

# **PLAGIARISM AMONG JOURNALISM STUDENTS AS A PREDICTOR OF UNETHICAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF UGANDA, RWANDA AND SOUTH SUDAN**

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## **Abstract**

**T**his article discusses the challenges of teaching journalism ethics in East Africa, both in journalism schools and on the job in newsrooms. It specifically explores academic plagiarism among journalism students and working journalists using Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan as case studies. The discussion mainly draws on the authors' experiences as journalism and media studies educators in East Africa and elsewhere in the world. The authors perceive plagiarism among East African journalism students and, to some extent working journalists, as a possible gateway to unethical behaviours during professional practice. From this perspective, plagiarism as a relatively minor form of 'corruption' can degenerate into an 'accepted normalised practice' where journalists are willing to compromise traditional journalistic values of objectivity and social responsibility to media audiences and society as a whole. From the perspective of journalism as a tool for national development, it is evident that plagiarism among journalism students, when viewed as a low level form of corruption, could influence later unprofessional journalism practices such as "envelope journalism".

*Keywords:* Journalism education, Journalism practice, Ethics, East Africa, Development Journalism. Plagiarism

## **Introduction**

For journalism students (some of whom were already working as journalists) and with professional journalists in East Africa, the issue of journalism ethics is often regarded lightly despite its significance in journalism education and practice. Some are of the opinion that complying with journalistic codes of ethics is a 'voluntary endeavor' and therefore should not be treated as a breach of professionalism. Others

argue that the prevailing socio-political and economic contexts in which a given journalist operates will define the extent of compliance with the prevailing ethical code of conduct during practice.

In many countries, journalistic corruption is an obstacle to developing a press system that effectively functions as a watchdog on government, as an agent of economic advancement, and as an advocate for human rights. The socialisation and professionalisation of journalists, who courageously and with strong conviction uphold professional ideals and ethical practices, has as its obverse in nations where journalists ignore these ideals and accept bribes, gifts or other rewards for producing or withholding news stories critical of the interests, policies or projects of the elite and the powerful. In so doing they may be acting as agents of the social, political and economic status quo, rather than as socially responsible agents of national development.

This article arises from these dialogues and the authors' experiences as journalism media educators and former journalism practitioners—especially while teaching basic and advanced print and broadcast journalism courses in East Africa and elsewhere in the world. We discuss the challenges of teaching journalism ethics in East Africa (both in journalism schools and on the job in newsrooms), with particular focus on plagiarism among journalism students and some working journalists in Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan. Since newsrooms are training platforms for novice journalists, the article also draws on insights from a few news editors and media stakeholders in South Sudan.

While emphasising our own observations and experiences with student journalism ethics, specifically related to plagiarism and dependency on the work of fellow students, as well as using unattributed materials in news stories, this investigation problematizes plagiarism among East African journalism students (and novice journalists) as a possible gateway to engaging in ethical abuses as future professional journalists. From this perspective, plagiarism as a relatively minor form of 'corruption' can degenerate into an 'accepted normalised practice' where journalists are willing to compromise traditional journalistic values of objectivity and social responsibility to media audiences and society as a whole. A 2015 Bribery Index report by Transparency International (Rwanda Chapter) perceives corruption as a big threat to both individual and national development which destroys public trust in leadership and misuses public resources. 'Corruption is considered to jeopardise a country's social-economic development and the move towards a knowledge-based economy' (TI-R, 2015).

The above resonates with journalism students who would be essential future workers in the knowledge-based economy. Yet a knowledge-based work force that is not conscious of intellectual property rights and ethical issues related to appropriating the creative work of others places their employers at risk of incurring sanctions (Wiehler, 2015). Although most of East Africa's countries' anti-corruption efforts are focused more on immediate and macro-level laws and controls (TI-R, 2015), the authors suggest that these should logically begin with educating the young with

regard to ethical and practical moral attitudes and practices that they can make sound decisions that collectively lead to the development of their professions.

## **Plagiarism and Unprofessionalism in Journalism Scholarship and Practice**

The main challenge of contemporary journalism educators is to sensitise students on the dangers of unethically appropriating others' intellectual resources, and the economic value of those resources to their creators (Belmas and Lule, 1999). By understanding the economics of producing and disseminating that content, they can judge whether they are doing harm to the knowledge creators when they appropriate that work as their own. It might be easier for a student with a strong religious education and moral foundation to understand that music piracy such as downloading from the web is theft from the artist who performs the music or from the engineers and sound technicians and other professional who make their income from the product that is being pirated or stolen (Kovach and Senstiel, 2007). Also, international musicians and others in the business have been somewhat successful at pressuring their national governments to enforce copyright and other related intellectual and artistic property laws and penalties (Knight and Clare, 2013). However, for content that can be accessed easily through search engines like Google and condensed and made available through websites such as Wikipedia, it is not so clear that religious commandments such as *Thou Shalt Not Steal* are applicable with regard to accessing and appropriating the content as their own.

Certainly, web-based news sites with few obligations to their reporters or connections to their audiences and public relations professionals who may substitute their own biased and subjective content for news and information are potentially damaging to journalism as a profession (Belmas and Lule, 1999). These forces can be an obstacle to cultivating and encouraging professionalism among journalism students that is based on idealistic notions of serving a socially responsible press, empowering its citizens through factual and reliable information, and protecting them from tyranny and repression through a constant and critical analysis of government and other institutions of power in the 'watchdog' tradition (Christians et al., 2009).

Journalism students who adopt the plagiarism habit are certainly not internalising the higher aspirations regarding the profession that the universities should be cultivating in the classroom. For journalism teachers, it would be a mistake not to fully warn students that they are likely to be caught if they engage in plagiarism as paid professional journalists (Belmas and Lule, 1999). While the Internet has made plagiarism much easier for media professionals to engage in, it also allows copy editors (and journalism instructors) to more easily detect plagiarised content (Clark cited in Ryan, 2007:62).

Within the limitations of this study we are constrained from presenting a detailed ethical or moral context for discussing plagiarism issues among journalism students that comprises our case studies. It is important to propose that even if a journalism

academic programme is unable to offer a full course in media law and ethics, from the beginning of their journalism education students should understand what their value is as professionals, particularly their economic value (Knight and Clare, 2013). If they are educated as to the potential profits that their work can generate, then they are more likely to be stimulated to produce competitive and quality work and to understand that appropriating someone else's intellectual property in the form of news content through plagiarism or other means diminishes their own skills and competitiveness as reporters (Kovach and Senstiel, 2007). The idea that their own hard work can be plagiarised and appropriated should also aggravate them and as a consequence build a stronger professional pride and identity (Clark cited in Ryan, 2007:62).

Our study has a practical and applied aspect in that rather condemning or faulting students for plagiarising and otherwise appropriating the work of others to present as their own, we advocate for education and enlightenment on the connection between plagiarising and cheating at the university level, and the serious consequences of such practices on media professionalism. The cheating is disregarding the rewards of the hard work of learning and developing journalistic and other communication skills they will need for a successful and satisfying career. Like any knowledge and skills that are not acquired but are necessary in a profession, the student who engages in cheating is likely to be caught in what could become desperate circumstances of trying to fulfill job expectations they are not qualified for (Clark, 2004). If they are in the habit, they will attempt to find unethical or deceptive ways of meeting expectations but will ultimately fail when the work is deemed unacceptable or even illegal with regard to copyrights and patent infringement. At the level of the employer or company, dishonest and deceptive employees will likely reflect negatively on the entire ownership, management and employee structure.

Just like how business like computer software production is plagued by infringement of copyright through illegal downloading and black market sales of knockoffs, it would stand to reason that if journalism students in developing countries, who are often among the brightest, engage in plagiarism, illegal digital downloading and other forms of low level piracy of technology, software and media content, their failure to master creative production of their own media content would on a larger scale hinder the progress of the country toward becoming a competitive information-based economy.

For journalism students and some professional journalists in East Africa, the issue of journalism ethics, particularly plagiarism in journalism courses, has had very little regard despite its importance in the profession. However, this complacent attitude towards plagiarism is likely to radically change as East African higher learning institutions move to acquire plagiarism detecting software that is rapidly being adopted worldwide. For instance, the University of Nairobi (Kenya) offers free plagiarism checkers on its website some of which include: *Turnitin* (Proprietary software), *Viper* (Free software), *Plagiarism detector* (Free software), *Plagiarism.Net* (Free online checking), and *Copyscape* (Online Free Plagiarism detecting software).

Of these, *Turnitin* has become the most popular anti-plagiarism software programme available to the academy. In recent times, *Turnitin* software analysed more than 55 million student papers from 1003 higher education institutions in the United States to understand the change in levels of unoriginal content in student papers.

Even with the availability of such technology, it is much harder to detect and prove plagiarism when assignments are collected and marked on paper. As Internet availability and quality improve, more instructors in East Africa will be able to effectively detect and prove students have plagiarised. With such detection and evidence, then colleges and universities will have to decide how plagiarism will be avoided or punished. If students know they will be caught for engaging in plagiarism, they are much less likely to do so.

Simeon Wiehler, Dean of the School of Social, Political and Administrative Sciences at the University of Rwanda, in a *The New Times* newspaper story on June 23, 2015, observed that plagiarism is a 'system-wide failure that hurts the future of Rwanda by having the universities produce sub-standard research'. He blames top leadership in the education systems who fail to monitor and discipline plagiarism because of fear of retribution by disgruntled students who may have economic or political connections with family or friends who might obstruct or interfere with deserved punishment by the university. The solution to this systemic problem, he argues, is by empowering academic leaders to make independent decisions and push for independent disciplinary policies. He also advocates for adoption of web-based plagiarism checking technology such as *Turnitin*, and attributes the current lack of this software to the sluggish university system to acquire licenses and to make the technology available to professors.

One South African study showed that academics also practice plagiarism, and that, where students perceived their instructors to be less likely to enforce strictures about plagiarism, they are less hesitant to practice it themselves (Adele, 2015). In a related study, South African researchers surveying 900 academics at one public university found that they tended to be uncomfortable about disciplining those students engaged in cheating and others objected to the time and effort required to make reports and provide evidence of cheating (ibid). Such reporting detracted from time available for their own research, which was crucial for academic promotion. The researchers also found that faculty themselves were often complicit in cheating. Adele (2015) established further that almost 50 percent of 371 academic articles published in South African management journals contained over 15% plagiarised material. This study raises the concern that if academics themselves are plagiarising, it seems likely they'll ignore students doing the same.

## **Brief Overview of Journalism Education in Three East African Nations**

This study focuses on three contexts in East Africa including the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Rwanda (Rwanda), the

Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University (Uganda) and the Media Development Institute of South Sudan.

### *Rwanda*

Rwanda's School of Journalism and communication, to begin with, has grown in student population from about 30 at its inception in 1996 to about 250 to date. The average class size is 60 students. With increased student numbers, over the years, and a static staff population, education of journalists at the SJC is a great challenge more so because journalism education by nature is equipment-intensive and requires individualised attention especially for practical classes such as writing skills, audio and video editing among others. With a staff-student ratio of about 1:30, it is not easy for educators to satisfy the individual learning needs of large classes. This has led to some lecturers opting to administer group assignments even in writing classes so that grading becomes easier.

With a small library and increased student numbers, there has been a marked reduction in the number of library users since most students prefer online sources for reference. These authors have observed a common practice amongst many students who download materials from the internet and present them as their own for class assignments. This is even more prevalent in large classes (currently the largest class size is about 100 students) where some lecturers are not keen on checking the sources consulted by students.

Journalism students in Rwanda are introduced to research techniques during their first year (through a module entitled *Introduction to scientific research*). One element of this module is academic writing skills where students learn how to research and write academic papers (with proper referencing and citations). This module also introduces students to different sources of information for academic research purposes such as library materials as well as internet search and retrieval. Students are sensitised on good and bad online sources and how to identify them. In their 3rd year, students also get trained on communication research methods where ethics of research forms part of the main topics taught. While teaching on journalism ethics is a key characteristic of journalism education, such training at Rwanda's school of journalism is lacking. Instead, notions of journalism ethics and principles are taught as part of other modules such as *Media and Society* among other related modules. The Acting Dean, Joseph Njuguna, confirmed the pending plans to introduce a module on media ethics (in interview).

### *Uganda*

Makerere University is one of the oldest and most prominent universities in East Africa. The university has grown from a mere technical school in 1922 to a fully-fledged institution of higher learning. Currently the University offers not only day but also evening and external study programmes to a student body of about

30,000 undergraduates and 3,000 postgraduates (both national and foreigners). It is also a very active center for research. Since July 2011, the University has become a collegiate university, consisting of eight colleges and two schools, operating as semi-autonomous units of the University.

The Department of Journalism and Communication at Makerere University has the vision of offering ‘quality education in journalism, communication and professional development to students in Africa’, according to the department’s website. While Makerere University has an ‘Academic Integrity Policy’ (AIP) and a ‘Quality Assurance Committee’ where issues of plagiarism are addressed, plagiarism is common amongst journalism students who lift materials from the internet sources without acknowledging the sources. According to William Tayeebwa, the department head, the emergence of ICT tools has aggravated plagiarism.

*Students routinely lift material from Google and other search engines without proper attribution. I have read emails from the general staff list where colleagues discuss the issue of plagiarism by students. (in interview).*

At the same time, Makerere University Academic Integrity Policy on page 1 (see end note 3) stipulates that, ‘Members of the Makerere community are expected to foster in their own work the spirit of academic honesty and not to tolerate its abuse by others’. According to Gorretti Nassanga, Professor of Mass Communication, the Quality Assurance Committee is charged with enforcing the highest standards of quality by instilling a culture of academic integrity among staff and students at the university. Students who are proven to have engaged in plagiarism are sanctioned. Depending on the gravity of the case, penalties can range from a verbal warning, scoring a zero, to discontinuation from the programme. It is important to note that although Makerere University operates a no-plagiarism policy on staff and students’ work, there is no comprehensive university-wide policy determining which plagiarism software is to be used by staff and how to access it. The result is piecemeal application of the policy where only keen staff buy or download their own software (or borrow from colleagues) and use it in their courses. Lack of a common policy on access to common software leaves it upon staff to execute the policy or not ‘making it difficult for staff to detect and sanction all plagiarism cases in the university’ (Nassanga in interview).

### *South Sudan*

In South Sudan the media situation is still low-key since the country is just rising from its conflict-laden past. Most journalists lack the necessary skills to perform even the basic journalistic functions. With constant government interference and intimidation by security officials who do not understand or value media’s role in society, the profession is hampered as news editors are under constant threat of

arrest or closure of their media houses (Clifford and Zeuthen, 2011). The media are, therefore, not able to play their monitorial role deemed necessary to cultivate human rights, good governance and democracy (Christians et al., 2011). Due to poorly maintained equipment, a number of radio and television stations have been off-air for long periods (UJOSS, 2012).

To address skills gaps, the Media Development Institute (MDI) was established in 2014 under the Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS), with funding from Internews and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), among other organisations. MDI aims to strengthen the capacity of journalists and develop media professionalism by ensuring ethical reporting standards.

The foregoing provides the contexts that this research undertakes to analyse the extent of adherence to journalism ethics and enforcement of prohibitions for journalism students and novice journalists with reference to plagiarism.

## The Study Method

This study adopted a mixed method approach. The authors' experiences in teaching, research and consultancy work in the region brings a variety of insights in this investigation. This way we engaged in formal and non-formal interviews and class discussions with our students, workshop participants, journalism teachers and journalists in Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan. Three data collection methods were used: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and a survey. In-depth interviews were specifically held with two academicians at Makerere University (2016) and with selected media stakeholders in South Sudan (2015) including editors of some local newspapers such as *Juba Monitor*, *The Citizen* and from the Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS). In South Sudan FGDs were also held with participants of a journalism workshop at the Media Development Institute in Juba. The workshop focused on the ethical code of conduct for South Sudan journalists who had earlier been found to be unpopular among journalists (Fojo, 2012). The focus of these interviews was to interrogate ethical issues raised as critical issues in the workshop.

The survey sought to explore the nature of plagiarism among journalism students in Rwanda. The focus on Rwanda (for the survey) was specifically to ascertain the validity of an on-going thesis among a number of journalism lecturers that plagiarism is mainly aggravated by the Internet. It was anticipated that results from Rwanda could be externally validated to other study contexts within this study's scope. Ninety-one journalism students from the School of Journalism and Communication were surveyed. A 5-scale Likert questionnaire was administered where respondents were asked whether they 'strongly agree,' 'agree,' were 'uncertain,' 'disagree,' or 'strongly disagree' with ten propositions (P1 – P10) that speak to the influence of the Internet (or new media) on their ethical decisions on course work and assignments (see Table 1 below). The survey was followed by a FGD with selected students and interviews with some journalism lecturers.



**Table 1: Propositions Put to Students**

<b>Propositions</b>	
P1	The Internet is free to everyone and there should be no punishment by the University when students borrow from Web sources and present it as their own work in course assignments.
P2	It is too difficult for me to gather my own news and information for journalism assignments and course work without copying from the Web or other sources.
P3	I believe it is acceptable for journalism students to use unattributed and uncited Web sources and other material in the work they submit at the University of Rwanda.
P4	Most students are afraid of the consequences for plagiarism and cheating in journalism courses.
P5	We have not been taught enough about plagiarism and cheating on course work at the University and so we don't know when and how to avoid it.
P6	Plagiarism and other forms of cheating on course work and assignments, is not related to the code of ethics for professional journalists.
P7	Plagiarism and other forms of cheating on course work and assignments, has little relationship with how a student who engages in plagiarism and cheating will act in real journalism practice.
P8	Cheating at the university and engaging in plagiarism have little to do with other moral and religious and the way someone treats other people in the society or at home.
P9	Most UR students engage in plagiarism and cheating in their coursework and assignments.
P10	There should be a values and ethics module dedicated to teaching journalism ethics at the School of Journalism and Communication.

## **Key Research Issues**

The survey sought to address three research issues:

- Students' attitudes towards plagiarism and enforcement of prohibitions.
- Students' levels of agreement or disagreement with hypotheses that provide foreground for the influence of the Internet and Web sources on the way they execute their coursework and assignments.
- Respondents' views on the perceived relationship between students' plagiarism behaviour and unprofessionalism in real journalism practice.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Students' Attitudes towards Plagiarism and Enforcement of Prohibitions**

As an ethical principle that journalists should gather, verify, contextualise and attribute factual information, a proposition was put to students that since the Internet is a free resource for everyone, there should be no punishment by the University

when students use information from Web sources and present it as their own work in course assignments without attribution (P1). The majority of the students disagreed with this idea when the ‘strongly Disagree’ (35 students) and the ‘disagree’ (33 students) classifications are combined. Approximately 55% opposed the view that it was ‘too difficult for them to gather their own news and information for journalism assignments and course work without copying from the Web or other sources’. This was made evident when 34 students ‘disagreed’ and 16 ‘strongly disagreed’ with this proposition making a total of 50 respondents. Quite related, 27 students disagreed and 31 strongly disagreed (64%) to the suggestion that it was ‘acceptable for journalism students to use unattributed and uncited Web sources and other material in the work they submit at the University of Rwanda’ (P3). However the presence of 33 students (36%) in the other categories raises questions about the extent and levels of awareness of the actual meaning and implications of plagiarism more so within the context of the absence of a course on media ethics as noted earlier.

**Table 2: Number of Responses to Propositions**

Total Response	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Total for Strongly Agree	10	6	6	36	11	24	18	11	11	51
Total for Agree	7	14	16	20	10	17	35	29	16	21
Total for Uncertain	4	13	11	19	5	7	9	12	20	9
Total for Disagree	33	34	27	5	32	15	14	17	16	4
Total for Strongly Disagree	35	16	31	6	25	28	14	17	27	5

The survey established that more than half of the students surveyed are afraid of the consequences for plagiarism and cheating in journalism courses as evidenced by the 36 responses in the ‘strongly agree’ and 20 responses in ‘agree’ categories totaling to 56 students (62%) of the total sample of 91 students. During a class discussion on plagiarism, a fourth-year student offered his understanding of plagiarism as:

*When you steal work done by other people and you don't include their identities [names], showing that it is your own work, to me that is plagiarism. There was also a situation when 2 people submitted same written assignment and they were caught, we all knew that it was forged (read plaglarism) (A fourth-year student in a class discussion).*

The above understanding was contradicted by 32 and 25 students (63%) in the ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ categories, respectively, to the statement that ‘[they] have not been taught enough about plagiarism and cheating on course work at the University and so [they] don't know how and when to avoid it’. But awareness on plagiarism and any form of cheating is clearly elaborated in UR (2016)

academic guidelines and regulations and is defined as ‘academic dishonesty that includes cheating, unauthorised collaboration, falsifying academic records and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning processes.

Although plagiarism at the UR is generally not allowed, the students confirmed that this vice is still rampant. There was a majority agreement (62%) of the total combination of those who ‘Disagreed’ and ‘Strongly Disagreed’ with the statement that students have been taught and sensitised about plagiarism as unprofessional. A small number of the surveyed students (23%) did not think that enough has been taught to them about plagiarism and other unprofessional practices. Five (5) students were not sure if the knowledge gained on anti-plagiarism was adequate to signal to them when to detect the vice and how to keep away from it. There seems to be a high tendency among students to rely on Internet sources as opposed to library materials as evidenced in the following statement.

*We are given many assignments by different lecturers making it almost impossible to sit in the library, read and summarize many materials. The easy way is to download work from the internet sources [...] and get assignments done before the deadlines. (A Third-year student in a FGD).*

It is clear from the above quote that students blame the system of teaching where too much workload is assigned to them with very strict deadlines. Some lecturers are also not very keen on checking if students have acknowledged sources in their work, especially if the class is big. The above can also suggest that journalism students are not well prepared for the demands of the journalism profession where deadlines are crucial to the game. In journalism education like in any other academic programme, a heavy workload in one course may not be an excuse for plagiarism or missing deadlines in another.

Acknowledging information sources has generally been a ‘tricky’ issue especially since most of the students do not know the fine line between paraphrasing and indicating a quoted reference. It can also be argued that the medium of instruction may hinder students from the habit of referencing academic work – most students (with a weak English background) find it difficult to read and summarise complex information sources that have been written in English. This was confirmed by a second-year student in a FGD thus:

*Due to the difficulties of some information found online, it is easier to just copy and paste as it is given there because paraphrasing it is difficult when I don't understand the meaning.*

Clearly the above raises another issue related to English, the language of instruction that was made mandatory in 2008. This has become an issue in the education sector as many teachers were not ready to switch from French to English in a short period of time which was given.

## The Relationship between Plagiarism and Code of Ethics in Journalism Practice

Plagiarism and other forms of academic cheating were acknowledged by 43 of the respondents (53%) drawn from the categories of those who ‘disagreed’ and ‘strongly disagreed’ to have a relationship with the journalistic code of ethics. These respondents realised a great influence of academic dishonesty on values of journalism practice. In the FGD about this issue, respondents drew parallels between the practice of presenting a piece of plagiarised academic work and the unethical behaviour of producing an unattributed journalistic piece.

*In my opinion, copying and pasting work from unclear sources is the same as imagining news stories and presenting them as ‘well-researched’ [...] this will make a journalist to be doubted on his integrity. I think journalism students should have good ethical standards and professionalism which make audiences trust their work. (A fourth-year student in a FGD).*

At Makerere University, journalism teachers generally agree that plagiarism and other forms of cheating in coursework and assignments have a relationship with the journalism code of ethics. According to Nassanga, ‘the two are closely related as they both deal with having honest work practice by properly acknowledging sources of information’. Tayeebwa is more emphatic that ‘in all known codes of journalism ethics, using work or quoting someone without attribution is unacceptable practice’. For students who participated in the survey, this was also acknowledged.

## Perceptions on Guidelines and Enforcement of Prohibitions

Like other journalists elsewhere in the world, journalists in Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan are guided by a Code of Ethics in the conduct of their journalistic responsibilities. But cases abound (in these contexts) of journalists who fall short of the tenets enshrined in this code by publishing stories that lack accuracy, objectivity and evidence. For example, one FGD participant in South Sudan shared her experience as follows:

*Copying and pasting information from documents, without any effort to acknowledge their sources is a practice evident in some newsrooms which obtain and translate stories from other online sources without acknowledging them.*

No doubt the above is unprofessional and no different from a student who plagiarises material for academic purposes. Yet, these cases are so rampant that aspiring journalists have come to embrace them as normal and acceptable.

At both Makerere University and at the University of Rwanda Schools of Journalism and Communication, there are courses that introduce journalism students to ways of doing research in which students are supposed to learn how to conduct literature reviews and how to reference or cite sources in their assignments. While the school in Rwanda lacks a module on media ethics, at Makerere this module exists. Individual lecturers in different modules also demand that referencing guidelines are followed by students when doing their course work. However, a lack of adequate practical exercises on these guidelines is largely lacking at both institutions. Consequently, students easily forget about referencing guidelines once they are through with these foundation course units. However, there is a feeling in Rwanda that lecturers are not doing enough to address issues of plagiarism, as observed by a lecturer in Rwanda thus:

*It is a matter of enforcing these rules. We need to constantly remind students about the referencing system [...] and emphasise that students always follow the guidelines. Otherwise, students are lazy and forget the system as soon as the module is over.*

While lecturers (as seen in the above quote) tend to characterise students as ‘lazy’ and ‘forgetful’, some lecturers are also not keen to follow up on plagiarism cases and to acknowledge that the problem has become rampant. In an interview, Tayeewa suggests that lecturers should also know their students’ writing abilities:

*When a student writes something that is out of the norm, the lecturer should take a closer look and subject the doubted paragraph to a plagiarism check. This can be a simple Google search of the paragraph. Universities ought to provide plagiarism detecting software.*

Nassanga agrees with the above and argues that if Journalism teachers continue to instill in students the values of professional referencing and attribution of sources in their news stories and academic articles, plagiarism incidences, especially the all-powerful temptation of lifting readily available materials from Internet sources, can gradually be contained. She contends that Journalism teachers have not done much to address these issues both in journalism schools and in newsrooms. ‘It is a big challenge especially that a key yardstick for professional practice is how the voices of sources in the story are acknowledged’.

## **Journalism Ethics in South Sudan: Analysis and Discussion**

The issue of journalism ethics in South Sudan needs to be discussed within the broader context in which the media operate. This investigation establishes that the South Sudan media are not yet prepared to take on the monitorial role due a complexity of factors – poor skills, state interference, etc. While news rooms and

short workshops provide basic journalism training, issues such as media ethics are rarely or scantily tackled due to time constraints as this FGD participant observes:

*These workshops are very brief and facilitators when explaining ethics don't make reference to our own unique context—a context without media freedom and proper reporting skills. We need to learn with real life situations and examples from our experiences.*

Another journalist, in a FGD, was particularly concerned about the absence of knowledge on the ethical code of conduct, a knowledge gap viewed by South Sudanese journalists as a hindrance to their journalistic performance. 'Sometimes we feel irresponsible especially if we don't know our social responsibilities in society such as how to treat information sources, etc'. These aspects of the Code and other ethical concerns, especially in a conflict-sensitive context, have not been made clear. Citing examples of how the media have generally performed in addressing issues related to conflicts in South Sudan, an interview respondent contended that the media have instead aggravated the situation:

*Because they rush to publish information before analysing it, notions of objectivity are not considered. Sometimes journalists ask sensitive questions that can easily spark off conflict. Many journalists are biased along ethncal lines. (Michael Duku, Centre Manager, AMDISS).*

The situation is compounded by the lack of understanding of the Code of Ethics by most South Sudanese journalists and those who know it 'have disregarded it', according to Alfred Taban, Chief Editor *Juba Monitor* a local daily newspaper. For instance the ethical code on discrimination is disregarded where by the Dinkas and Nuers (ethnic groups) are given more media platforms, space and microphone to air their views and opinions at the expense of other citizens. Taban contends further that the codes on accuracy, deception, and the social responsibility of media are not respected. As a result, many facts from some stories are hidden while other most critical issues underpinning society do not make it to the media. The issue of the 'brown envelope' features significantly and, as a consequence, truth is compromised while rumor-mongering is promoted. According to Taban, through these unethical tendencies, South Sudanese media have more often than not been complicit in aggravating conflicts in a bid to make news attractive'. He however clarified that the in-house training and editorial policies of his media institution puts great emphasis on the social responsibility of journalists and any journalist or sub-editor who breaches this policy is 'not tolerated'.

As ethics is a key aspect of media education, the subject is normally incorporated in a training programme. But this research has established that the majority of journalists in South Sudan do not have any formal journalism training and lack skills to perform even the basic journalism function. The few journalists

who can research and report stories are hindered by government interferences and intimidation by some security officials who do not understand or value media's role in society. Such abuses and harassment, according to the journalists who participated in FGDs, include beatings, imprisonment/detentions, inducements such as threats and bribes and expulsion from work. Media institutions have quite often been closed down and journalists and editors imprisoned if 'found guilty' of 'angering' government officials or security agents. Worse, many journalists have been killed at the hands of government security agents or during military crossfires. Consequently, self-censorship amongst journalists and some media institutions has increased as journalists get more concerned about their safety than anything else. According to Veronica Lucy Gordon, member of the Association of Media Women in South Sudan, 'you have to think twice of what will happen to you before you write or broadcast anything'.

South Sudanese journalists are also being censored by their editors to 'avoid problems' according to a journalist in a FGD. The professional consequence of these trends is that the media's monitorial functions of watchdog and surveillance (Christians et al., 2009) are undermined. Unfortunately for society, many crimes are not reported in the media for fear of being 'eliminated', observed Michael Duku in an interview, adding that excessive self-censorship as an ethical issue has been mainly enabled by government that has prescribed the dos and don'ts for journalists.

*Anything critical of government is not reported. We have for example been barred to quote the opposition or anyone who is not in favor of government, though this is an act of fairness, objectivity and balancing information. To avoid being detained, all journalists in this country obey this draconic rule.*

Excessive government controls on media's work and self-censorship by journalists and editors have left many public issues unattended to by the media, who should have been in the forefront to address them or, at least, highlight them. The many public issues underpinning the country include: bad politics/political conflicts; struggles over resources such as land, cattle and water; ethnic conflicts. There are also issues related to society as a whole such as domestic-related conflicts caused by polygamy and other civil issues. Conflict in South Sudan is also understood in terms of marginalisation and enslavement of 'some individuals or groups of people by others' (Michael Duku in interview).

In such a context the media are expected to be prepared with resources, skills and an enabling environment with fundamental freedoms such as free speech, expression and press freedom for them to fully address these issues. Yet, on the African scene, South Sudan has been ranked in the 124th position for the absence of these fundamental human rights (Press Freedom Index, 2011/2012). For journalists, the freedoms of searching for information, accessing sources, reporting and of expression are generally constrained in South Sudan. According to Colin Lasu, MDI

Manager, ‘these freedoms probably exist in people’s homes – behind closed doors as many people in the country do not have the potential to express themselves and always censor what they say’ (Coli Lasu in interview).

The issue of expression is most prominent in the broadcast media which predominantly relies on spoken words, thus emphasising the language of communication. Quite a number of newspapers and radio stations in Juba operate in English, yet a majority of journalists do not have a good command of the language and, like students and novice journalists in Rwanda, these too resort to plagiarism due the language barriers. Further, most information sources speak Juba Arabic, a type of Arabic exclusive to this community. Many journalists in South Sudan were also viewed in this study as ‘corrupt’ which was argued to influence not only their news reports and programmes, but also determine the inclusion and exclusion of certain issues and events. ‘When they are not given “something”, there is little or no commitment to fully analyse the issues at hand’, argues Nhial Bol, Editor In-chief, *The Citizen* newspaper (in interview).

Many of the journalists are also poor, — given the meagre remuneration they receive, particularly freelancers. During the training on journalism ethics conducted in Juba in 2014 by one of the authors of this article, the participants wanted to be paid for participation in addition for transport refund. As this was not factored into the budget especially for those who resided in Juba, some few journalists opted out of the workshop. This becomes an ethical issue especially when viewed from the perspective of the *Brown envelope*. In a discussion that followed this incident, many journalists viewed ethics as a ‘voluntary endeavor’ and argued that given their context of ‘abject poverty’ free money should not be turned away.

*The poor should use the opportunity to earn some money. Those who are well off can refuse the money, but complying with the codes of ethics should be voluntary and, if one fails the test, it should not be seen as a breach of professionalism. (A FGD participant).*

Colin Lasu is however emphatic that journalistic ethics should be the cornerstone and pillars for good and professional journalism. ‘It does not matter whether one is poor or rich, truth should always be respected’ (in interview).

## Summary and Conclusion

This article has addressed plagiarism as a critical ethical challenge for journalism teachers using case studies from Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan. Testimonials from these cases indicate that indeed plagiarism and unethical tendencies exist among journalism students as well as novice journalists. The general impression is that the emergence of ICT tools, especially the Internet has increased the incidences of plagiarism, making it a deleterious issue in journalism education in East Africa, as students routinely lift material from Google and other Web resources without



proper attribution. Despite the awareness of the various faculties at both Makerere and University of Rwanda schools of journalism of the existence of plagiarism, very little has been done to address it. The existing academic policy instruments have not produced any results either. While the Department of Journalism and Communication at Makerere University has an ethics module, its counterparts in Rwanda are yet to institute one. The majority of the students studied advocated for a course specifically on media ethics, as most journalists find themselves on the wrong side of the journalistic values when they are not well-versed with the Code of Ethics.

This study has also underscored the need for formal journalism training for South Sudan journalists to become professionals in order for them to address the magnitude of public issues underpinning the country. It is evident that lack of the development of professionalism leads to unethical practices among journalists. As Taban emphasised, journalism ethics and the code of conduct for journalists should be core at all levels of engagement, and unethical tendencies should not be tolerated. Authors of this article posit that the journalists' Code of Ethics should form the foundation for journalism education and training in East Africa.

The researchers also found evidence that a solution to the student plagiarism problem does not necessarily have to be complex. One of the researchers who found a high incidence of plagiarism in an advanced journalism reporting class found a dramatic decrease in student plagiarism for a Level One or after he explained clearly at the beginning of the course what plagiarism constitutes and what the professional penalties are. The students were also warned that the consequences of plagiarism would be a failing mark for the course and perhaps university level sanctions. This would indicate that when a student understands what plagiarism is, what the consequences are, and why it is unethical, they are better prepared to avoid it.

In the final analysis, there seem to be a direct relationship between the habit of plagiarism of academic work and the tendency to adopt a similar approach in producing stories for the media. The general view appears to be that since it is a form of culture, plagiarism is likely to find its way into the workplace when a student is not used to independent research and professional attribution of the work produced. There is no doubt that if journalism students are used to the habit of downloading unattributed materials from the internet and other sources, they are highly likely to do the same in real journalistic assignments. To this end, we argue that cheating on class assignments might prove to be a stepping stone to perfection of this art in the real world during practice. Engaging in unethical academic practices has also been viewed in this study as having a negative moral implication not only at school and on the student engaging in it, but in the society as a whole. The authors argue that since journalists are judged by their adherence to the Code of Ethics by which they work, it behooves schools of journalism to have mandatory courses on ethics to ground students with this knowledge and awareness before they venture into practice.

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