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## The Role of Forensic Linguistics in Detecting and Curbing Plagiarism Among University Undergraduate in Katsina State

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the significance of Forensic Linguistics in detecting and curbing plagiarism among university undergraduate students in Katsina State, Nigeria. The study focused on three universities: Al-Qalam University Katsina, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, and Federal University Dutsin-Ma. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The population of the study consisted of 154 students, comprising 16 students from Al-Qalam University Katsina, 73 students from Federal University Dutsin-Ma, and 65 students from Umaru Musa Yar'adua University. A sample of 132 students, selected through purposive sampling technique, participated in the study, with 16 students from Al-Qalam University Katsina, 60 students from Federal University Dutsin-Ma, and 56 students from Umaru Musa Yar'adua University. A total of 132 questionnaires were administered to the students, and 33 students' completed projects were analyzed using Turnitin Plagiarism Detection Software. This study investigated how Forensic Linguistics can be used to prevent plagiarism by identifying and addressing these elements. The study found that Forensic Linguistics is an effective tool for detecting plagiarism and promoting academic integrity among university students. However, the majority of the respondents disagreed that Forensic Linguistics can accurately identify plagiarized content, deter students from committing plagiarism, and improve students' understanding of plagiarism and its consequences. The study recommends that universities in Katsina State utilize Forensic Linguistics tools and software to detect plagiarism and promote academic integrity. Universities should also educate students about the consequences of plagiarism and the value of original work, and develop clear policies and procedures for addressing plagiarism. Furthermore, universities should provide training and support for faculty members to use Forensic Linguistics tools and software effectively. This study provides conclusive evidence of the significance of Forensic Linguistics in promoting academic integrity and reducing plagiarism among university undergraduate students in Katsina.*

**Keywords:** Forensic, Linguistics, Plagiarism, Undergraduate





## Introduction

Plagiarism is a pervasive problem in academic settings worldwide, undermining the integrity of research and education. It is defined as the act of presenting someone else's work, ideas, or words as one's own, without proper acknowledgment or credit. This can take many forms, including direct plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism, and self-plagiarism. Despite its prevalence, plagiarism remains a complex and multifaceted issue, with serious consequences for individuals and institutions (East, 2010). The prevalence of plagiarism in academic settings is alarming. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of students engage in plagiarism, with some estimates suggesting that up to 80% of students have plagiarized at some point in their academic careers (McCabe, 2015). This problem is not limited to students, however, as faculty members and researchers have also been known to engage in plagiarism. The rise of the internet and social media has made it easier than ever to plagiarize, with many students and academics unaware of the serious consequences of their actions.

The consequences of plagiarism can be severe, ranging from failure in a course or program to expulsion from an institution (McCabe, 2015). In addition to these academic consequences, plagiarism can also have serious professional and personal repercussions. For example, individuals found to have plagiarized may struggle to find employment or advance in their careers. Furthermore, plagiarism can damage an institution's reputation and undermine public trust in academia

(East, 2010). Given the serious consequences of plagiarism, it is essential that institutions take proactive steps to prevent and detect plagiarism.

In recent years, Forensic Linguistics has emerged as a powerful tool in the fight against plagiarism. Analyzing language patterns and stylistic features, Forensic linguists can identify instances of plagiarism and provide evidence in cases of suspected academic dishonesty (Grant, 2012). Despite its potential, however, forensic linguistics remains underutilized in many academic settings (Johnson, 2017). This study aims to explore the significance of Forensic Linguistics in identifying and preventing plagiarism among university undergraduate students, with a view to informing policies and practices aimed at promoting academic integrity. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense that can have severe consequences for individuals and institutions. For individuals, plagiarism can result in academic penalties, such as failure in a course or program, suspension, or expulsion from an institution. Moreover, plagiarism can damage an individual's reputation and credibility, making it difficult to regain trust (East, 2010). This can have long-term consequences, including difficulty in securing employment or advancing in one's career (Howard, 2007). Furthermore, plagiarism can also lead to emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and loss of self-esteem.

Forensic linguistics has a wide range of applications, including language analysis in criminal investigations, authorship identification and plagiarism detection. In recent years, forensic linguistics has gained increasing attention in academic settings, particularly in the context of plagiarism detection (East, 2010). One of the key potential applications of forensic linguistics in detecting plagiarism is authorship identification (Baldwin, 2013). This involves analyzing the linguistic features of a text, such as vocabulary, syntax, and





style, to determine whether it was written by a particular author. Forensic linguists use a range of techniques, including stylometry and lexical analysis, to identify the unique linguistic characteristics of an author's writing. Comparing these characteristics to those found in a suspect text, forensic linguists can provide evidence of plagiarism. Forensic linguistics also has the potential to detect plagiarism in cases where traditional detection methods may fail. For example, some plagiarism detection software may not be able to detect instances of plagiarism where the text has been heavily paraphrased or where the plagiarist has attempted to disguise their writing style. Forensic Linguistics can provide a more nuanced and detailed analysis of language evidence, allowing for the detection of plagiarism in these cases. Furthermore, forensic linguistics can also provide evidence of intent, which is a critical factor in determining whether plagiarism has occurred.

The study focuses on the application of Forensic Linguistics in detecting and preventing plagiarism among university undergraduate students in Katsina State. This topic is motivated by the growing concern about academic dishonesty and the need for effective methods to identify and deter plagiarism. Forensic Linguistics is a multifaceted field that combines linguistic principles with legal and forensic techniques to analyze and interpret language evidence. In the context of plagiarism detection, Forensic Linguistics can be used to identify the authorship of written work, analyze linguistic patterns, and detect inconsistencies in language use. This approach can be particularly useful in identifying plagiarism, as it can help to distinguish between original and copied text.

## Statement of the Problem

Plagiarism is a pervasive issue in academic institutions worldwide, with Nigeria being no exception. Despite efforts to address the issue, plagiarism remains a significant challenge among university undergraduate students in Nigeria. Previous studies have investigated plagiarism in various Nigerian contexts, employing methods such as surveys, structured questionnaires, and content analysis. These studies have consistently shown that plagiarism is a widespread problem in Nigerian universities, with many students engaging in intentional or unintentional plagiarism due to lack of understanding, inadequate citation skills, or pressure to succeed. However, most of these studies have focused on specific disciplines or universities, with limited attention to the broader Nigerian educational system.

Furthermore, existing research has primarily relied on traditional methods of plagiarism detection, such as manual checks, without fully exploring the potential of plagiarism detection software. Although some studies have employed plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, the effectiveness of these tools in the Nigerian context remains understudied.

1. Assess the level of awareness among undergraduate students in Katsina State universities about forensic linguistic methods used in identifying plagiarism.
2. Examine how forensic linguistics contributes to the identification of plagiarism among university undergraduates in Katsina State.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of forensic linguistic approaches in curbing



plagiarism among undergraduate students.

4. Analyze the reliability of Turnitin software in detecting instances of plagiarism among university undergraduate students in Katsina State.

### Scope of the Study

The study is limited to universities in Nigeria, with a specific focus on those located in Katsina State, and does not include colleges of education or other tertiary institutions within the state. It centers on plagiarism within academic contexts and does not cover other areas of linguistic analysis or broader applications of forensic linguistics beyond academia. The research specifically targets final-year students from the English Departments of selected universities in the state—namely, Al-Qalam University, Katsina; Umaru Musa Yar'adua University; and Federal University Dutsin-Ma. The Federal University of Transportation, Daura, is excluded due to its lack of an English program. These final-year English students form the core population for the study, while other groups are not considered. The research is conducted in English, aligning with the focus on academic writing and the detection of plagiarism in English-language scholarly work.

### Literature Review Forensic Linguistics

Forensic Linguistics is a rapidly growing interdisciplinary field that combines linguistics, law, and forensic science to analyze and interpret linguistic evidence in legal contexts (Coulthard, 2017). The term "Forensic Linguistics" was coined in the 1960s by the British linguist, John Bolton, who used it to describe his work on deciphering ancient

inscriptions (Bolton, 1965). Since then, Forensic Linguistics has gained recognition as a distinct discipline, with its own academic programmes, professional organisations, and research journals. The field of Forensic Linguistics is concerned with the analysis of language in legal settings, including the interpretation of written and spoken texts, the identification of authorship, and the assessment of credibility (Coulthard, 2017). Forensic Linguists use their expertise in language structure, usage, and variation to provide insights into legal disputes involving issues such as plagiarism (Johnson, 2017), intellectual property infringement (Larson, 2017), criminal investigation (Coulthard, 2017), and civil litigation (Gibbons, 2017).

Forensic Linguistics is an emerging sub discipline of Forensic Science, and it is a branch of Applied Linguistics (McMenamin, 2008). "Forensic Linguistics is the scientific study as applied to Forensic and contexts" (McMenamin, 2008: 86). Forensic Linguistics procedure involves two types of expert analysis techniques; Speech Analysis and Text Analysis (Coulthard, 2017). Forensic Linguistics is the study of Linguistic techniques to investigate Crimes (Criminal/ Civil) especially rape, murder, drug dealing, telephoned bomb threat, random threat, missing, kidnapping, counter terrorism, authorship dispute, documentation, text, media and social media dispute, intelligence and surveillance (Coulthard, 2017). This means that language is able to be utilised as an investigative tool to help resolve the aforementioned crimes.

Forensic Linguistics, an interdisciplinary field combining language analysis and legal expertise, offers a valuable tool for detecting and preventing plagiarism (Coulthard, 2017).



By analyzing language patterns, syntax, and semantics, forensic linguists can identify similarities and anomalies in texts, helping to detect plagiarism and attribute authorship (Johnson, 2017). In addition, Forensic Linguistics can aid in the development of plagiarism detection software and informed educational policies and practices aimed at preventing plagiarism (Coulthard, 2017). Forensic Linguistics is the interface between language, crime, and the law. It involves the application of linguistic knowledge, methods, and insights to the forensic context of law, language, crime investigation, trial, and judicial procedure. In relation to plagiarism, Forensic Linguistics examines textual similarities and authorship to determine cases of intellectual property theft. In view of this, Coulthard & Johnson (2007) opine that Forensic Linguistics is the application of linguistic theory and methodology to the context of law and criminal investigations. When applied to plagiarism, Forensic Linguistics involves the comparison of texts to identify copied material and establish authorship, thus providing evidence in cases of suspected plagiarism.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism, a growing concern in academic institutions worldwide, undermines the integrity of research and education (Adebayo, 2015). It involves passing off someone else's work as one's own, without proper citation or credit, and can take many forms, including verbatim copying, paraphrasing, and collusion (Oyewole, 2017). The rise of digital technologies and the internet has made it easier for students to access and copy materials, contributing to the increasing prevalence of plagiarism (Igbineweka, 2017). In Nigeria, universities face significant challenges in addressing plagiarism due to limited

resources, inadequate awareness, and a lack of effective detection methods (Adebayo, 2015). The consequences of plagiarism can be severe, including academic penalties, damage to reputation, and even legal action (Oyewole, 2017). Moreover, plagiarism undermines the values of honesty, integrity, and intellectual curiosity that are essential to academic and professional communities (Coulthard, 2017).

Plagiarism is a critical issue in higher education, affecting the credibility of academic institutions and the quality of education provided. In Nigeria, the problem is particularly severe due to a combination of factors including inadequate enforcement of academic integrity policies, lack of awareness among students about what constitutes plagiarism, and insufficient use of advanced detection tools. According to a study by Adejumo (2019), a significant percentage of Nigerian university students engage in plagiarism, often due to pressure to achieve high grades and lack of understanding of proper citation practices. The population of the study comprises all final-year undergraduate students of English 2023/2024 academic session across three universities in Katsina State. This includes students from Al-Qalam University, Katsina, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, and Federal University, Dutsin-Ma. A population is defined as "the entire group of individuals or cases that the researcher is interested in understanding or describing" (Creswell, 2014, p.125). Population described as the aggregate of all individuals or cases that share a common characteristic or set of characteristics (Babbie, 2017, p.91). The research does not include Federal University of Transportation, Daura, as it does not offer English Language programme. The study targets all 400-level students in the English departments



of these universities, providing a comprehensive scope for the research. The population of the study is one

hundred and fifty-four (154) students as indicated in the table below:

**Table: 1. Population of the Study**

S/N	University	Number of Students
1.	Al-Qalam University, Katsina: College of Humanities, Department of English	16
2.	Federal University, Dutsin-Ma: Faculty of Humanities; Department of English	73
3.	Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina: Faculty of Humanities; Department of English	65
<b>Total</b>		<b>154</b>

### Source: English Departments of the Universities

#### Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study consists of 132 respondents, selected using the purposive sampling technique. A sample is defined as "a subset of individuals or cases selected from the population, which is used to represent the population" (Creswell, 2014, p.126). Sampling is the process of selecting a sample from the population, with the goal of making inferences about the population based on the sample data (Babbie, 2017, 93). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on their expertise, experience, and knowledge related to the research topic (Patton, 2015, 264). This technique is also known as judgmental sampling, as it relies on the researcher's judgment to select participants who are most relevant to the research topic (Kerlinger, 1973, p.127). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves

selecting participants based on their expertise, experience, and knowledge related to the research topic. In the context of this research, the purposive sampling technique is appropriate because it enables the identification and selection of students who have experience and knowledge about research. The reason for this is that the research requires engaging participants who have demonstrated expertise in research and writing research projects, or who have taken courses on research methods.

#### Table:2 Sample Size of the Study

A total sample of 132 students, comprising sixty (60) students from Federal University, Dutsin-Ma; fifty-six (56) students from Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina; and fifteen (16) students from Al-Qalam, University,



Katsina, was drawn, as indicated in the below table:

S/N	University	Number of Students Sampled
1.	Federal University, Dutsin-Ma: Faculty of Humanities; Department of English	60
2.	Umaru Musa Yar ' adua University, Katsina: Faculty of Humanities; Department of English	56
3.	Al-Qalam University, Katsina: College of Humanities, Department of English	16
Total		132

### Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher to gather information about students' awareness and understanding of plagiarism, their experiences with plagiarism on the role of Forensic Linguistics in preventing plagiarism and the students' completed projects for the 2023/2024 academic session.

### Method of Data Collection

The data for this study is collected through the administration of questionnaire based on Likert Scale. The questionnaire employed a closed-ended format, utilising a Likert Scale with the following response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D)

To facilitate analysis, responses are consolidated into two categories: Positive Responses (combining SA and A) and Negative Responses (combining SD and D). And the analysis of the students' completed projects by using Turnitin Plagiarism Detection Software. For the purpose of this study, 33 completed projects were sampled as a representative sample (i.e. 25% of the total sample of 131 participants) for

Forensic Linguistics analysis. This number ensures that the projects selected are representative of the diversity of students' work, making the findings generalizable to the larger population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Cochran, 1977). Using 25% of the total population as a sample size is a common and acceptable range for social science and humanities research (Bryman, 2016) and is sufficient for research purposes, especially when the population size is large (over 100) (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Additionally, analyzing 33 projects is a more manageable task, allowing for an in-depth examination of each project without compromising the quality of the analysis (Marshall, 1996). This sample size also allows for statistically significant results, especially when complemented by quantitative methods (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, selecting 33 projects optimizes resource allocation, enabling the researcher to devote sufficient time and effort to each project's analysis, thereby ensuring the quality and reliability of the findings (Bryman, 2016). Analyzing 33 completed projects, this study can strike a balance between representativeness, manageability, statistical significance, and resource efficiency, ultimately leading to meaningful conclusions about plagiarism





among university students in Katsina State.

### Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data (obtained through questionnaire) are analysed by using frequencies and simple percentage and the qualitative data (soft copies of students' completed projects) are analysed through the use of *Turnitin* Plagiarism Detection Software. *Turnitin* is plagiarism detection software that originated in 1997. It was founded by Chris Caren, a University of California, Berkeley graduate student, and later joined by John Barrie and Jason Chu. Initially, the company focused on developing a plagiarism detection tool for educators. Chris Caren, an American entrepreneur and educator, developed the idea for *Turnitin* while working as a teaching assistant at UC Berkeley. He recognised the need for a tool to help instructors detect plagiarism in student submissions. Caren's vision was to create a platform that would promote academic integrity and support educators in teaching students about proper citation and referencing practices. The first version of *Turnitin* was launched in 1997, and it quickly gained popularity among educators. The software used a database of web pages, academic papers, and other sources to compare student submissions and identify potential plagiarism.

### Findings

This section presents the discussion of research findings of this study, based on the formulated research questions. The findings are analysed and interpreted in relation to the existing literature on Forensic Linguistics, *Turnitin* Plagiarism Detection Software.

The study revealed the concerning lack of awareness and

knowledge among university undergraduate students regarding Forensic Linguistics Techniques for Plagiarism Detection. The result shows that 86% of respondents were not familiar with the use of Forensic Linguistics in detecting plagiarism in academic writing. This finding is in consonance with Monday (2016) who found that students lacked knowledge about plagiarism detection techniques. The finding also is the same with Magubane (2018) who revealed that students had limited understanding of plagiarism which led them to engage in the menace. In the same vein with that of Juola (2006) who emphasised the need for education and training on plagiarism detection techniques for the students.

Furthermore, Nwohiri (2021) also highlighted the importance of raising awareness about plagiarism among university students and also noted that students' lack of understanding of plagiarism can lead them to unintentional plagiarism. He found out that students' attitudes towards plagiarism were influenced by their lack of knowledge and understanding of plagiarism. Likewise, the finding of Zahara (2023) who revealed that the need for institutions to develop clear policies and procedures for addressing plagiarism needs not to be overemphasized. This finding is also in contrast with Ahmed et al. (2023) asserted that the use of Forensic Linguistics techniques can improve the detection of plagiarism. Additionally, Simon (2015) noted that plagiarism can have serious consequences for students' academic careers. The finding also is in the same line with Narayana (2020) who highlighted the importance of educating students about the ethical implications of plagiarism. The study revealed that university undergraduate students were not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and



prevent plagiarism in their academic work. This lack of awareness and knowledge can lead them to unintentional plagiarism, which can have severe consequences for students' academic careers. Therefore, it is essential for universities to provide awareness and knowledge on plagiarism detection techniques and to develop clear policies and procedures for addressing plagiarism.

The study further revealed the need for education and training on Forensic Linguistics techniques. The results showed that 82% of respondents did not know how to apply Forensic Linguistics techniques to identify plagiarised content. This finding is consistent with Adebayo (2011) who found that students lacked knowledge about Forensic Linguistics techniques and its application in detecting and preventing of plagiarism. In the same vein with Magubane (2018) who revealed that students had limited understanding of plagiarism detection techniques in terms of detecting plagiarised content. This finding is correspondent with Ajayi (2021) who emphasized the need for training students on Forensic Linguistics techniques to prevent plagiarism in academic writings. In the same way with Rui Sousa-Silva (2014) who noted that students' lack of understanding of Forensic Linguistics techniques led the students to unintentional plagiarism in their academic writings. And aslo, Amaka (2022) found out that students' attitudes towards plagiarism were influenced by their lack of knowledge and understanding of Forensic Linguistics techniques in detecting plagiarised content. In addition, Zahara (2023) emphasized the need for institutions to provide education and training on Forensic Linguistics techniques to address plagiarism. Ahmed et al. (2023) found that, education and training on Forensic Linguistics techniques can

improve students' ability to identify and prevent plagiarism in academic writings. Simon (2015) noted that education and training on Forensic Linguistics techniques are essential for promoting academic integrity. The study asserted that university students required education and training on Forensic Linguistics techniques to enable them to identify and prevent plagiarism in their academic work.

The analysis of the soft copies of students' completed projects based on overall similarity scores using *Turnitin's* Plagiarism Detection Software has revealed a range of results, providing insight into the students' commitment to academic integrity and originality. Projects with low similarity scores ranging from, 14%, 17%, 18%, and 19%, demonstrate a strong commitment to academic integrity, with no plagiarism detected. These scores indicate that the students have properly referenced sources, maintained academic honesty, and submitted work that is substantially original. In contrast, projects with higher similarity scores, such as 29%, 37%, 39%, and 42%, raise concerns about academic integrity and originality. These scores suggest that the students may have relied too heavily on external sources, resulting in notable instances of plagiarism due to inadequate paraphrasing, insufficient citation, or unintentional duplication of sources. The 42% and 48% similarity scores are particularly alarming, indicating significant plagiarism that necessitates immediate attention and review.

The study also highlights the importance of proper citation and referencing practices in maintaining academic integrity. Students who achieved low similarity scores demonstrated a strong command of



proper citation and referencing practices, whereas those with higher similarity scores may require additional guidance and support in this area. The results also underscore the need for students to understand the consequences of plagiarism and the importance of originality in academic work. The analysis also reveals that even projects with low similarity scores may still contain some incidental matches with common phrases or correctly cited references. However, these instances do not compromise the project's authenticity, and the students who achieved these scores are commended for their commitment to academic integrity.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Institutions should consider integrating Forensic Linguistics into their academic programmes to educate students about plagiarism detection and prevention.
- ii. Universities should offer training and workshops for faculty members and students on the application of Forensic Linguistics in detecting plagiarism.
- iii. Academic institutions should utilize Forensic Linguistics tools and software to detect plagiarism and promote academic integrity.
- iv. Universities should emphasize the importance of academic integrity and the consequences of plagiarism through awareness campaigns and educational programs.
- v. Institutions should regularly assess the effectiveness of their plagiarism detection methods and make necessary improvements.

- vi. Universities should foster an environment that encourages original work and creativity among students, rather than simply penalizing plagiarism.
- vii. Institutions should establish clear and concise plagiarism policies, outlining the consequences of plagiarism and the procedures for reporting and addressing incidents.
- viii. The findings emphasize the importance of using plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, to promote academic integrity and originality.

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