

# Preventing Visual Plagiarism in Design Programs in Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Ahlia University

Imad Assali, Amal Attiya



**Abstract:** Recently, the persistent problem in art and design programs in Worldwide universities are visual plagiarism. The main core values of academic institutions in general and Ahlia University is to produce graduates with not only good knowledge but also good values and high academic reputation that encourages intellectual and moral development promoting the image of their universities. Therefore, Ahlia university invests its efforts to create policies and procedures for text-based assignments to control originality of students' work while handing in assignments, reports, research proposals, and dissertations by using software technology like Turnitin. Conversely, little has been done focused on non-textual materials in art and design education. Besides, there are a plethora of articles when searching the Scopus database, about text-based academic misconduct with a dearth of research devoted to visual plagiarism which often left to the experience of academic faculty. Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to shed light on students' understanding of visual plagiarism issues and bridge the gap in visual work. Moreover, this research will develop a pedagogical policy that can be used by faculty to control academic dishonesty in visual arts. This research is conducting using two main methods. Firstly, it depended on reviewing different literature from journals, articles, and policies from different universities about plagiarism. Secondly, this research used qualitative and quantitative data. To collect qualitative data, an in-depth interview with the 15 academicians was conducted to triangulate with the students' findings of reasons of visual plagiarism and prevention solutions. For the quantitative data, an online survey using the Google form survey was used to a sample of 54 students in the design program at Ahlia University and other universities in Bahrain. Finally, this research reveals that the lack of awareness among students in arts and design education about academic integrity leads to visual plagiarism.

**Keywords:** plagiarism; visual plagiarism; Academic misconduct; Academic integrity; Turnitin

## I. INTRODUCTION

been considerable work recently on all aspects of text-based plagiarism; however, there has been little exploration of non-text-based plagiarism, particularly in the area of visual forms of communication". [1:04]

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The word plagiarism derived from the Latin word *Plagium* that means theft. Literally, plagiarism is defined as presenting other textual work, ideas, concepts, and design work as yours without acknowledging the source. On the other hand, academic integrity almost using others' work and provided your own explanations to create new ideas. Therefore, academic integrity involves of all human acts that sustain ethical values within the university environment. Bowman [1] stated that it is considered plagiarism if you take the works and ideas of others that make up most of your work even if you make proper referencing. He wrote, "turning in someone else's work as your own, copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit, failing to put a quotation in quotation marks, giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation, changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit, copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not" [ibid]. Plagiarism is considered as a violation of academic honesty and the main challenge in higher education arts system not only negatively affecting the quality of education and scientific research but also damages universities' reputation and credibility [1,3]. Balbuena [4] addresses that the degree offered by educational institutions with poor academic integrity will lose confidence by the community and stakeholders. The act of plagiarism which is unacceptable under any religion or tradition can continue in the work-life after higher education [5,6].

### 1.1 Forms of Plagiarism

Plagiarism has two main forms:

- The text-based plagiarism in theoretical subjects like copy and paste and change the order of words in a sentence without a proper citation which is according to Lee et al. [7] called Ghost Writing. Another type of text-based plagiarism is called photocopy writing when a student uses the same phrase from one recourse without changing a text.
- Visual plagiarism in art and design which is believed to be complicated compared to text-based one which is mostly happened in visual work such as design drawing projects, 3D models, audio, video, sculptures, figures, and images [8].

### 1.2 Why Students Plagiarize

According to Noh et al. [9] internet accessibility increases visual plagiarism among students in art and design programs significantly, they added students in design programs should be aware between the inspiration and copying from other design work.



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Moreover, the innovation in design software and the widespread of online documents including social media and blog websites such as *Behance* and *Pinterest* has contributed to rapid dissemination and image distribution that gives rise to ethical problems [10,11].

Conversely, the widespread of information technology has a positive impact on improving education and facilitates accessing information, but if it is used in an unethical way it will threaten academic integrity and affect students' future attitudes and work ethics [4, 12, 13, 14]. Bowman [1] added the huge amount of data on the Internet that provides unrestricted access to everyone makes it difficult for faculty members to track the original source of materials from their own knowledge. Lee et al. [7:8] noted that "there is evidence that cheating has increased in the last few decades, and the Internet is likely to intensify the problem". Recent studies showed that the attitudes of students towards plagiarism in higher education reveal that more than 50 % of students use the Internet and engaged in dishonest behavior in their academic endeavors [15]. Tabsh et al. [14] stated that using data from the internet facilitates plagiarism among students. Different software tools adopted by the academic institutions used for textual plagiarism detection such as *Turnitin* and *iThenticate*, which is not effective for visual works such as images, animation, and videos [16, 17]. Finally, there is no data of plagiarism among students in Bahrain universities to examine the occurrence of plagiarism is increasing or not. Therefore, it is important to reveal students' attitudes toward plagiarism to decrease or prevent this behavior.

## 1.3 Ahlia University Plagiarism Policy

Ahlia University is the first co-educational private University, founded in February 2003 in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The university offers a bachelor's degree through five colleges: Engineering; Arts and Sciences; Information Technology; Business and Finance; and Medical and Health Sciences. Ahlia University Assessment Manual (version 4.0) introduced academic integrity for students and faculty members using *Turnitin* for textual materials. Besides, the university through the induction day presented to its students the values of academic integrity along with the consequences of academic misconduct. It clear that there is no such policy regarding visual plagiarism for arts and design programs, therefore it is essential to include such policy in the Student Handbook to establish a sense of ethical responsibility.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Art and design staff are very clear about the long tradition of art on which their students are expected to build. They use the terms 'appropriate', 'expand on a resource', or 'homage' to acknowledge that artists use each others' ideas, processes and materials, but use them differently from each other by developing their own particular grammar/vocabulary". [1:02] Generally, preventing Plagiarism and Enforcing Academic Integrity is the main aim of educational institutions [6]. Unfortunately, statistics enumerated from previous studies showed that Academic Dishonesty has risen and become very common among students on obtaining high grades [14]. Nowadays, higher education institutions all over the world work hard on augmenting the educational system by developing policies and procedures in increasing the awareness about academic integrity and provide strong

ethical culture to their students [18]. Tendencies of plagiarism among students can be intentionally or unintentionally because of certain reasons. These reasons: lack of proficiency in teaching language, anxiety of receiving a low grade, time limits, lack of knowledge on academic dishonesty, lack of knowledge of how to cite resources, course difficulties, unfairness marking by instructors, and a better job offer upon graduation [3, 6, 10,12, 16, 19, 20]

A study by Tabsh et al. [14] in one of the universities on engineering students found that the amount of homework, projects, and the lack of available time were the major reasons for students' plagiarism practice. Harding et al. [16] argued that students blame faculty members for academic dishonesty as they deliver irrelevant course material, lack of connection between assignments and course material, participation in extracurricular activities, and pay no attention to academic dishonesty. According to Awasthi [19] a survey in an engineering school showed that 60% of the students mentioned that they were not aware of the idea of plagiarism and the reason that forces them to plagiarize is inadequate language skills. She added the harm of plagiarism "is that no benefit from doing the work has been gained, yet the student is asking for recognition of having received those benefits that have not, in fact, been earned." [19:98].

## 2.1 Attitudes Toward Plagiarism

Literature about university students' attitudes toward plagiarism is mostly inquired in all academic fields with fewer studies that were carried out in the fields of arts and design. In 1999 the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University steered a study about cheating and academic misconduct and found that 70% out of 68,000 students in both high schools and colleges cheated in their assignments [21]. Surprisingly, the study by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) showed that 95% of plagiarism practices among students do not get caught regardless of using *Turnitin*. Besides, a survey conducted at Fordham University showed that the GPA for those who practice cheating is 3.45, while non-cheaters have an average grade of 2.85 [22]. Many studies found that academic dishonesty varies in relation to the field of study, as students with technical disciplines such as engineering, IT, and Design had higher levels of plagiarism than those in arts disciplines [23]. Many reasons contribute to academic dishonesty in design programs: the internet, faculty members who are not aware of the difference between inspiration and plagiarism. Similarly, the Spot the Difference Project by Garret and Robinson [18] in the University for the Creative Arts and the University of Surrey to investigate the nature of visual plagiarism and the use of *iTrace* as a visual search technology to detect visual plagiarism in art and design programs revealed that the lack of awareness of referencing amongst students, and the lack of proper guidance of faculty members increase the opportunity of plagiarism in design assessments. The study concluded that teaching by examples, demonstrating best practice within the design studio, discuss with students the issues of plagiarism will boost their awareness of academic integrity [18]. Hence, the following part will discuss plagiarism in arts and design education and the procedure that should be used in art and design program for visual plagiarism detection.



## 2.2 Plagiarism in Arts & Design

In the context of arts and design, visual plagiarism is recognized when students create drawings and projects in studios depending on collecting examples related to their projects and case studies which cause confusion between plagiarism and inspiration [6].

Moreover, famous designers usually pull inspiration from multiple sources and then establishing a new concept that accommodates new materials and emerging technologies that reflect the needs of their generation better [24]. One good example of architecture inspiration done by the famous architect I.M. Pei when designing The Louvre glass pyramid in Paris inspired from the Great Pyramids of Egypt which considered as an architectural icon rather than a plagiarized work. When Hadid was asked if her design for the three-tower complex in Beijing was plagiarized by the construction team in Chongqing, she responded, “if the ‘copycat’ designs displayed innovative mutations, “that would be exciting” [25]. Besides, as arts and design are accumulative knowledge over the ages, therefore, getting inspired from previous works to develop new design ideas is acceptable if the result works accompanied by acknowledgment of the original work [5]. Conversely, copying previous works in interior design and architecture is impossible, nevertheless, each project tailored to adapt to its own constraints related to a specific site and building. Moreover, a famous architect Rem Koolhaas acknowledge referencing in his works, he mentioned that one of his projects was inspired by the work of the pioneer architect Mies Van Der Rohe. He added, “it is difficult to imagine that any work of art could claim absolute originality and isolation from precedents - which is the same claim of the proponents of the ‘Copy Left’”. Koolhaas believes that borrowing from previous works is a source of inspiration for architects and facilitate their creativity and innovation [27:100].

## 2.3 Preventing Visual Plagiarism

This part seeks to explain the procedures used to help faculty members in discouraging visual plagiarism among students in their assignments and work. These procedures are powerful in reducing visual plagiarism. The following methods can be used to prevent visual plagiarism:

### 2.3.1 Higher Education Institutions Role

- The core courses in arts and design education are design studios that require students to collect case studies and data for their projects with a proper citation, meanwhile, research methodologies are not taught for students in their first year which makes them unaware of visual plagiarism in producing their design projects. Accordingly, introducing a research methodology course in the early years in the educational curriculum will increase student’s awareness of academic honesty.
- Higher education institutions should conduct professional development workshops for academicians, librarians, advisors, counselors to mitigate risks to academic integrity.
- Adopt a holistic approach to promote integrity through marketing campaigns which have an effective role of reaching a wide audience by distributing leaflets, and posters to raise awareness about plagiarism and the consequences of plagiarism [26].

### 2.3.2 Faculty Members Role

- Faculty members should discuss with their students why academic integrity is important, teach them about plagiarism, and use proper referencing to cite visual work in their assignments. In addition, discuss the topic in class with the students from an ethical, legal, and professional standpoint to increase their awareness about professional standards and copyright. Also, design students’ assignments from the beginning to end to guide student’s idea development from a source used as initial inspiration from imitation and copying and give feedback on each part of the assignments which enable faculty members to monitor the work.
- Teach students that inspiration from other designer’s work is an approach for learning and the source used must be changed several times to produce noticeably work differently from the source of inspiration. The change used from other work can include color, composition, context, proportion, materials, fabric, etc. [27]. According to Noh, et al. [9] creativity in design work starts with referring to other artworks and designs to build an understanding and knowledge in developing creative work. in design programs, students must show the full documentation for their work and justify in detail the methods in creating their design artwork [9]. Roberts [8] asserted that students who study art and design must work on sketchbooks and reference their sources and research materials. He added sketchbook includes drawing, designs, illustrations, photographs, etc. works of others that used by students to develop their ideas and methodologies. Halak & El-Hajjar [17] added that assignments and projects given to students should be changed every year to prevent students from using previous works.

### 2.3.3 Librarian’s Role

- the librarian’s role is equally important in advising and instructing students on how to use library resources to show their creativity in their assignment without indulging in plagiarism by offering appropriate orientation workshops [21].

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Data Gathering

This research main purpose is to examine the findings of different kinds of literature about plagiarism and academic misconduct. The plagiarism questionnaire used in this research is targeted to undergraduate students from different levels in higher educational institutions in Bahrain studied art and design. The survey was conducted from September 2019 until December 2019 covering the definition, incidents, prevention, and detection methods for visual plagiarism. A systematic random sampling of 54 students anonymously answered the visual plagiarism checklists questionnaire. In addition, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with 15 faculty members in arts and design institutions in Bahrain to investigate visual plagiarism in greater depth. Relating to program enrolments, 42 (77.3%) students were from architecture and design programs, 12 (22.7%) from arts disciplines.



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## 3.2 Data Analysis

The survey has produced a tremendously rich set of data. The interviews with faculty members were aimed to determine which methods were used to teach students about visual plagiarism in arts and design programs. The finding revealed that all academics focus on text-based plagiarism in using *Turnitin* to check the percentage of similarities in the theoretical part of arts and design programs with no methods have been used about acceptable and unacceptable practices about visual assessments.

The reason was their university academic integrity policy focus only on the text-based assessments and neglected the visual work assessments. Moreover, all the academics interviewees agreed that it is harder to detect plagiarism of visual assessments comparing to text-based assessments. Also, when students were asked about if plagiarism is acceptable as a behavior, 81.7% of them regarded that plagiarism is a crime. A very important finding was about the reasons for committing plagiarism, 43.8% of the surveyed students indicated that they have committed plagiarism to the lack of knowledge in the assignment, the lack of time, and universities are reluctant to take actions against students who plagiarize, while 31.7% committed plagiarism to get a high CGPA. A study by Tabsh et al. [14] on engineering students found that the amount of homework, projects, and the lack of available time were the major reasons for students' plagiarism. Also, when asking students whether their university's policy addressed visual plagiarism adequately in the non-text-based assessments, about 75.2% of students surveyed thought that they did not. When surveyed students were asked if their universities did workshops or seminars for them about visual plagiarism, 78.8% of the students answered that all the sessions about using *Turnitin* for text-based assessments but not in the visual assessment. This suggests that universities must include visual plagiarism in their academic integrity policy. The study also showed that 76% of the sources used by students in their assignments depend on the Internet, while 24% of sources are from books, magazines, and previous students' work. Besides, the survey responses showed that there is a lack of effective detection tools for visual assessment items. In addition, 86% of faculty members stated that they detect visual plagiarism by inspecting students' sudden improvements. Interestingly, when students were asked about the reuse of one's own work, 72% of the respondents answered it is unacceptable for text-based assessments, while 81.6% of the respondents found this act is acceptable for design assessments if they borrow others work and change it.

## IV. CONCLUSION

It appears that most of the literature of academic integrity focused only on written assessment and ignored visual design. Although the basic principle in text-based assessment is to acknowledge the source of words and ideas which is not the case for visual work for the lack of standard approaches for writing such references. If academic integrity is to be encouraged at Bahrain higher education institutions, then the policies should be applied for both disciplines' text-based assessment and visual assessment which include deterrent policies that contribute towards a reduction and elimination of plagiarism. Therefore, there should be a general discussion pertains to the visual discipline's academic integrity among

academics and specialists to find suitable examples the students can apply in their assessment and can be part of higher education institutions policy for academic integrity. Also, the study showed that students have generally good knowledge of plagiarism, but this knowledge should be improved especially in visual design by academics who should provide more information on plagiarism concepts and examples of what constitutes plagiarism. In addition, universities need to put in place procedures that encourage honesty through teaching, mentorship, and implementation of honesty policies.

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