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### Policy and Practice Replications of Research Misconduct in Higher Education Institutions in Uganda

Ssemanda Philipo<sup>1</sup>, Muweesi Charles<sup>1, 2\*</sup>, Nabakiibi Agnes<sup>1, 4</sup>, Luttamaguzi John Bosco<sup>1</sup>, Kaweesi Muhamadi<sup>2</sup>, Sserwadda Lawrence<sup>3</sup>, Kalule John<sup>4</sup>, & Mugabo Augustine<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Muteesa I Royal University, P. O. Box 322, Masaka, Uganda.

<sup>2</sup> Busitema University, P. O. Box 236, Tororo, Uganda.

<sup>3</sup> Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang Province, 321004, P.R. China.

<sup>4</sup> Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda.

\* Author for Correspondence Email: [cmuweesi@gmail.com](mailto:cmuweesi@gmail.com)

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*Research Misconduct,  
Academic Integrity,  
Plagiarism,  
Ethics,  
Falsification.*

Research misconduct in higher education Institutions (HEIs) is a growing concern that undermines academic integrity, scientific progress and public trust and thus this paper focuses on the causes of plagiarism and falsification of research in higher educational institutions with a focus on the Ugandan context with concentration on establishing the causes and effects of plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning as well as identifying possible measures which can be adopted to minimize plagiarism and falsification of research. Using a Narrative qualitative design, responses were obtained from lecturers and students using Nkumba University as a case study with the help of interviews and focus group discussions. The findings of the study revealed that plagiarism and falsification of research is driven by various causes such as intense academic pressure, inadequate training in research ethics and the lack of strict penalties for unethical behavior; and this undermines the credibility of research which leads to the dissemination of misleading information that can misguide public policy, medical practices and further scientific inquiry. Therefore, higher institutions must adopt comprehensive measures to prevent and manage plagiarism and falsification of research by implementing policies and structures, such as clear ethical guidelines, transparent reporting mechanisms, and independent oversight committees are essential to fostering a culture of accountability.

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher Educational Institutions are critical to the Country's socio-economic development. They produce skilled professionals in fields such as medicine, engineering, education, and agriculture, which are essential for addressing national development priorities outlined in Uganda Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). The Institutions also contribute to research and innovation, particularly in areas like public health, agricultural productivity, and environmental sustainability. Research and innovation are critical components of higher education Institutions because they drive knowledge creation, technological advancement, and socio-economic development. Higher institutions such as Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, and Kyambogo University have established research centres and institutes to address local and global challenges in areas like agriculture, health, and environmental sustainability (Ssengendo, 2016). Research outputs from these institutions contribute to policy formulation, community development, and the global knowledge economy.

However, the quality of research and innovation is often compromised by practices of research misconduct, which undermines academic integrity. Among the most prevalent forms of misconduct are plagiarism and falsification, both of which violate

ethical standards and institutional policies (Resnik, 2014). Plagiarism involves the unauthorised use of another's ideas, words, or data without proper attribution, while falsification refers to the manipulation or fabrication of research findings (National Academy of Sciences, 2009). These practices not only harm individual careers but also damage the credibility of academic institutions and the broader scientific community.

Plagiarism remains a pervasive issue in academia, facilitated by the ease of access to digital resources and the pressure to publish (Scanlon, 2011). Some students and researchers intentionally or unintentionally plagiarise due to poor understanding of citation norms, time constraints, and competitive academic environments (Charles, M., *et al.*, 2024). Institutions employ plagiarism detection software and educational programs to mitigate this issue, but cases continue to arise, which leads to retractions, sanctions, and reputational harm (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016).

Falsification of research, though less common than plagiarism, also poses severe consequences for scientific progress. This misconduct involves altering or fabricating data to support desired outcomes, driven by the pressure to secure funding or achieve high-impact publications (Fanelli, 2009). High-profile cases of falsification have led to retractions, loss of funding, and legal repercussions,

which calls for the need for rigorous peer review and data verification processes (Steneck, 2006). False findings always mislead future studies and policy decisions. Thus, this study will answer queries related to the causes of Plagiarism and Falsification of research, its impact on the academic future and possibly the solutions to mitigate such arrays using a case of Nkumba University in Uganda.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research paper examines the practices of research misconduct in higher education institutions in Uganda.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objectives.

- To establish the causes of plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning.
- To examine the effects of plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning.
- To identify possible measures that can be adopted to minimise plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to collect data.

- Which factors contribute to plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning?
- What are the effects of plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning?
- What measures can be adopted to minimise plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning?

### **Theory of the Study**

The study was guided by Institutional Theory, which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The theory is a prominent framework in sociology and organisational studies that examines how institutions such as organisations, norms and cultural frameworks influence behaviour and decision-making (Scott, 2005). It emphasises the role of social structures, rules and norms in shaping organisational practices and individual actions. The theory highlights how organisations operate within an institutional environment that shapes their structures and practices, which leads to conformity with societal expectations rather than efficiency-driven decisions. Organisations adopt practices and structures to gain legitimacy in their field, even if those practices are not directly linked to performance outcomes. Institutional Theory was highly relevant in studying the factors contributing to research misconduct in higher education institutions because it provided a framework for understanding how external and internal institutional pressures shape organisational behaviour and individual actions (Pamela, 1999). The theory highlighted how universities as organisations are influenced by coercive pressures, mimetic pressures, and normative pressures. These pressures create environments where research misconduct is either discouraged or inadvertently enabled, depending on the institutional culture and priorities.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Plagiarism And Falsification of Research in Higher Institutions**

Many factors contribute to plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions. One of the primary factors is the intense pressure on academics to publish. Universities often require staff members to publish a certain number of papers to qualify for promotions or tenure, which creates a "publish or perish" culture (Ojambo, 2018). This pressure leads researchers to cut corners, thus

resulting in practices such as data fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism. The lack of adequate support for research, such as funding and mentorship, expands this issue, therefore pushing some researchers to engage in unethical behaviour to meet institutional demands (Charles, M., *et al.*, 2022). Many researchers and students in higher institutions lack sufficient training in research ethics and integrity. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for them to understand the importance of ethical research practices and how to avoid misconduct (Ssengendo, 2016). Without proper training, some researchers unintentionally engage in unethical behaviours such as improper citation or failure to obtain informed consent from participants.

Furthermore, the absence of good institutional policies and frameworks to address research misconduct is a significant contributing factor. Many institutions lack clear guidelines on research integrity, plagiarism and data management, which leaves researchers without a clear understanding of what constitutes misconduct (National Council for Higher Education, 2021). In addition, the lack of dedicated offices or committees to oversee research ethics and integrity further weakens the ability of institutions to detect and address misconduct effectively. It is also important to note that even in institutions where policies exist, the enforcement mechanisms are often weak or nonexistent. Limited resources and capacity to monitor research activities mean that misconduct can go undetected or unpunished (Twinomuhwezi *et al.*, 2020). For example, the absence of plagiarism detection software or regular audits of research data in most institutions allows unethical practices to persist.

In a related development, the competitive nature of securing research funding and academic recognition also drives researchers to engage in misconduct. Because of limited funding opportunities available, some researchers feel compelled to exaggerate findings or manipulate data to make their proposals more appealing to funders (Kwesiga & Ahikire, 2006). Similarly, the desire for recognition and

career advancement also leads to unethical practices such as ghostwriting or honorary authorship, where individuals are listed as authors despite minimal contribution to the research.

Another important point is the cultural attitudes toward academic success and recognition (Nandagire, P., *et al.*, 2023). In some cases, the emphasis on achieving academic qualifications and titles may overshadow the importance of ethical research practices (Mamdani, 2007). Societal tolerance for minor ethical breaches, such as copying or sharing work, normalises misconduct and makes it more acceptable within academic circles.

Similarly, researchers in some institutions often face challenges in accessing essential resources such as journals, databases, and research tools. This limitation hinders their ability to conduct rigorous and original research, leading some to resort to unethical practices like plagiarism or data fabrication (Basaza *et al.*, 2010). Improving access to research resources and providing training on how to use them effectively can help reduce the incidence of misconduct (Muweesi, C., 2015). In addition, the absence of strong mentorship and support systems for early-career researchers and students contributes to research misconduct. Without guidance from experienced researchers, young academicians find it challenging to maintain ethical research practices (Ssengendo, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to establish mentorship programs and foster a culture of collaboration and support to address this issue and promote ethical research behaviour.

In addition to the above, the lack of strict penalties for research misconduct in higher institutions creates an environment where unethical behaviour thrives. In many cases, misconduct is either ignored or addressed with minimal consequences, which sends a message that such behaviour is tolerable (Ojambo, 2018). There ought to be the implementation of clear and enforceable penalties for misconduct, such as retraction of publications or

suspension of research privileges, to serve as a deterrent and reinforce the importance of research integrity.

Another factor is that research misconduct in higher institutions in Uganda is also influenced by global and systemic challenges such as the pressure to conform to international publishing standards and the dominance of Western research paradigms (Mamdani, 2007). These challenges create unrealistic expectations for researchers in low-resource settings and are bound to lead to unethical practices as they strive to meet global benchmarks.

### **Effects of Plagiarism and Falsification of Research on Learning**

Plagiarism and falsification of research severely affect and undermine the integrity of academic institutions. For example, when researchers engage in unethical practices such as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, it compromises the credibility of the institution and its research outputs (National Council for Higher Education, 2021). This erosion of trust can have long-term consequences, as stakeholders like students, funding agencies, and the public may lose confidence in the institution's ability to produce reliable and valid research.

Another immediate effect of plagiarism and falsification of research is the retraction of published work. When misconduct is discovered, journals often retract the affected papers, which can damage the careers of the researchers involved and tarnish the reputation of their institutions (Ojambo, 2018). Retractions can also lead to a loss of credibility for the researchers and their institutions, making it more difficult to secure future funding and collaborations.

Furthermore, plagiarism and falsification of research results in the wasteful allocation of valuable resources such as time, funding, and effort. When research is based on fabricated or falsified data, the findings are unreliable and cannot be used

to inform policy or practice (Ssengendo, 2016). This waste of resources is particularly detrimental in low-resource settings like Uganda, where funding for research is already limited. The diversion of resources to unethical research practices deprives legitimate studies of the support they need to address critical development challenges. Additionally, plagiarism and falsification of research can have serious implications for policy and practice, particularly in fields such as health, agriculture, and education. Policymakers and practitioners rely on research findings to make informed decisions, and when these findings are based on fraudulent data, the resulting policies and interventions may be ineffective or even harmful (Twinomuhwezi *et al.*, 2020). For example, in the health sector, falsified clinical trial data can lead to the adoption of unsafe or ineffective treatments, putting patients at risk.

On a similar note, plagiarism and falsification of research undermine the advancement of scientific knowledge by introducing false or misleading information into the academic literature. This can lead to the duplication of flawed studies, the misdirection of future research efforts, and the erosion of trust in scientific findings (Kwesiga & Ahikire, 2006). In Uganda, where research is increasingly recognised as a driver of development, the impact of misconduct on scientific progress is particularly concerning. It should also be noted that researchers found guilty of plagiarism and falsification of research often face severe professional consequences such as loss of employment, suspension of research privileges, and damage to their reputations (Ojambo, 2018). These consequences can have a lasting impact on their careers and make it difficult for them to secure future positions, funding, or collaborations. For early-career researchers, the stakes are even higher as a single instance of misconduct can derail their academic trajectories and limit their opportunities for advancement.



Plagiarism and falsification of research also erode public trust in science and academia. When the public becomes aware of unethical practices such as data manipulation or plagiarism, it can lead to scepticism about the validity and reliability of scientific research (Mamdani, 2007). This erosion of trust is particularly damaging in institutions where public support for research and innovation is crucial for addressing development challenges.

### **Curtailing Plagiarism and Falsification of Research in Higher Institutions of Learning**

According to Resnik (2014), well-defined policies provide a framework for ethical behaviour and ensure accountability. Institutions should develop and enforce clear, comprehensive policies on research integrity that define misconduct, outline reporting mechanisms, and specify consequences for violations. These policies must be communicated effectively to all researchers, including students and staff. Regular updates to these policies in line with evolving ethical standards are also essential to address new challenges in research practices. Anderson *et al.* (2013) emphasise that education fosters a deeper understanding of ethical principles and equips researchers with the skills to manage complex ethical dilemmas. Mandatory training programs on research ethics and integrity should be integrated into the curriculum for students and researchers at all levels. These programs should cover topics such as proper citation practices, data management, and the ethical implications of research misconduct. Workshops, seminars, and online courses are effective tools for delivering this training.

Fanelli (2009) highlights the importance of oversight mechanisms in detecting and addressing plagiarism and falsification of research early, thereby preventing its escalation. Institutions should establish independent ethics committees or institutional review boards to oversee research activities and investigate allegations of misconduct. These bodies should operate transparently and ensure impartiality in their proceedings. Regular

audits of research projects should be carried out to help maintain accountability and ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Martinson *et al.* (2005) argue that a supportive culture reduces the likelihood of plagiarism and falsification of research by fostering trust and collaboration among researchers. Creating an institutional culture that values honesty, transparency, and accountability is critical to minimising research misconduct. Leaders within higher education institutions must model ethical behaviour and actively promote a positive research environment. Open communication channels and whistleblower protections encourage individuals to report unethical practices without fear of retaliation.

Steneck (2006) suggests that technological solutions complement institutional policies by providing objective evidence to support investigations into plagiarism and falsification of research. The use of technology, such as plagiarism detection software and data analysis tools, can help identify potential instances of misconduct. For example, tools like Turnitin and iThenticate are widely used to detect plagiarism in academic writing. Mentorship programs can play a vital role in guiding early-career researchers and students toward ethical research practices. Experienced mentors can provide advice on ethical challenges and reinforce the importance of integrity in research. Titus *et al.* (2008) found that mentorship reduces the likelihood of misconduct by fostering a sense of responsibility and accountability among researchers. Institutions should formalise mentorship programs and ensure that mentors are trained to address ethical issues effectively.

Tijdink *et al.* (2016) suggest that aligning incentives with ethical behaviour promotes a healthier research environment and discourages unethical practices. Institutions should recognise and reward researchers who demonstrate exemplary ethical behaviour and contribute to the advancement of knowledge through honest and rigorous research.

This can be achieved through awards, grants, or public acknowledgement.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a narrative research design to explore experiences and perceptions on plagiarism and falsification of research in higher education institutions. The researcher conducted in-depth

interviews with staff members, postgraduate students, and research administrators to gather personal accounts and institutional perspectives. The narratives were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, motivations, and consequences of misconduct. The respondents who participated in the study are shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Study Sample Demographic Information**

Category of respondents	Population	Sample size	Gender		Data collection method
			Male	Female	
Lecturers	16	14	09	05	Interview
Student leaders	20	19	07	12	Focus Group Discussions
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	

Table 1 above presents a breakdown of study participants who included lecturers and student leaders, with a total population of 36 and a sample size of 33, representing approximately 92.2% of the total population. Among lecturers (16), a purposive sample of 14 (95%) who included 09 males and 05 females was selected for in-depth interviews, which ensured the collection of detailed insights from experienced academics. Student leaders (20) were represented by a sample of 19 (96%) who included 07 males and 12 females, and these participated in a focus group discussion (FGDs) which enabled the researcher to get collective perspectives and dynamic interactions.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### Factors Contributing to Plagiarism and Falsification of Research in Higher Institutions

The respondents who participated in the study revealed that the major cause of plagiarism and falsification of research is academic pressure. They indicated that research misconduct is often rooted in the intense academic pressure to publish frequently and achieve high-impact results, which creates a highly competitive environment. This pressure leads researchers to cut corners, fabricate data or engage in other unethical practices to meet expectations and secure funding, promotions or

recognition. One of the lecturers who participated in the study asserted as follows.

*"A significant factor driving plagiarism is the overwhelming academic pressure to publish frequently and produce high-impact results. This culture creates an environment where researchers feel compelled to cut corners or engage in unethical practices to meet expectations, secure funding, or advance their careers. The relentless demand for quantity over quality often leads to compromises in ethical standards."* (Geoffrey – Lecturer).

The findings suggest that academic pressure is the primary cause of plagiarism and falsification in research. This shows that researchers and students alike face intense demands to publish frequently, secure funding, and achieve career advancement, which leads to a hyper-competitive environment that leads to misconduct.

In addition, the study also established that inadequate policies and poor enforcement of the existing ones also encourage plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning. The respondents asserted that most institutions have no mechanisms for enforcing research ethics, which encourages students and staff to engage in misconduct. The respondents indicated

that many higher institutions even fail to detect cases of research misconduct. One of the interviewees had this to say.

*“When institutions lack clear guidelines or fail to consistently implement them, it creates an environment where unethical practices can thrive. Without proper oversight and accountability, researchers feel emboldened to engage in falsification of research findings, knowing the consequences are unlikely to be severe or consistently applied.”* (Grace – Lecturer).

As noted by the researcher, the above findings reveal that weak institutional policies and lax enforcement mechanisms significantly contribute to the prevalence of plagiarism and falsification in higher education. The findings indicate that many institutions lack effective systems to detect, investigate, and penalise research misconduct, which creates an environment where unethical practices go unchecked.

Furthermore, the respondents indicated that limited training in research ethics also contributes to plagiarism and falsification of research in many institutions. They emphasised that without adequate education on ethical standards, proper research practices, and the consequences of misconduct, researchers unintentionally engage in unethical behaviour due to a lack of awareness. It was established that the absence of structured training programs or workshops on research integrity leaves individuals ill-equipped to address ethical dilemmas, increasing the likelihood of misconduct. In an interview, one of the students indicated as follows.

*“Limited training in research ethics contributes to the falsification of research findings in many institutions. When students and researchers aren’t properly educated on ethical standards and responsible practices, it’s easy to make mistakes or even unintentionally cross ethical lines”.* (Paul – Student).

The above findings mean that many cases of plagiarism and falsification happen simply because researchers and students are not adequately trained in research ethics. Therefore, without clear guidance on what counts as ethical research, how to properly cite sources, or what the consequences of misconduct are, researchers often break rules unintentionally.

Lastly, the respondents revealed that the lack of strict penalties for plagiarism and falsification of research encourages many staff and students to engage in misconduct. They highlighted that when institutions fail to impose significant consequences for misconduct, such as retractions, suspensions, or loss of funding, it sends a message that such behaviour is tolerated or low-risk. This perceived lack of accountability creates an environment where individuals feel emboldened to fabricate data, plagiarise, or engage in other forms of misconduct, knowing that they can avoid serious repercussions.

The findings show that weak punishments for plagiarism and research fraud make the problem worse. Many staff and students cheat because they know their institution won't seriously punish them; there might be no repercussions, suspensions, or funding cuts for misconduct. If institutions enforce strict consequences, it can send a message that cheating is very costly.

### **Effects of Plagiarism and Falsification of Research in Higher Institutions of Learning**

After establishing the factors responsible for plagiarism and falsification of research, the researcher went ahead to examine how such misconducts affect higher institutions of learning. The respondents who participated in the study indicated that because of plagiarism and falsification of research, the integrity of the institution is undermined. They revealed that when cases of misconduct such as data fabrication, plagiarism, or unethical practices come to light, it casts doubt on the quality and reliability of the research produced by the institution. This damages



relationships with funding bodies, collaborators, and the broader academic community and diminishes public confidence in the institution's commitment to ethical standards. One lecturer asserted as follows.

*"Plagiarism severely undermines the integrity of an institution by eroding trust in the credibility and quality of work. When cases of unethical practices emerge, they cast a shadow over reputation and call into question the commitment to academic excellence. This not only damages relationships with the public but also weakens the foundation of trust that an institution is built upon."* (Geoffrey – lecturer).

The above findings show that plagiarism and fake research seriously harm an institution's reputation. When cases of cheating or data fraud become public, people start questioning whether any research from that institution can be trusted. This broken trust scares away research partners, funding organisations, and the public and can make everyone doubt the school's commitment to quality education.

The study also established from the respondents that plagiarism and falsification of research dispose misleading information to the public and other stakeholders of the research. They said that when fabricated or falsified data is published, it distorts the body of knowledge, potentially influencing policy decisions, medical practices, or public opinion based on inaccurate findings. This misinformation can misguide other researchers who build upon the work, wasting time, resources and effort. One of the study participants explained as follows.

*"Falsification of research findings spreads misleading information to the public and other stakeholders, creating far-reaching consequences. For example, when fabricated data is published, it distorts the truth and can lead to misguided decisions in policy, healthcare, or public opinion. This misinforms*

*other researchers who rely on such work and also erodes trust in the research process."* (Grace – Lecturer).

The findings reveal that plagiarism and fake research spread dangerous misinformation with far-reaching consequences. When studies contain stolen or fabricated data, they pollute the scientific record, potentially leading to wrong medical treatments, flawed policies, and misguided public beliefs. This corrupted information acts like a chain reaction because other researchers may waste resources building on false findings, while the public and policymakers make critical decisions based on lies.

Additionally, some respondents asserted that plagiarism and falsification of research amount to some professional consequences. They indicated that individuals found guilty of such misconduct often face severe penalties such as retraction of published work, loss of credibility, and damage to their professional reputation. This can result in difficulties in securing future research funding, collaborations or academic positions. Additionally, respondents noted that institutions may impose disciplinary actions such as suspension, termination, or legal repercussions, which may further jeopardise the individual's career. One of the study students explained as follows.

*"Plagiarism leads to serious professional consequences. If someone is caught fabricating data or plagiarising, they can lose their credibility and damage their reputation. It becomes really hard to get funding, collaborate with others, or even keep their job. It's a huge risk that can ruin a career and undermine trust in the research community."* (Lilian – student)

The findings show that plagiarism and research falsification carry serious professional costs. Those caught engaging in misconduct often suffer published retractions, destroyed reputations, and lost trust from peers, which makes it harder to get funding, jobs, or research partnerships. Institutions

may fire offenders, suspend them, or even take legal action, therefore creating career-ending consequences.

### **Possible Measures to Minimise Plagiarism and Falsification of Research in Higher Institutions of Learning**

In response to possible measures to minimise plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning, the respondents indicated that higher institutions of learning should adopt the use of technology to detect cases of plagiarism. They emphasised that advanced tools such as plagiarism detection software can help identify irregularities, fabricated data, or unethical practices more efficiently than manual methods. Integrating these technologies into the research process can help institutions to enhance transparency, ensure accountability, and maintain the integrity of academic work. Respondents also noted that such tools can serve as a deterrent, hence discouraging researchers from engaging in misconduct due to the increased likelihood of detection. A student who participated in the study said the following.

*"Higher institutions of learning must adopt the use of technology to detect and prevent plagiarism and falsification of research. Tools like plagiarism detection software, data analysis algorithms can efficiently identify irregularities that might otherwise go unnoticed. With technology, institutions can enhance transparency, ensure accountability and maintain the integrity of academic work. (Grace – lecturer).*

The findings suggest that universities and colleges should embrace technological solutions to combat plagiarism and research fraud. Through implementing plagiarism detection software and other digital tools, institutions can more effectively spot copied content, manipulated data, and other forms of misconduct compared to traditional manual checks. These technologies serve as both a

deterrent against cheating and a means to quickly identify violations.

In addition, the respondents said that institutions should implement policies and structures to address cases of plagiarism and falsification of research. They suggested that these policies should include well-defined guidelines on ethical research practices, procedures for reporting misconduct, and transparent mechanisms for investigating and adjudicating cases. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of establishing independent oversight committees to ensure fairness and impartiality in handling allegations. They also stressed the need for consistent enforcement of consequences, such as retractions, suspensions, or funding withdrawals, to deter future misconduct. John, one of the students, said the following.

*Institutions need to implement clear policies and strong structures to address plagiarism and falsification of research effectively. Without well-defined guidelines, reporting mechanisms and fair investigation processes, cases of misconduct can go unchecked. It's crucial to have independent oversight committees and consistent enforcement of consequences like suspensions to hold people accountable".*

The findings highlight the urgent need for institutions to establish clear, comprehensive policies to combat plagiarism and research falsification. Effective frameworks should outline proper research conduct, create safe channels for reporting violations and ensure fair, transparent investigation processes with consistent consequences for offenders. These measures would help restore trust in academic work by demonstrating an institution's commitment to upholding rigorous ethical standards at all levels.

Furthermore, the respondents asserted that higher institutions bear the responsibility of imposing serious penalties on individuals who engage in plagiarism and falsification of research to uphold

academic integrity and deter unethical behaviour. They argued that without strict consequences, misconduct is likely to persist due to a perceived lack of accountability. Respondents emphasised that consistent and transparent enforcement of penalties sends a strong message that unethical practices will not be tolerated, thus fostering a culture of honesty and rigour.

The findings emphasise that universities must enforce strong penalties such as retractions, suspensions, and termination for plagiarism and research fraud to protect academic standards. When institutions fail to punish misconduct severely, it sends the message that unethical behaviour has minimal consequences, which encourages repeated offences.

## DISCUSSIONS

It was established that research misconduct is often rooted in the intense academic pressure to publish frequently and achieve high-impact results, which creates a highly competitive environment. This pressure leads researchers to cut corners, fabricate data, or engage in other unethical practices to meet expectations and secure funding, promotions, or recognition. The findings are in line with Ojambo (2018), who shows that Universities often require staff members to publish a certain number of papers to qualify for promotions or tenure, which creates a "publish or perish" culture. This pressure leads researchers to cut corners, thus resulting in practices such as data fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism. Secondly, the study established that inadequate policies and poor enforcement of the existing ones also encourage plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning. This was also in line with the National Council for Higher Education (2021), which emphasised that many institutions lack clear guidelines on research integrity, plagiarism, and data management, which leaves researchers without a clear understanding of what constitutes misconduct. Furthermore, the findings revealed that limited training in research ethics also contributes to plagiarism and

falsification of research in many institutions. This was so because, without adequate education on ethical standards, proper research practices, and the consequences of misconduct, researchers unintentionally engage in unethical behaviour due to a lack of awareness. The findings rhyme with the literature review from Ssengendo (2016), who said that many researchers and students in higher institutions lack sufficient training in research ethics and integrity. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for them to understand the importance of ethical research practices and how to avoid misconduct.

Lastly, the study established that the lack of strict penalties for research misconduct encourages many staff and students to engage in plagiarism and falsification of research. It highlighted that when institutions fail to impose significant consequences for misconduct, such as retractions, suspensions, or loss of funding, it sends a message that such behaviour is tolerated or low-risk. These findings also supported the views of Ojambo (2018), who established that in many cases, misconduct is either ignored or addressed with minimal consequences, which sends a message that such behaviour is tolerable.

In line with the effects of plagiarism and falsification of research, the study established that, because of research misconduct, the integrity of the institution is undermined. It revealed that when cases of misconduct, such as data fabrication, plagiarism, or unethical practices, come to light, it casts doubt on the quality and reliability of the research produced by the institution. In addition, it was established that research misconduct disseminates misleading information to the public and other stakeholders of the research. When fabricated or falsified data is published, it distorts the body of knowledge, potentially influencing policy decisions, medical practices, or public opinion based on inaccurate findings. Finally, the findings showed that research misconduct amounts to some professional consequences. Individuals

found guilty of misconduct often face severe penalties such as retraction of published work, loss of credibility, and damage to their professional reputation.

In line with the possible measures to minimize plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions of learning, the study established that higher institutions of learning should adopt the use of technology to detect cases of misconduct because advanced tools, such as plagiarism detection software can help identify irregularities, fabricated data or unethical practices more efficiently than manual methods. It was also established that institutions should implement policies and structures to address cases of research misconduct, that these policies should include well-defined guidelines on ethical research practices, procedures for reporting misconduct, and transparent mechanisms for investigating and adjudicating cases. Furthermore, the findings showed that higher institutions bear the responsibility of imposing serious penalties on individuals who engage in research misconduct to uphold academic integrity and deter unethical behaviour. It was established that without strict consequences, misconduct is likely to persist due to a perceived lack of accountability.

The findings above were also in line with Resnik (2014) who wrote that well-defined policies provide a framework for ethical behavior and ensure accountability and therefore institutions should develop and enforce clear, comprehensive policies on research integrity that define misconduct, outline reporting mechanisms and specify consequences for violations, Anderson *et al.* (2013) who emphasize that education fosters a deeper understanding of ethical principles and equips researchers with the skills to maintain complex ethical dilemmas and therefore mandatory training programs on research ethics and integrity should be integrated into the curriculum for students and researchers at all levels and Steneck (2006) who suggests that technological solutions complement institutional policies by

providing objective evidence to support investigations into misconduct. The use of technology, such as plagiarism detection software and data analysis tools, can help identify potential instances of misconduct.

## CONCLUSIONS

Plagiarism and falsification of research in higher institutions is a complex issue driven by various causes such as intense academic pressure, inadequate training in research ethics, and the lack of strict penalties for unethical behaviour. Pressure combined with limited oversight and insufficient emphasis on ethical training creates an environment where researchers may feel compelled to compromise integrity to achieve career advancement or institutional recognition.

The effects of plagiarism and falsification of research are far-reaching and detrimental, impacting not only the individuals involved but also the institutions and the broader academic community. Plagiarism and falsification of research undermine the credibility of research, leading to the dissemination of misleading information that can misguide public policy, medical practices, and further scientific inquiry. It erodes trust in academic institutions, making it harder to secure funding, collaboration, and public support. In addition, the professional consequences for those involved, such as retractions, loss of reputation, and career setbacks, serve as a stark reminder of the high stakes associated with unethical practices.

To address these challenges, higher institutions must adopt comprehensive measures to prevent and manage plagiarism and falsification of research. Implementing policies and structures such as clear ethical guidelines, transparent reporting mechanisms, and independent oversight committees is essential to fostering a culture of accountability. Institutions should also prioritise training in research ethics to equip students and staff with the knowledge and skills needed to overcome ethical challenges. Furthermore, using technology, such as



plagiarism detection software and data analysis tools, can enhance the ability to identify and address misconduct efficiently.

### Policy Recommendations

Higher education institutions should develop and implement comprehensive policies on research integrity and misconduct. These policies should clearly define what constitutes research misconduct, like fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, and outline the procedures for reporting, investigating, and addressing such cases. Institutions should also establish dedicated offices or committees to oversee the enforcement of these policies.

To prevent plagiarism and falsification of research, institutions should make research ethics training mandatory for all researchers, especially students and staff members. This training should cover topics such as ethical research design, data management, proper citation practices, and the consequences of misconduct. Integrating research ethics into academic curricula and offering continuous professional development programs can help instill a strong ethical foundation among researchers.

Higher institutions should also promote transparency in research by encouraging open access to data and publications. Researchers should be required to document and share their methodologies, data, and findings to allow for replication and verification by peers. Institutions should also implement systems for tracking and monitoring research activities, such as digital repositories and research management platforms.

Furthermore, higher institutions should establish clear and enforceable penalties for unethical behaviour. These penalties could include retraction of publications, suspension of research privileges, or even termination of employment. At the same time, institutions should provide support mechanisms for researchers, such as mentorship programs and counselling services, to address the pressures that may lead to misconduct.

In addition, the Ugandan government should increase funding for research and innovation to ensure that researchers have the resources they need to conduct high-quality, ethical research. Finally, collaboration between institutions, government agencies, and international organisations can play a crucial role in addressing research misconduct. Partnerships with global research networks can provide access to best practices, training programs, and resources for promoting research integrity.

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