"Any? The fact that he copied, ok, he made photocopies of some pages, but he also made sure that he submitted the assignment with the reference list of the sources he used; I don't think so because he made his reference list and submitted it with the assignment." (Female, 20 years and below, Law, LCU)

"I don't think so. Because even though he used people's work for his assignment, he gave references or made the lecturer know that he didn't do it on his own, that he had help from other people, he made sure those people's names were mentioned in his assignment. (Male, 20 years and below, Law, LCU)

"*I don't think that it's plagiarism because he acknowledged the fact that it wasn't his intellectual work*" (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI).

"I don't see any ethical issue. He had the reference list with the sources he used that's why I don't see any issue. All I would say he did is that he just

copied. There is something we call copy and paste like he didn't add any of his understanding of the paper, he just copied directly from the source, but at least he was able to make a reference list." (Female, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

Thirty-seven participants responded that there is an ethical issue in the scenario. However, only 33 were able to identify the ethical issues. Thirteen respondents, however, said “No,” as revealed in Figure 4.

Scenario Two - Copyright Infringement



**Figure 4: Awareness of ethical issues in scenario 2.**

Many of the respondents who admitted that there were ethical issues believed that Alfred was wrong to have changed and added more characters (Table 5). Moreover,

some representative responses below show that many of the students believed that Alfred ought to have sought the author's permission.

**Table 5: Word count for comprehension of copyright infringement**

Word	Count	Weighted %
Changes names of characters	13	46.67
Added more characters	9	15.00
Picks one of the plays	6	10.00
Copyright infringement	4	6.67

“The ethical issue I can identify from this excerpt is, one, he copied. After

digesting the foreign book's content, he copied it and then changed the

names and the characters and added more. In a way, he was still building on the person's idea; the idea wasn't his own; it's already an existing idea. So I think that is a copyright infringement." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

*"The ethical issue there is copyright. Maybe because I'm quite familiar with theater production and the likes so I know that in this kind of situation, what most people do is to adapt. So, there's something called an adaptation; you adapt someone's work, but you still credit the person whose work you adapted, but it wasn't mentioned here that he did that. Obviously, this is a copyright issue. The fact that he just picked the PDF and then changed the names and characters."* (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI)

"Yes, because why would you go and download somebody else's story and change the name of the characters without formally informing the person and letting the person know that you want to use the story?" (Female, 21 – 25 years, Education, LCU).

"Everything about this is wrong. You stole someone else's work and just changed the title. That's stealing straightforward. That's wrong. You shouldn't do something like this. This is a copyright infringement. You

shouldn't just go and copy. This is stealing someone else's work because you have not published it, and I published it before you, it's my work, and you can't take it away from me." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, LCU)

"Yeah, changing the names of the characters of a book and changing the name of the book is very unethical because it's not his character, it's not his idea, it's just someone stealing *and putting his characters!*" (Male, 21 – 25 years, Science, LCU)

Among students who believed that there was no ethical issue in the scenario, many expressed this as commonplace among students, not excluding themselves. At the same time, some saw this act as being smart.

*"To me, there is no ethical issue because what he did was just to like; he had access to the books he purchased online, so let me say he kind of like improvised. He just changed one or two, so there's nothing wrong with that. It's what students do. He is just smart."* (Male, 21 – 25 years, Science, UI)

*"No. We all do that, most of the plays we act are not originally ours, and this was published online, he changed names and added more characters. I don't think there is any ethical issue."* (Female, 21 – 25 years, Law, LCU)

"It's what students do. It's what I, too, can do if I'm in that kind of situation. You don't expect me to search; I'll just look for two or three novels, something like that and just improvise. If I'm in such circumstances, I'll do the same *definitely*." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

Many of the students believed there was no ethical issue in Scenario Two. They attributed this to Alfred changing the characters' names and adding more characters, making the play more enjoyable. The respondents claimed that ideas are not new, and since Alfred changed the characters' names, he did not commit any crime.

"He changed the characters and added more characters; he added more characters which actually *means it's fine, it's really okay*" (Female, 21 – 25 years, Education, LCU)

"Well, I don't think so. To me, there is no ethical issue because what he did was just that he had access to the books he purchased online, so let me say he improvised. He just changed one or two, so there's nothing wrong with that." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

"There is really no ethical issue. I'm in the middle at this point. I'm in the

middle because it's not like he carried it directly; he changed the characters, he added to the number of characters, and he made the play more interesting. Obviously, he must have added some things to the characters' parts or most of the characters' parts to make it interesting more than the other person's work. I don't think there is any ethical issue there." (Female, 20 years and below, Education, UI)

"No, *I don't think there is any ethical issue*. Everybody is a writer. I am a writer; we always write because we have read from different sources. I *don't know if this is clear*; nobody brings a new idea; nothing is new under heaven. The things that we call new ideas are all just a combination of old ideas seen from a different perspective. He changed the characters and added more characters, and by doing so, he would have consequently added more events to make the story whole and complete. Because he changed the characters and the events, that changed the whole thing, because stories are built, and short plays and dramas are built from events and characters mostly, so if you change these and they are not the same thing as what you read, there is no unethical conduct." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

## Intention Toward Cyber-Ethical Practices

Respondents' intention toward cyber-ethics was explored by asking them what they would do when faced with similar circumstances as Alfred.

### Scenario one – Plagiarism

The Nvivo word cloud in Figure 5 shows that more students would respond the way Alfred did. Although they know plagiarizing is a vice, some reported that they would still act as Alfred did because they did not want to fail.

“Same thing. Yes, but I know it's wrong.” (Female, 20 years and below, Social Sciences, LCU)

“The thing is I will actually think about the assignment, I will think

about ways to maneuver within that week and meet up. But if I can't or there is no way for me am sorry I will have to follow Alfred.” (Female, 20 years and below, Science, LCU)

“If I was Alfred like I said, I'm also a student, and then no one wants to fail; I don't want to fail. If it happens that I'm taking 14 courses and I'm trying my best to do well in the 14, I'll definitely flop in one. So if I'm given an assignment, I may not have the time to go through it. Maybe I'm having an assignment for this course, and I have a test for another course I'll definitely want to prepare for the test more because I can't cheat in this test. But for the assignment, I can get help from other sources, I think I'd actually do what Alfred did, to be sincere.” (Female, 20 years and below, Social Sciences, UI)

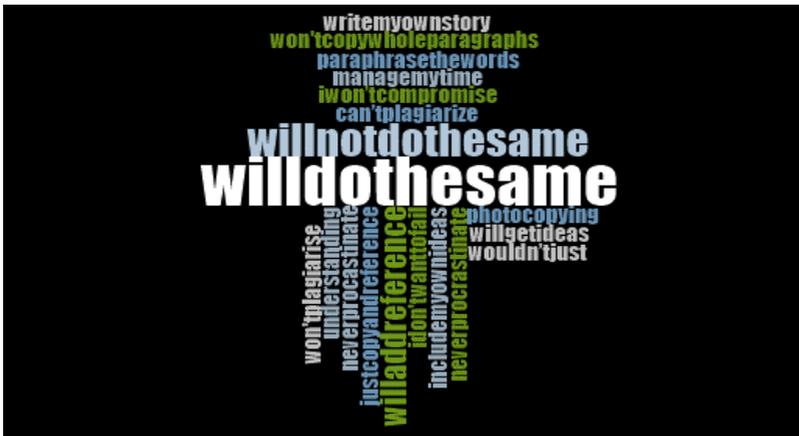


Figure 5. Word cloud of the intention of students – Plagiarism

Many students also said that they would not do what Alfred did (Figure 4). Reasons cited included their religious belief and academic

*“As a Christian and as a law student, I won't compromise. It is just about time management and how to be smart, time yourself, arrange your timetable and have everything done.”* (Female, 20 years and below, Law, UI)

*“I will honestly try my very best even if I can't get a couple of sites that deal with the topic that I am requested to write on. Personally, I don't think it is super hard to get points from an article and then build on those points. I think that is what I would do. I wouldn't just copy and paste as he did.”* (Female, 21 - 25 years, Science, UI)

*“No, No!. I will start it earlier, and I will stop everything am doing. I won't do this. I will go through the material and pick some lines but make sure there are footnotes and references in it, not everything. I*

#### Scenario Two – Copyright Infringement

As shown in Figure 6, more students reported that they would not do what Alfred did. Many expressed that they would instead develop their

discipline. They expressed their opinion that better time management would prevent them from plagiarizing.

*mean, I can't copy the whole paragraph”.* (Female, 21 – 25 years, Law, LCU)

*“There's something we call time management. You should be able to manage your time and know-how to maneuver a few things, so once you know how to manage the time, I don't think you'll have any problem. If I could not manage my time and had a little time left, I think I'd do what I know how to do best. Whatever little I know on that paper, I would just give it my best no matter how little it is and work on it. Then, I will know that whatever score I'm getting from that paper or whatever the result is, you know this thing is from my own effort, and you know when you fail it you know that you are to blame because you didn't put more effort into that work.”* (Female, 20 years and below, Education, UI)

idea even if such an idea is not as spectacular. They believed that doing otherwise shows a lack of creativity.

*“I have been faced with something similar before, drafting a mock scenario for a competition. You just have to sit down and think. You use*

your brain to think. You should. It *doesn't necessarily have to be as spectacular as some people's work*, because they also started from somewhere, it is a challenge for you to put in effort into what you do, you *don't just copy other people's work*, because those people did not just get those things done by sheer luck, they put in the effort and even if it is luck *pray for your luck too*". (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

*"But I don't think I would actually have stolen someone's story and changed characters like Alfred did because that's lack of creativity as a writer. He should read a vast amount of books, gather ideas, and just imagine himself in a world where the people are. I won't do what he did"*. (Female, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI)

*"If I was in his position, there was no way I wouldn't have come up with a short play being a literature student, I can draw instances, or I can draw techniques from other people's work, the settings of their movies and that will really help as a guideline."* (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences LCU)

*"I would come up with my own story because it is possible that this same thing I got online someone else has gotten it, then we end up doing the same thing, and there is a kind of*

*controversy. I might even be disqualified because they won't know the exact person that copied who, so both of us might get disqualified. So I will just come up with my own idea since it is a competition."* (Female, 20 years and below, Science, UI)

Others expressed that they would seek permission from the book owner.

"Number one thing you should do is, ask the author for permission. If the author is dead, and as I said, it's free if it's in the public domain. But if the author is still alive, ask for permission because you might be refused permission, and in that instance, you have to look for another play to use, but if you can't ask for permission and it's something you have to pull off real quick, you should always give credit." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Law, UI)

*"If I was the one I will try and reach out to the person whose work I'm trying to use and make him see whether I want to develop it into a sequel or just adapt and develop something more."* (Male, 21 – 25 years, Social Sciences, UI)

*"I'll probably contact the owner of the information online. I believe there will be contact through email or whatever. So what I will do is to contact the person and inform the person that I want to use the*

information, and after that, I will state there in my play or at the end, something like 'Adapted from.'" (Male, 26 – 30 years, Education, LCU)

Some participants assumed that simply citing the author of the book absolves them of copyright infringement.

"I will source for materials online, and if the materials I got online suit what I want to do, then I will gather ideas from those materials. If at all I'm going to use somebody else's

work, at least I'm going to make *reference to the person.*" (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

"Personally, I can look into somebody else's idea, maybe on a particular play, and develop something out of that, but if it's something that should be written down or a project work, I would reference the person." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Education, UI)

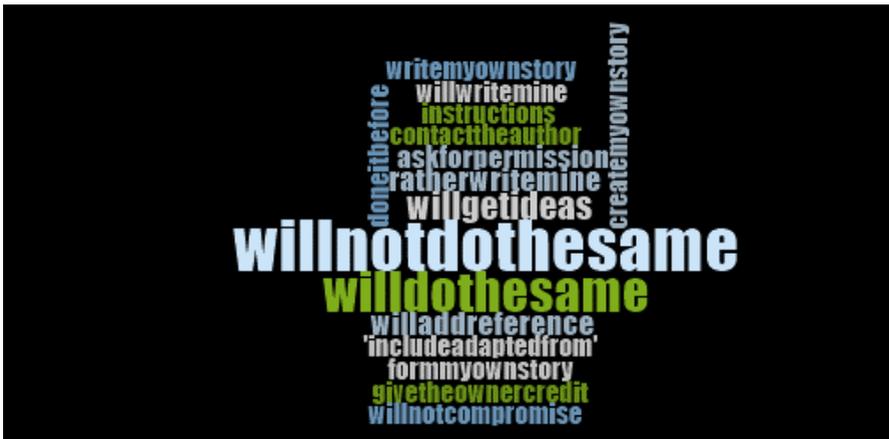


Figure 6: Word cloud of the intention of students – Copyright infringement.

Some participants, however, said that they would do what Alfred did. Reasons stated include limited time and difficulty of the task assigned.

"If the time given is limited, I have no option than to do exactly what Alfred did, but if I have enough time to write my play within the time

given, I think that will be the best option for me. But if I have limited time, I am going to do the same thing." (Male, 21 – 25 years, Science, UI)

"Let's say I'm given a project to do if I tell the lecturer that I can't do it and then he says you must do it, then probably I would do what Alfred did." (Male, 20 years and below, Science, LCU)

"It depends on the play actually, if it's something I can relate to and something I can do, like use my creativity to do, yes I would do that myself, but if I can't really do it, yes I *would just do what he did.*" (Female, 20 years and below, Science, LCU)

A respondent said he would repeat Alfred's action because he believed it did not negatively affect the original author.

*"I think this one*, though, his action is neither wrong nor right because it is not affecting anyone negatively in any way. It might be positive to Alfred in the sense that he gets to present something for the competition and the chances that he might win. But the original author of the foreign novel he got online, there is really nothing because he *wasn't directly importing word for word*, I think this is fair use of such,

*so it's okay.*" (Male, 21 – 25 years, Science, UI)

### **Discussion and implication of findings**

Results showed that many undergraduates did not have a problem explaining what copyright infringement meant. However, responses indicated that many did not understand the concept of plagiarism. A third of the respondents could not explain how they perceived plagiarism. This result contradicts Oyewole et al. (2018), which reported a high awareness of plagiarism among distant undergraduate learners of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. However, the current findings agree with Adum et al. (2019), which observed a high level of awareness on copyright laws among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria. Some respondents believed that plagiarism was all about copying a text without author attribution. On the other hand, others could not clearly distinguish between plagiarism and copyright infringement when they expressed their opinion that plagiarism is about copying another person's work without permission.

Whether or not students substantially understand what constitutes plagiarism has been a concern among information

professionals. Dawson and Overfield's (2006) findings from a Manchester Metropolitan University undergraduates study showed that students do not usually understand the boundary between plagiarism and acceptable practice. About a decade later, Permana and Santosa (2018) reported a similar finding concerning the EFL students in Singaraja, Bali. The authors reported that although the students were aware of plagiarism, they still required their teachers to explain acts that constituted plagiarism.

Likewise, Muriel-Torrado and Fernández-Molina (2015), in their survey of Spanish university students, revealed some understanding about copyright infringement, which was far below the requisite knowledge in the proper use of copyrighted materials. In this study, the participants' perception of what constitutes plagiarism is about copying an author's idea without citation. This simplistic and unrealistic insight is fragile. Many undergraduates may continue to indulge in copying and posting others' works, believing that they are not guilty of plagiarism after citing the authors.

Interestingly, more than two-thirds of the participants could identify ethical issues in both scenarios when presented with the scenarios. The majority said it was

wrong for Alfred to have copied the entire pages as seen in the first scenario and using another author's book without permission as read in the second scenario. Supporting findings in the current study, an earlier study by Oyewole (2017) revealed that the level of awareness of the issues associated with computer ethics by the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, was high. Most respondents were familiar with the subjects of fraud, hacking, child pornography, copyright, and software theft in the study. Tella and Oyeyemi (2017) also reported that most undergraduates at the University of Ilorin (Nigeria) were aware of copyright infringement to a reasonable extent. As noted earlier, these studies were carried out using quantitative approaches that might not necessarily reflect the students' comprehension of cyber-ethical practices. Notwithstanding, this current study's outcome buttresses the fact that many undergraduates can identify a cyber-ethical issue when confronted with one.

Although many of the participants were able to identify ethical issues in the scenarios, quite a number reported that they would do what Alfred did in both scenarios, especially in plagiarism. This finding clearly shows that students' comprehension of cyber-ethics does

not restrain them from committing the crime. When students engage in unethical practices, that is not always a result of an inadequate understanding of the issues involved. This finding agrees with Adum et al. (2019), which reported that undergraduates engaged in copyright infringements despite the significant level of awareness of copyright laws. Selemani, Chawinga and Dube (2018) reported that pressure for good grades was the dominant reason postgraduate students of Mzuzu University in Malawi engaged in plagiarism. Others included laziness and poor academic skills.

Although participants in the current study cited the fear of failure and inadequate time as the reasons for engaging in unethical practices, lack of adequate academic skills appears to be a subtle reason for students' unethical writing practices. In a study investigating undergraduates of an Australian university, Roberts (2008) observed that while almost 80 percent of the students claimed they possessed good academic skills required to avoid unethical practices, less than 50 percent reported confidence in their use. According to Louw (2017), students often commit unethical acts such as plagiarism due to inadequate skills needed to avoid them. Permana and Santosa (2018) reported similar findings of EFL students in

Singaraja, Bali, where they admitted their lack of understanding behind their continued breach of copyright laws.

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the perception and comprehension of undergraduates on selected cyber-ethical issues. A key finding in the study is that participants had a better comprehension of the issues. The study also found that although many of the students had a relatively high comprehension of cyber-ethical issues, many reported that they would still engage in unethical practices, especially plagiarism. Copyright infringements appeared more comfortable to commit than plagiarism among the students.

Although this study adopted the qualitative approach, it has significantly substantiated the initial two findings of several studies. First is students' reasonable level of awareness of these unethical issues. Second is their continued engagement in plagiarism and copyright infringement, despite their awareness.

### **Recommendation**

This study has exposed the need for more enlightenment on cyber-ethical issues for students. While instructors and administrators have a role in

creating awareness and ensuring strict adherence to ethics in online materials for academic activities, an important aspect that should be given attention is providing training on how students can avoid engaging in unethical issues. This shift in instructors' understanding of students' needs concerning their perception of cyber-ethical issues would mainly help students avoid unethical practices.

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