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**Finding Their Ground: Nigerian Nursing Students'  
Perceptions of Plagiarism**

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**Finding Their Ground: Nigerian Nursing Students'  
Perceptions of Plagiarism**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my father, Frank Larry George (1932 – 2013).

Thank you for always believing in me—no matter what.

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supported me and your prayers sustained me. There is not a word that I have written that I have written alone.

*. . . the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all of the will of the Lord. Mosiah 24:15*

# **Finding Their Ground: Nigerian Nursing Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism**

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The essence of plagiarism is whether any individual can claim ownership of thoughts, words, and ideas. Social norms and culture influence each person's perception of plagiarism. U.S. culture, which embraces individuality and values individual ownership, views plagiarism as unethical. Conversely, collectivist cultures such as that of Nigeria, value group ownership and have difficulty understanding U.S. values associated with plagiarism. The U.S. Embassy in Nigeria reports that an increasing number of Nigerian students are studying in the U.S., especially in New York and Texas. Little is known about Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism when they become students in U.S. colleges. This study utilized Naturalistic Inquiry to explore Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism. Seventeen Nigerian nursing students or recent nursing graduates were interviewed using a web-based chat dialog format. Study data consisted of demographic information, interview transcripts, and the researcher's reflective journal. Data analysis utilized the Constant Comparative Method. Beck's criteria were used to ensure trustworthiness and rigor of the study's procedures. Study

findings revealed that Nigerian nursing students often had little knowledge or understanding of plagiarism prior to entering U.S. schools and they struggled to understand and adapt to U.S. academic views and expectations regarding plagiarism. Nigerian nursing students who have immigrated to the U.S. to attend college wanted to follow U.S. academic plagiarism rules, but often found the rules regarding plagiarism in the U.S. unclear and confusing. Nigerian nursing students learned and adapted to U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism through an incremental process of adaptive transformation after matriculation to U.S. schools. The Nigerian students shared what they had learned with other Nigerian students as a way of helping other Nigerians. The Nigerian nursing students wanted to inform U.S. nursing educators about what Nigerian students need to help them learn, adapt, and meet U.S. rules related to plagiarism.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADN	Associate's Degree in Nursing
APA	American Psychological Association
BSN	Bachelor's of Science in Nursing
CCM	Constant Comparative Method
GSBS	Graduate School of Biomedical Science
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NI	Naturalistic Inquiry
U.S.	United States
USB	Universal Serial Bus
UTMB	University of Texas Medical Branch

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter one introduces this Naturalistic Inquiry (NI) (Erlandson, et al. 1993) study, which explored Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism. The chapter provides an overview of plagiarism and the impact of culture on perceptions of plagiarism, the study aim, and the research question. The chapter describes the natural inquiry research methodology, the study's significance, explains the use of this methodology, including the data collection and analysis. Finally the chapter provides a brief overview of the study findings.

## **STUDY PROBLEM**

The American Psychological Association (2010) defined plagiarism as the practice of claiming credit for the work, ideas, and concepts of others. Acts of plagiarism by nursing students can potentially harm the nursing education process, nursing care, and ultimately patient safety. Evidence has shown that students who exhibit academic dishonesty or unethical behavior are more likely to exhibit unethical behavior as professional nurses (Bavier, 2009). Concerns related to authorship and plagiarism may at first appear simple, but are often complex when one considers the various types of plagiarism such as self-plagiarism, innocent or naive plagiarism, malicious plagiarism, and degrees and severity of plagiarism (Baggs, 2008).

Human beings are amalgamations of their heritage, culture, and life experiences. Childhood and adult environment, culture, and religion impact and shape individual perceptions, although people may be unaware of how their perceptions guide their

interpretations of the world. Individual perceptions can change over time, but such change happens slowly through prolonged contact with other beliefs and cultures and through education and maturity (Richards & Morse, 2007).

U.S. nursing schools have large numbers of international students. Once matriculated, international nursing students' personal beliefs and perceptions impact their views of academia, nursing, and the legal and ethical issues associated with issues such as plagiarism. Transition to life in U.S. colleges can be overwhelming for international students as they adjust to major cultural and social differences (Sanner et al., 2002). Students previously educated in non-Western cultures may encounter difficulties with Westernized conceptions of plagiarism, which are based on the "premise that individuals own their ideas" (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012, p. 63).

Students raised in some non-Western cultures may view information, including published works, as public property. Thus, they may integrate such information into their work without acknowledgement of the original author (Payan et al., 2010). The Nigerian culture is an example of a non-Western culture that often places greater value on group membership than individual accomplishment (Payan et al., 2010). Nigerian people tend to be group-oriented with strong characteristics of communality and collective responsibility (Idowu, 1985). Within the Nigerian culture, relationships are family oriented and based on age, status, and respect; the importance of family impacts many areas of the Nigerian student's life (Idowu, 1985).

Nigerian people place a great deal of emphasis on higher education, and many Nigerian students enroll in U.S. schools and universities (Idowu, 1985). Nigerian students comprised the 17<sup>th</sup> largest foreign student undergraduate population and the 19<sup>th</sup> largest

source of foreign graduate students attending U.S. universities during the 2009-2010 academic year. The most popular areas of study among these students were engineering, business, physical sciences, and public health (U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, 2012). The number of Nigerian students in the U.S. grew 6% in 2010 to 6,568 Nigerian students; they were enrolled in over 730 U.S. colleges in all 50 states. Colleges in Texas were the most popular choice of Nigerian students, and New York was the second most popular (U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, 2012).

### **RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM OF STUDY**

This study aimed to improve the understanding of how Nigerian nursing students perceived plagiarism. The study used NI (Erlandson et al., 1993) to answer the research question: what are the Nigerian nursing student's perceptions of plagiarism?

### **NATURALISTIC INQUIRY**

The study utilized NI based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and as elaborated by Erlandson et al. (1993). NI constructs new knowledge through a process of reflection (Erlandson et al., 1993), asking questions such as "what is happening here?" and "why are things the way they are?" (Erlandson et al., 1993). The naturalistic paradigm accepts that there are multiple realities based on the constructs, or filters, through which people view their environments. NI further posits that the different viewpoints, constructs, or parts of reality are interrelated, and understanding reality as a whole will enhance understanding of people's viewpoints (Erlandson et al., 2013).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This study enhanced understanding of Nigerian students' perceptions as they encountered and adapted to U.S. standards and expectations regarding plagiarism. Study

findings may facilitate policy and educational program development within U.S. colleges and universities to improve tactics for addressing plagiarism concerns in academic nursing programs.

#### **DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

Seventeen Nigerian nursing students or recent nursing graduates participated in the study. All study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Texas Medical Branch. Study data included participant demographic and interview answers. The study utilized a website created specifically for the study. Subject consent and data collection took place within the website's chat room. Researcher and participant communications were all typed, resulting in a transcript of all data that was immediately available following interview completion. Data confidentiality was assured by removing all identifying individual participant information from the transcripts used for data analysis and assigning participant codes to each dataset. The constant comparative method, as detailed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was used for data analysis.

#### **OVERVIEW OF STUDY FINDINGS**

The study utilized NI to explore the experiences of 17 Nigerian students or recent nursing graduates who had immigrated to the U.S. to study nursing and encountered U.S. views of plagiarism. The study revealed that Nigerian nursing students had entered the U.S. with a unique set of values that placed great importance on education and a sense of social responsibility to other Nigerians. Participants arrived in the U.S. with some awareness of plagiarism but lacked full understanding of the concept. Soon after matriculating in U.S. schools, Nigerian students became aware of the dissimilarities in

how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S. compared to Nigerian views of plagiarism. Nigerian students struggled to understand and comply with U.S. expectations of plagiarism. Nigerian students learned about plagiarism and U.S. academic expectations regarding plagiarism incrementally over time. The study revealed that Nigerian students went through a process, labeled *Adaptive Transformation*, during which participants adjusted their behaviors to meet U.S. standards of plagiarism through conditional acquiescence. The study also revealed that although Nigerian students acquiesced and learned how to meet U.S. standards, their core beliefs and values regarding plagiarism rarely changed. Study participants also shared a message to U.S. educators on how faculty members can assist Nigerian students adjust to academic life in the U.S.

#### **SUMMARY OF INTRODUCTION**

This chapter gave an overview of plagiarism and the ways in which plagiarism is problematic in U.S. academia. This chapter discussed the unique situation that occurs as Nigerian nursing students enter the U.S. to study nursing and encounter concerns related to plagiarism within academic environments. The chapter also provided an overview of NI and presented data collection and analysis strategies used.

#### **FUTURE CHAPTERS**

This study is presented in five chapters. This first chapter introduced the study. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of current literature associated with plagiarism. Chapter two answers the questions: what is plagiarism, why is plagiarism a concern, and why does plagiarism occur? Chapter two discusses the prevalence of plagiarism in society as well as opinions as to why plagiarism is a problem for society in general, within academia, and for students—specifically international and nursing students. The

final section of chapter two discusses why plagiarism occurs within the international student population in general, and within the Nigerian nursing student population in particular.

Chapter three details the methodological approach to the research, justification of the chosen methodology, the interview process, the plan for managing research data, the data analysis approach, and strategies chosen to enhance the trustworthiness and relevance of the research. Chapter four details the study findings. Chapter five provides a conclusion and offers recommendations based on the study findings.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews current literature describing plagiarism, the impact of plagiarism on academia, and causes of plagiarism. In particular, the chapter examines the causes and impact of plagiarism on international students and Nigerian nursing students.

### **PLAGIARISM DEFINED**

Issues related to plagiarism can be divided into three basic areas: ethics, ownership, and esteem (Crawford, 2010; Green, 2002; Habermann et al., 2010). The American Psychological Association (2010) has defined plagiarism as the act of claiming credit for written work, ideas, and thoughts of others or the fraudulent copying of others' work (Hansen, 2003; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Posner, 2007). Some experts have categorized plagiarism as theft or fraud (Green, 2002; Posner, 2007). Others have placed plagiarism under the umbrella of academic dishonesty (Green, 2002; Klocko, 2014; McCabe, 2009). Applied linguistics professor Dr. Abasi defined plagiarism as any act of copying or using someone else's original written work or ideas without giving the original author credit; this definition included an underlying assumption that those who plagiarize have an intent to defraud. Abasi and Graves (2008) cautioned that this viewpoint represents only the Western view of plagiarism.

### **Types of Plagiarism**

Di Maria (2010) organized plagiarism into two broad categories: intentional and unintentional. This organization helped to distinguish severity, intent, and motivation of the plagiarizer.

### ***UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM***

Unintentional plagiarism assumes many forms including incorrect citations, omitted citations, or misunderstandings of what must be cited (Badke, 2007; Darab, 2006; Hussin, 2007). Some experts have termed this type of plagiarism as “plagiarism of ignorance” (Badke, 2007). Each of these types of plagiarism shares a lack of intent. Introna and Hayes (2005) cautioned that not all plagiarism should be automatically categorized as academic dishonesty. Their approach rejected academic dishonesty as an umbrella for plagiarism, arguing specifically that unintentional plagiarism did not qualify as such.

On the other hand, intentional, or malicious, plagiarism includes plagiaristic acts for which there is an intentional attempt to deceive or defraud. This can include buying and submitting entire papers from websites and deliberate use of large portions of other authors’ text with no attempt to attribute the copied works to the original author.

In addition to the broad division of plagiarism based on intention, there are many specific types of plagiarism worth defining separately.

### ***COLLUSION***

Collusion occurs when students collaborate on a product and then submit identical or very similar works (Sutton & Taylor, 2011). Many students mistakenly believe collusion is appropriate because they highly value each individual’s contribution to the group work (Haynes & Introna, 2005).

### ***SELF-PLAGIARISM***

Self-plagiarism occurs when people reuse a previous written work of their own creation and submit that work as an academic assignment or article without citing the

previous work (Baggs, 2008). Self-plagiarism does not meet all the criteria of most definitions of plagiarism because it does not require using someone else's work; self-plagiarism, however, does fail to cite the author's own original work (Posner, 2007). Due to this reason, many experts have included self-plagiarism within the larger category of plagiarism (Baggs, 2008; Posner, 2007).

### ***GHOST WRITING***

Ghost writing occurs when an individual writes a work yet another person claims authorship. While ghost writing can be considered appropriate in some fields outside academia, academic ghost writing represents a clear example of plagiarism in which student assignments, publications, or journal articles are presented without acknowledgement of substantial, or sole, contributors (Baggs, 2008).

### **Cultural Attitudes toward Plagiarism**

Social norms and culture influence how people perceive plagiarism (Green, 2002; Haynes, 2005; Payan et al., 2010). The notion that individuals can claim ownership to their own thoughts, words, and ideas is not universal. The Western world, including the U.S., promotes individual ownership and the protection of intellectual property. As a result, most Western cultures view plagiaristic acts, especially in academia or publishing, as dishonest and unacceptable (Alder-Collins, 2011; Song-Turner, 2008).

Many non-Westerners, however, maintain a culture of shared ownership of ideas and knowledge. These cultures, including many from Asia and Africa, have a history of limited written information and a traditional reliance on the use of storytelling to share and preserve knowledge with little considerations of ownership of that which is shared (Alder-Collins, 2011). Such a cultural viewpoint leads to shared creativity and

collaborative tasks within social groups. People raised in places in which there is a culture of sharing (often referred to as collectivism) may find understanding Western conceptions of plagiarism to be difficult (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012; Duff et al., 2006; Payan et al., 2010; Posner, 2007; Song-Turner, 2008). Understanding divergent cultural attitudes toward plagiarism within nursing and nursing academia is crucial because many countries with predominantly collectivist cultures are members of the International Council of Nursing (ICN). Moreover, many individuals from ICN member countries attend nursing schools or work as nurses in the U.S. (Alder-Collins, 2011).

### **PREVALENCE OF PLAGIARISM**

Concerns regarding academic integrity have increased recently and mirror the overall increase in concern related to truthfulness in business and society as a whole (Darab, 2006; Green, 2002; Hansen, 2003; McCabe, 2009). The literature to-date does not provide exact incidence rates of plagiaristic acts. Gathering precise data on the topic is difficult because students are likely to underreport incidents of their own acts of plagiarism. Many experts, however, have posited that the severity of plagiaristic acts and the rate of plagiarism appear to have escalated in recent years (Anderson, 2009; Badke, 2007; Coffey & Anyinam, 2012; Darab, 2006; Das, 2003; Heitman & Litewka, 2011; Klocko, 2014; Langone, 2007). Braumoeller & Gaines (2001) concluded that while plagiarism is a problem, it is not as pervasive as commonly thought. Meanwhile, Sutton and Taylor (2011) concluded that plagiaristic acts are more common than ordinarily thought.

Posner (2007) staked out a middle ground. While conceding that plagiarism has gained attention, he debated whether this greater attention has resulted from increased

acts of plagiarism or simply increased identification and detection of plagiarism. He ultimately suggested it may be a result of both influences.

Two studies explored the incidence of plagiarism. Badke (2007) gathered what is perhaps the most substantial data on rates of plagiarism, though his survey focused exclusively on “cut and paste” plagiarism. Badke surveyed 50,000 undergraduate students on whether they copied text directly from the internet and then used it in academic papers. In 1999, 10% of students surveyed answered yes; by 2005, 40% answered yes. Still others have estimated that the rate for all academic dishonesty is as high as 70% (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012).

Plagiarism has been of particular concern within nursing and international student communities. While exact rates of plagiarism within the nursing field have remained unknown (McCabe, 2009), one study of all health professional students estimated the rate at 60% (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012). Most experts have considered international students in general to be much more likely to have engaged in plagiarism than domestic students within Western universities. Researchers have identified several potential causes for increased plagiarism rates among international students. These reasons include not understanding expectations related to plagiarism, inexperience with writing college papers, lack of knowledge of how to properly cite authors, desire to use the words of experts, cultural differences, and a lack of proficiency in English (Klocko, 2014; Payan et al., 2010; Song-Turner, 2008).

#### **PROBLEMS WITH PLAGIARISM**

While some cultures may have developed greater tolerance of plagiarism, plagiarism can nonetheless create social problems. Badke (2007) observed that societies

with strong protections on intellectual property rights were also most noted for their innovation and creativity. Thus, negative impacts of plagiarism span the societal level to the individual level.

### **Society**

The Western view of ownership of written thoughts or ideas serves several purposes. First, there may be some economic gain to the creator or publisher of some works. Moreover the concept of owning intellectual property goes beyond that of economic value. Subject matter experts, researchers, and academic professionals often gain the respect and admiration of their peers through the publication of their original ideas, findings, and insights (Green, 2002). In addition, when information maintains its connection with its creator, the original words maintain their authority, which benefit both creators and consumers of information (Bavier, 2009). Badke (2007) explained why retaining original authorship provides value to information consumers:

Knowing who produces our information, and under what circumstances, remains a value to each of us precisely because it verifies the value of the information. By the same token, an anonymous Web site is suspect because it's impossible to check the qualifications of the author (p. 59).

When a plagiarist takes credit for an original author's work resulting in financial or notoriety gains, it is often at the expense of the original content creator (Green, 2002; Posner, 2007). When plagiarism becomes rampant, such as in collectivist cultures, content producers lose financial- and esteem-based motivation to create, which may limit the creation of new ideas and harm society as a whole. Because of the negative social effects of plagiarism, Western societies have attached strong moral and ethical concerns

to plagiarism. These moral and ethical concerns have been responsible for the most common consequences of plagiarism: “disgrace, humiliation, ostracism, and other shaming penalties” (Posner, 2007 p. 35).

## **Academia**

Plagiarism within academic settings, particularly among students, is distinct from general plagiarism. In academia, protection of the content creator has not been the primary concern—i.e., borrowing a classmate’s old biology paper will hardly have a financial impact. Rather, plagiarism has been a concern for student evaluation. Because much academic work is designed to evaluate the quality of student thinking, students who present the thinking of others as their own may hold unfair advantages. Plagiarism can impact all areas of academia—homework assignments of undergraduate students, research projects and publications by graduate students, and faculty members’ work (Green, 2002). There is evidence that identification of plagiarism is easier in the hard sciences, such as nursing and medicine, as compared to the social sciences (Das, 2003; Decoo, 2002). Acts of plagiarism within academia can have negative impacts on societal perceptions of the work. When research is identified as plagiarized, the public is likely to reject the findings of the research regardless of the accuracy of its conclusions (Green, 2002). This is not only a problem in individual cases; when plagiarism is repeatedly identified over the long-term, public trust in academic, research, and publishing institutions may diminish (Green, 2002). Concerns that plagiarism may de-incentivize potential content creators by removing possible financial incentives or individual academic acclaim exist within academia, but primarily among faculty members rather than students. Croxford (2001) argued that plagiarism in and of itself is not a hindrance to

“intellectual excellence” and does not prevent the creation of “high quality works” (p. 56). These views, however, are of the minority.

Universities have instituted a wide variety of approaches to combat negative effects of plagiarism and to attempt to end it altogether. Concerns related to authorship and plagiarism have been often multifaceted and complex when one considers types of plagiarism such as self-plagiarism, innocent or naive plagiarism, malicious plagiarism, and the degrees and severity of plagiarism (Baggs, 2008). To simplify this approach, Nilstun et al. (2010) recommended limiting investigation of plagiarism to its occurrence without evaluation of intent. The complex nature of plagiarism and the recommendation to ignore student intention have caused most punitive approaches to plagiarism to be fraught with potential problems. Academic institutions have attempted to address plagiarism through honor codes, student orientation classes, and online plagiarism detection services (Green, 2002; Langone, 2007). Online plagiarism detection services can detect some, but not all, incidents of plagiarism. These approaches can decrease plagiarism, albeit mildly (Green, 2002). Academic institutions often have relied on punitive measures. Students caught plagiarizing can face a wide range of punishments including private conversations and instruction to, in the case of research fraud, imprisonment (Wicker, 2007). Most commonly, students face no consequences, course failures, or expulsion from the institution. Although intentional plagiarism often has been considered a form of theft, incidents of legal prosecution have been rare (Dames, 2007; Green, 2002). Rather, when students have been disciplined formally, academic institutions ordinarily have viewed the offense as a violation of the student honor code (Posner, 2007).

## **Student Plagiarizers**

Plagiarism's problems do not end with the effects on the original content creators and content consumers—they harm the plagiarizer as well. The first negative effect for plagiarizers comes with the risk of detection and consequent punishments that can severely impair the academic career of students. Moreover, student plagiarizers circumvent the learning process, learning much less than students who have read, synthesized, and completed their assignments independently (McCabe, 2009). In situations where students submit entire papers they have purchased, they may never have studied the material at all, robbing the student of any learning. The detrimental consequences of plagiarism on student learning and on the ability for faculty members to assess student learning can be significant (Posner, 2007), and the students' ultimate ability to perform in the workplace may be compromised.

## **Nursing**

Acts of plagiarism by nursing students may negatively impact the nursing education process, nursing care, and ultimately, patient safety. Studies have shown that students who exhibited academic dishonesty or unethical behavior were likely to exhibit unethical behavior as professional nurses (Anderson, 2009; Bavier, 2009; Coffey & Anyinam, 2012; Harper, 2006; Higgins, 2007; Klocko, 2014; Langone, 2007; Payan et al., 2010). Studies have found a high level of correlation between students who plagiarized and students who broke professional ethical standards during their careers (Anderson, 2009; McCabe, 2009). Because of the highly sensitive work of nurses, the public should be very concerned about the existence of plagiarism within nursing programs. Acts of plagiarism by healthcare practitioners, lecturers, or students negatively

impact training, education, research, and patient care (Klocko, 2014; McCabe, 2009; Wicker, 2007).

### **CAUSES OF PLAGIARISM**

What causes these exceptionally high plagiarism rates in light of the severe negative effects of this act? Researchers have developed a number of provocative explanations.

#### **Generally**

Darab (2006) conducted a qualitative empirical study of first year general studies undergraduate students' receptiveness to learning about plagiarism, and how this learning impacted students' ability to avoid plagiarizing through the development of new academic skills. Her study sample included 784 Australian students from several campuses. Darab (2006) found that most students were open to learning skills that would help them to avoid plagiarizing. Her study also revealed that students found learning about and avoiding plagiarism to be an overwhelming experience that required more time and resources than they were willing to devote. The result was that students felt alienated from faculty members (Darab, 2006). Darab's study suggested that academic institutions may have not effectively designed or implemented their current plagiarism preventive measures. Darab also found that students may plagiarize because they misunderstood the assignment, forgot to cite correctly, or plagiarized unconsciously (Darab, 2006). Above all, the most common reasons cited for plagiarism were over commitment and lack of time (Klocko, 2014; Zobel & Hamilton, 2002).

There are other potential causes of plagiarism that may not be readily apparent to students. Cryptomnesia is a type of innocent plagiarism that occurs when people have

read or heard something yet later believe it is their own original idea (Landau & Marsh, 1997; Marsh & Landau, 2007). Carpenter (2002) suggested that cryptomnesia constitutes a normal stage of the learning process and argued for a more collectivist view of knowledge that recognizes all ideas as products of a large shared knowledge base. Cryptomnesia is an example of student plagiarism that can be avoided through preventative and educational measures.

While the internet cannot be blamed for all student plagiarism, its increasing ubiquity has coincided with surging rates of student plagiarism. Many researchers have noted the link between the internet and plagiarism (Braumoeller & Gaines, 2001; Darab, 2006; Das, 2003; McCabe, 2009). Hansen (2003) suggested that the internet has created a communal culture in which information is viewed as free and available for unlimited use. Students educated during the 1990s and 2000s have had tremendous exposure to online information. In the past, these students would have cited properly when taking information from published sources such as books or journals; today, they ignore these steps when using information found online (Hansen, 2003). As the internet becomes an increasingly crucial part of student development, the collectivist approach promulgated by easily accessed internet information may continue to increase student plagiarism.

### **International Students**

International students comprise a significant portion of students within the U.S. in 2008-2009 over 60,000 health science graduate and postdoctoral students studied in the U.S., which represented an increase of 8% from the previous academic year (Heitman & Litewka, 2011). Plagiarism may be of special concern for this community of students. Payan et al. (2012) commented that students from the U.S. engaged in academic

misconduct (e.g., plagiarism) less often than did students from other countries. Because of the higher incidence of plagiarism among the international student population, many researchers have explored whether plagiarism among international students has unique causes.

Darab's study, described above, explored causes of plagiarism specifically for international students. Darab (2006) concluded that a lack of formal English skills impacted international students' ability to understand and comply with plagiarism standards. Further, Darab (2006) concluded that cultural differences do not play a role in the plagiarism of international students. While many other researchers have found language barriers to be a potential contributing cause of plagiarism, Darab was alone in rejecting cultural differences as a potential cause of plagiarism (Abasi & Akbari, 2008; Darab, 2006; Heitman & Litewka, 2011; Payan et al., 2012). Cross-cultural psychology studies often have linked people's home culture and behavior (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Berry, 1997). Many researchers have found this link to exist in incidents of plagiarism by international students (Duff et al., 2006; Hayes, 2003; Heitman & Litewka, 2011). Duff et al. (2006) concluded that while plagiarism can be a deliberate act of dishonesty, international students' unfamiliarity with local plagiarism standards or a lack of proficiency in citing references correctly were more likely causes. Other suggested causes have included friends and social pressure (Klocko, 2014) and simple misunderstandings (Payan et al., 2012)

Many international students may find adapting to local plagiarism standards to be a difficult and lengthy process. International students' home cultures strongly influence individuals' perceptions of plagiarism. Although individual perceptions of plagiarism

may change over time, this change may occur slowly, through contact with other beliefs and cultures, and through education and maturity (Duff et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007).

A study of 3,675 business students in 13 different countries indicated that students from collectivist cultures often have less regard for individual works of others, and that these students participated in questionable behaviors such as plagiarism more often than students from individualist cultures (Payan et al., 2012). Students from collectivist cultures initially may view information, including published works, as public property that can be integrated into the student's work without acknowledgement of the original author (Badke, 2007; Duff et al., 2006; Payan et al., 2010). Using others' words in this way may not only be considered acceptable but in some cultures seen as a sign of respect (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012). For such students the "Westernized idea based on the premise that individuals own their idea" (Coffey & Anyinam, 2012, p. 63) may seem entirely foreign and difficult to understand. Consequently, several authors have attested that international students should not be expected to understand their host institutions' cultural and educational values upon enrollment (Hussin, 2007; Russikoff et al., 2003). Recent research has shown that differences in cultural values between instructors and students cause problems within academic settings (Payan et al., 2012). Academic institutions expect students to act ethically and to embrace the values considered acceptable at their U.S. institutions; this may pose a challenge for the many international students whose home cultural values of plagiarism differ significantly from the cultural values of their educational institution (Di Maria, 2010; Hussin, 2007).

Acculturation occurs when students attempt to make the psychological and behavior changes needed to adapt to a new culture (Berry, 1997). The adaptation process, especially when the culture of origin is philosophically different than the current cultural environment, may lead to conflict and stress (Berry, 1997). Transition to life in U.S. colleges can be overwhelming for international students as they adjust to major cultural and social differences (Berry, 1997; Sanner et al., 2002). Educational institutions should support and ensure the success of international students through the use of clearly identified resources that focus on culturally-based approaches to student learning (Sanner et al., 2002).

### ***NIGERIAN STUDENTS***

The U.S. Embassy in Nigeria (2012) reported that an increasing number of Nigerian students have been studying in the U.S., especially in New York and Texas. Nigerian students made up the 17<sup>th</sup> largest foreign student undergraduate population and the 19<sup>th</sup> largest source of foreign graduate students attending U.S. universities during the 2009-2010 academic year, with engineering, business, physical sciences, and public health being the most popular areas of study (U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, 2012). During that period, there was a 6% growth in the number of Nigerian students within the U.S., with 6,568 Nigerian students in over 730 U.S. colleges located in all 50 states (U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, 2012).

As a rule, collectivism has been a strong presence in Nigerian culture. Nigerians usually have placed greater value on group membership than individual accomplishment (Payan et al., 2010). In addition, ownership of the written word may be unimportant for many Nigerian cultures that incorporate oral storytelling and knowledge sharing (Alder-

Collins, 2011). Nigerian people tend to be group-oriented with strong characteristics of communality and collective responsibility (Idowu, 1985). Nigerian relationships are family-oriented and based on age, status, and respect (Idowu, 1985). Nigerians also have placed a great deal of emphasis on higher education (Idowu, 1985). The Nigerian educational system has relied on a lecture based pedagogical style that is instructor centered and instructor controlled with minimal involvement of the students in the learning process (Benjamin, 2004; Hardman, 2008). Instructors in Nigeria primarily have taught by explanation and recitation with little regard to student learning (Hardman, 2008). Students occupy a passive role in learning and have been given periodic exams and assessments that focus on rote memorization; students reiterate what they are taught without analysis or construction of new knowledge or understanding, and higher course grades are given to those students who closely match the written text or words of their instructors (Benjamin, 2004; Hardman, 2008; Soneye, 2010).

As a result of these cultural differences, Nigerian students studying in the U.S. often have difficulty understanding the difference between collaboration, recitation, and academic misconduct (Payan et al., 2010; Sutton & Taylor, 2011). Nigerian students often placed greater importance on their friendships than on institutional rules that address plagiarism (Sutton & Taylor, 2011). Thus Nigerian students may be motivated to help their fellow students, regardless of rules and possible consequences regarding plagiarism. Because of these cultural barriers, Nigerian international students have been at high risk of becoming involved in academic plagiarism.

Orim et al. (2013) confirmed this elevated plagiarism risk for Nigerian students. The researchers interviewed 18 Nigerian masters level engineering students for a

phenomenographic study. Their study, conducted in the United Kingdom in 2010 to 2012, explored the Nigerian postgraduate engineering students' experience of plagiarism (Orim et al., 2013). The study concluded that Nigerian graduate engineering students may have limited understanding of what plagiarism was when they first began their studies within the United Kingdom, and that these students may have limited abilities and understanding of how to avoid plagiarizing (Orim et al., 2013).

### **Gaps in Literature**

Although extensive literature has addressed plagiarism, most has focused on understanding the causes and prevalence of plagiarism. While several studies have addressed broad categories of students—such as business, graduate, or healthcare professional—no study has addressed plagiarism among nursing students. In addition, no study has explored plagiarism among international students within healthcare fields, particularly international students from Nigeria who attend U.S. nursing programs. Thus, no study was identified that explored perceptions and experiences of Nigerian nursing students as they adapted to U.S. standards regarding plagiarism.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter three presents the research design and methodology utilized in this NI study (Erlandson et al., 1993) that explored Nigerian nursing students' perception of plagiarism. The chapter begins with a description of NI and the researcher's rationale for choosing NI. The research question that guided this study and the application, collection, management, and methodological techniques for data management and analysis are described. Procedures used to protect participant confidentiality and ensure informed consent are also discussed, as are definitions of terms related to the research study.

### **NATURALISTIC INQUIRY**

NI was selected for this study, which explored Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism. NI was uniquely suited for this study because it uses interpretive and exploratory techniques to discover patterns in behavior and allows for exploration of the subject matter from participants' perspectives without a priori hypotheses. This methodology allows data to speak for themselves. NI provides an alternate paradigm with a constructionist non-positivist approach to reveal beliefs that must be accepted as presented while still allowing for various valid viewpoints of the same phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher expected that Nigerian nursing students interviewed would have diverse perspectives of plagiarism; NI allowed for various valid viewpoints of the same concept (Erlandson et al., 1993).

The research design of a NI study remains tentative until the design is implemented, and it is continually refined as further information is gained from the social

context being studied (Erlandson et al., 1993). Thus, preliminary data analysis helps researchers to develop or modify succeeding steps of data gathering and analysis. The NI data collection and analysis process progresses and evolves through integrated steps that build on one another in a hermeneutic-dialectic fashion, by which initial data collection and analysis lead to a more focused end (Erlandson et al., 1993). The primary NI research instrument is the researcher (Erlandson et al., 1993). Context is very important in NI studies as is the foundational assumption that all study participants are linked together in a distinctive network of interrelationships (Erlandson et al., 1993). NI is useful for obtaining and exploring human constructions of reality within social contexts, and thus is ideally suited for use to examine and explore the dynamic and complex nature of society (Erlandson et al., 1993).

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM**

The research question that guided this study was: what are Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism? The aim of this study was to explore Nigerian nursing students' perceptions as they encountered U.S. standards and expectations regarding plagiarism.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The following sections describe the application of NI research techniques in this research study that explored Nigerian students' perceptions of their encounters with U.S. plagiarism standards. The section begins by describing participant recruitment, sample, and setting. Descriptions of the data collection procedures, data analysis, and data management strategies follow.

## **RECRUITMENT, SAMPLE, AND SETTING**

The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the study protocol. Please see Appendix A for documentation of UTMB IRB approval.

Non-random purposive and snowball sampling were utilized in the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). Purposive sampling is the process by which participants are chosen because they are identified as having unique information, knowledge, or perspectives about the study subject matter (Patton, 1990). Limiting the study to Nigerian nursing students employed Patton's (1990) strategy of homogeneous sampling and resulted in data that focused on the unique, rich experiences of this group of international students. Snowball sampling is the process by which participants of a study recruit other individuals to participate in the study based on their knowledge of the subject matter (Richards & Morse, 2007). Nigerian nursing students who participated in the study were asked to refer other Nigerian nursing students who might be interested in participating in the study. Consultation with members of the Nigerian community determined that initial recruitment of participants should occur from within the Nigerian community.

Business cards with study information were developed specifically to recruit participants for the study. The business cards introduced the research topic and contained the researcher's contact information (a copy of the recruitment business card is included as Appendix B). The researcher's Nigerian acquaintances distributed study recruitment business cards to acquaintances who met study inclusion criteria and appeared interested in participating in the study. Nigerian students who were interested in the study contacted the researcher by phone, text, email, or some combination of those methods. If a potential

participant contacted the researcher by email, the researcher responded by email and asked the potential participant for a contact telephone number and permission to phone them. Some potential participants contacted the researcher by text message, and during the subsequent texting conversation several potential participants phoned the researcher. The telephone conversations allowed time for the researcher to explain the study and answer any questions potential participants had about the study; it also allowed the researcher an opportunity to arrange a convenient day and time for the online interview to occur. The researcher also referred potential participants to the study website (see Appendix C) where information about the study, the subject consent form (see Appendix D), downloads related to the study, instructions for participating in the study interview process, and an optional “chat with Debbie” link were located (Appendix E). Appendix F displays screenshots of the study website and each linked website page for study purpose and participation requirements. Although the website provided strategies that Nigerian nursing students could use so their participation in the study could be completely anonymous, none of the study participants chose to remain anonymous.

Consultation with members of the Nigerian community initially caused the researcher to decide not to offer gift cards for study participation. Nevertheless, three of the first five participants asked if gift cards were being offered. Thus, the researcher decided to seek, and was granted, an amendment to her initial IRB approval in order to offer a one-time thank you gift of \$20 gift cards to study participants (See Appendix G). Interestingly, only eight participants wanted a gift card, and gift cards were sent to those eight participants.

Seventeen Nigerian nursing students were recruited and interviewed for this study. Recruitment and interviewing ceased when the data reached saturation. Study participants' demographic data will be presented in chapter four (Table 4.1). Saturation occurred when new data revealed no additional categories of findings. Four Nigerian students who were interested in the study contacted the researcher after data collection had been completed; they were thanked for their interest in the study and informed that participation recruitment had ended.

#### **PARTICIPANT INCLUSION CRITERIA**

Participants met inclusion criteria for the study if they were born in Nigeria and:

1. Currently were nursing students or had graduated from a professional nursing program within the 12 months preceding the recruitment and interview,
2. Had the ability to speak, read, and write English,
3. Were willing to participate in at least one online interview lasting up to one and a half hours,
4. Were at least 18 years of age,
5. Had access to a computer and the internet and had computer skills required to participate in an online interview.

Potential participants were excluded from the study if they did not meet any of these criteria.

#### **SETTING**

Study data were collected using an online chat room where all communication, although synchronous, was typed. The internet offered relative anonymity and was viewed as decreasing participant perception of vulnerability when discussing private

matters; thus the internet was well suited for preserving privacy of participants yet allowing participants to be open in their disclosure (Hine, 2005). The online format was a flexible, convenient process that provided privacy and confidentiality (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011; Nilsen, 2013).

#### **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Data for the study consisted of demographic data, interview data, and the researcher's reflective journal. Data were collected online within a secure password-protected website using demographic questions and a semi-structured interview guide. A copy of the demographic questions and the interview guide is in Appendix H. Demographic data collected included age, gender, ethnicity, nation of origin, number of years in the U.S., and number of years in the U.S. school system. The interview was based on the set of semi-structured interview questions developed for the study. Examples of interview questions were: what does plagiarism mean to you? What experiences have you or classmates encountered with plagiarism? The demographic questionnaire and the interview guide were reviewed and refined in collaboration with Nigerian colleagues of the researcher.

The researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the study. The researcher used the journal to record her ongoing reflections, thoughts, ideas, and questions concerning the research study, the data, and data collection process, and interpretation of the study data (Erlandson et al., 1993). Journaling allowed the researcher to document her journey through the study and allowed her to see how her perceptions and interpretations developed and changed; it also provided an audit trail (Beck, 1993).

Each participant was interviewed at least once within the password protected web-based online chat. The initial interviews ranged between 56 and 87 minutes, with an average of 68.3 minutes. Prior to the agreed-upon interview date, the researcher emailed potential participants detailed information about how to access the study site, create an account, and navigate through the web-based chat interview process. Potential participants were encouraged to visit the study website prior to the interview date and time. A reminder email or text was sent to each potential participant 24 hours prior to the planned interview. A copy of the reminder message is located in Appendix I.

The researcher and participants logged onto the study website at the scheduled date and time. The researcher and potential participants each typed a greeting, then the researcher discussed the study, the procedures, and answered any questions. The researcher explained the consent process and directed the potential participant to the consent form located on the study website; she asked the Nigerian students if they were willing to participate in the study and to indicate their decision by typing “agree to participate” or “do not want to participate.” The researcher asked participants to print a copy of the consent form for their records if they had not done so already.

Participants’ consent to participate in the study allowed data collection to begin. The researcher began the interview by typing the first demographic question and allowing time for participants to type their response; this process was repeated until each demographic question has been answered. Once the demographic information had been collected, the researcher began the study interview by typing the first question and allowing time for participants to type their responses. Participant and researcher dialog was dynamic in nature and allowed the researcher to clarify and explore participant

responses as the need arose. Near the conclusion of the interview, the researcher asked each participant if they had any information to add. The researcher also informed participants how to contact her if they wanted to add anything, and asked participants' permission to be contacted for additional information if needed. The researcher contacted three participants with questions that arose during data analysis. No participant was contacted for follow-up questions more than twice. All follow-up questions were posed through email.

Two of the Nigerian students had agreed to be available to participate in member checking. The researcher emailed each student, asking them for a time that would be a convenient for the member checking interviews. At the agreed-upon time and day of the member checking interview, the researcher and the participant logged in to the study website and entered the study chat room. The researcher reminded participants that their subject consent to participate in the study continued to be in effect but asked them to restate their willingness to participate in the interview for purposes of member checking. Upon receiving participants' agreement to participate, the researcher typed in a brief overview of the study up to that point, including a brief overview of study participants, and informed them that she had completed initial data collection and analysis. The researcher informed participants that she would be presenting the study findings to them and asked them to critique the findings and to evaluate whether the findings were consistent with their experiences and observations of Nigerian students in U.S. nursing programs. The participants independently confirmed the accuracy of the study findings, commenting that although findings described typical responses, individual Nigerian

students' reactions could be unique. The member checking data transcriptions were analyzed and data were incorporated into the write-up of the study findings.

#### **DATA MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Utilizing a web-based chat dialog format for data collection allowed a transcript of the data to be available immediately upon interview conclusion (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Participant codes were assigned to each dataset. The code book linking participants to their assigned codes was retained separately from other research data and stored in a locked file in the researcher's home office. One set of data was saved intact; a second, de-identified dataset was used for data analysis. The pristine dataset was stored separately from the de-identified set. Each dataset was saved in a separate password-protected encrypted backup external drive and separate USB thumb drive. The researcher's journal and hard copies of all study data were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. All study data will be destroyed once the study has been completed and the findings published.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Erlandson et al. (1993) divided the NI data analysis process into two components. The first component was data analysis that occurred during data collection; the second was data analysis that occurred after each interview, between interviews, and at the completion of data collection. Erlandson et al. (1993) recommended utilizing the Constant Comparative Method (CCM), as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), throughout NI data analysis. CCM is a process in which each item of data is compared to all other items within the individual dataset and then compared to data items in other data sets. Categories of data are constantly compared to refine categorization and

conceptualization of the data, which allows for a defined pattern or gestalt to emerge from the data (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Each transcript was analyzed line by line in a process Erlandson et al. (1993) called “unitizing data [defined as] disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that may stand alone in independent thoughts” (p. 117). The CCM method was used to group disaggregated data into categories with other similar data items. Use of CCM led to labeling of each category and a working outline of the temporal and conceptual distinctions among the categories. Continued use of CCM led to refinement of the outline reflecting distinctions among the categories. Table 3.1 displays the refinement of the categories’ data analysis. The ultimate category scheme that emerged from the data was naturalistically organized into four main categories: 1) Nigerian Nursing Students – Values and Viewpoints Prior to Entering the U.S.; 2) Distinguishing Differences; 3) Adaptive Transformation; and 4) Message to Educators. These findings are presented and explained in detail in chapter four. Figure 3.1 (below) demonstrates the progression and changes of emerging categories as the study data analysis progressed. Table 3.1 (which follows Figure 3.1) demonstrates the evolving categories of data items using three data items as examples.

Figure 3.1. Categorization: Progression of Findings

<u>9.17.13</u>	<u>10.31.13</u>	<u>4.02.14</u>
<p>I How they came to U.S. – (who they were then)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Cultural Norms</li> <li>b. Previous knowledge of plagiarism</li> <li>c. Difference within Nigerian population</li> <li>d. Difference between rural and urban populations</li> </ul>	<p>I Nigerian Students – their mindset when they entered the U.S.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Cultural Norms of Nigerian Students</li> <li>b. Cultural Norms Plagiarism</li> <li>c. Cultural Norms- Brother’s Keeper</li> <li>d. Cultural Norms- Education/Success</li> </ul>	<p>I Nigerian nursing students – values and viewpoints prior to entering the U.S.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Social Responsibility</li> <li>b. Importance of Education</li> <li>c. Nigerian Values Related to Plagiarism</li> </ul>
<p>II Encounters – formal and Informal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Formal</li> <li>b. Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Struggles in learning about plagiarism</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>II Previous knowledge of plagiarism</p>	<p>II Distinguishing Differences</p>
<p>III Conceptualization of what plagiarism is (what was expected)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Incremental attempts to conform</li> <li>b. Developing a new understanding</li> </ul>	<p>III Encounters with plagiarism within the U.S.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Formal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Adjustment</li> <li>ii. Ongoing understanding</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i . Learning from other Nigerian students’ experiences and punishments</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>III Adaptive Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Learning the Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i Formal</li> <li>ii Informal</li> <li>iii Trial and Error</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Definitions</li> <li>c. Conditional Acquiescence</li> <li>d. Teaching Others</li> </ul>
<p>IV Behavior Conforming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Conforming to teach others</li> </ul>	<p>IV Conceptualization of what plagiarism is and what is expected</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Early</li> <li>b. Transition</li> <li>c. Ongoing</li> <li>d. Coping due to fear</li> </ul>	<p>IV Message to Educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Scholarship</li> <li>b. Resources</li> <li>c. Welcome</li> </ul>
	<p>V Developing a new understanding/coming to terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Definitions</li> <li>b. Evaluation of plagiarism within the U.S. (re-judging)</li> </ul>	

Table 3.1. Categorization: Progression of Findings- Three Item Examples

Item	First (9/17/13)	Mid (10/31/13)	Final (4/2/14)
I: “Easily see where there is a group of Nigerians in a program who think they are helping each other by sharing information” [PA, 166]	How they came to the U.S. – cultural norms	Nigerian students – their mindset when entering the U.S., cultural norms, brother’s keeper	Nigerian students – values and viewpoints prior to entering the U.S., social responsibility
II: “I have to adjust and follow the rules and regulations of the educational system” [PQ, 138]	Conceptualization of what plagiarism is (what is expected), developing a new understanding	Developing a new understanding, coming to terms	Adaptive transformation
III: “I pretty much became instantly sensitized after that. We were scared he was going to lose funding and be sent packing back to Nigeria” [PH, 59-69]	Encounters, informal, others’ hardships	Encounters, informal, learning from other Nigerian students’ experiences/punishments	Learning the rules, informal: learning from other Nigerian students

**TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Trustworthiness reflects the degree to which a qualitative study’s procedures and findings can be relied upon to reflect and represent the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Concerns regarding reliability and validity (terms associated with quantitative research) are addressed in qualitative research by considering the study’s trustworthiness. Trustworthiness addresses the need for the researcher to establish methodological safeguards to establish methodological adequacy of the study (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Assessment of the trustworthiness, or the trust value, of this study utilized Beck's (1993) modification of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Beck's (1993) criteria for trustworthiness of a qualitative study were credibility, fittingness, and auditability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the truth value of the study (Beck, 1993). Credibility of the study was addressed by including participants who met study inclusion criteria, excluding potential participants who did not meet study inclusion criteria, using direct transcripts of the online interviews, considering alternative explanations, and ongoing memoing (Erlandson et al., 1993). Credibility of the study findings was supported by the researcher using the exact words of the study participants so that participants' own frank opinions and vivid descriptions illustrated and highlighted study findings (Beck, 1993). Erlandson et al. (1993) recommended the use of peer debriefing to enhance credibility of study procedures and provide researchers with feedback that may assist in refining or re-directing the inquiry process. Peer debriefers in the study were Nigerians acquaintances, other nursing PhD students, and the researcher's dissertation chair. The dissertation chair reviewed, critiqued, and debriefed the researcher throughout the entire study. The researcher's colleagues critiqued the proposal development, including strategies for recruitment of participants, the demographic data, and the interview guide.

### **Fittingness**

Beck (1993) described fittingness as how well the study results reflect the study data and how well the study findings fit a population other than the study population. Fittingness of the study findings was ensured by selecting participants who reflected the

population of interest and who were willing to discuss their experiences as they encountered U.S. expectations related to plagiarism.

The peer debriefing process provided assurance that study findings reflected the study data and were free from bias. The researcher presented the study findings to each peer de-briefer independently. The peer de-briefers were asked to critique the findings based on two criteria: 1) did the findings “ring true” and reflect their experiences, and 2) were the researcher’s interpretations of the Nigerians students’ statements accurate in terms of language and idiom. Each of the peer de-briefers independently confirmed that the researcher’s findings and interpretations were accurate and reflected their own experiences and those of their Nigerian colleges.

### **Auditability**

Auditability is the ability of an independent examiner to verify the processes used as studies are conducted (Beck, 1993). Auditability in the study was addressed by memoing, maintaining accurate transcripts of the interviews, the researcher’s journals, in-depth explanations and transparency of the data gathering and data processing activities, and precise documentation of the coding process and decision trail (Beck, 1993; Erlandson et al., 1993). Auditability was enhanced by the discussions with peer debriefers.

### **DEFINITIONS OF RELEVANT TERMS**

Terms utilized in the study are defined below:

*Academic Honesty*: the concept that those within a scholarly community conduct themselves in adherence with acceptable standards of integrity such as honor codes; often seen as the absence of cheating within the academic setting.

*International Student*: a student born outside of the U.S. who has matriculated into a nursing program in the U.S.

*Originality*: the concept that thoughts and ideas can be a unique creation.

*Ownership*: the concept that there is a legal, ethical, or moral right to claim a thought, idea, or creation as one's own.

*Plagiarism*: the process of copying an idea or written work and falsely claiming, or reflecting, that work or idea as one's own.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study involved interviewing human subjects about the topic of plagiarism. Like any topic concerning academic honesty, plagiarism can be a sensitive subject. Therefore, the study was designed to protect human participants in the study and to maintain their confidentiality. Primary risks of the study for human subjects were loss of confidentiality and potential emotional distress related to the topic of plagiarism.

During the initial contact, the researcher referred potential participants to the study website and directed them to the study consent form; she requested that they read the consent form prior to the interview. The researcher obtained Nigerian students' consent to participate when they met in the study chat room the day of the interview. The researcher informed each participant that participation in the study was voluntary, that they were not required to answer any question that made them uncomfortable, and that they could stop the interview at any time without penalty. The researcher answered the Nigerian students' questions about the study, and once the Nigerian students' questions were answered the researcher asked them to indicate whether they agreed to participate in the study by typing "agree to participate" or "do not agree to participate". The Nigerian

students' agreement to participate in the study allowed data collection to begin. The researcher also asked participants to print a copy of the study consent form for their personal records.

Nigerian students were assured that all information related to the study would be kept confidential and that their personal identifying information would be kept confidential. Students were informed of the steps the researcher would take to ensure that all participant information was kept confidential, including assigning a code to replace their name and masking or removing information that could be linked to them. Students were informed that only de-identified data would be used for data analysis and that code books identifying them would be kept under lock and key in the researcher's home office and separate from data used for analysis.

The study website informed participants how to interact and be interviewed anonymously within the online format if they so desired; the web-based chat did not require any personal data to log on or connect. Passwords to the web-based chats were changed between participant interviews. All data were deleted from the chat sites between interviews. Transcripts of the data were created and stored on the researcher's personal password protected computer. Using only de-identified datasets in the data analysis process further limited the risk of loss of confidentiality of participant personal information.

The second potential risk for study participants was that discussing the topic of plagiarism might be emotionally upsetting to the participants. The researcher remained sensitive to participants' demeanor during the interview. If a participant appeared to

indicate distress, the researcher made comments such as “Are you OK?” and “You know you do not have to answer questions that make you uncomfortable.”

### **SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS**

Chapter three provided a description of NI, the methodological approach used in study, and the researcher’s rationale for using NI to explore Nigerian nursing students’ perceptions of plagiarism. Chapter three also described how participants were recruited for the study, the study sample, and data collection setting. The study data collection procedures were detailed and data management strategies and data analysis were explained. Steps taken to protect the study participants from potential risk associated with study participation were delineated.

Chapter four describes study findings including demographic information about the study participants and detailed discussion of the study participants’ perceptions of their encounters with plagiarism as they became students in U.S. nursing programs. Chapter five details discussion of the study and its findings and will include the study’s conclusions and recommendations.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter four explains the findings of the NI study (Erlandson et al., 1993) exploring Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism. The research question, "What are the Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism?" guided this study. Chapter four begins with a description of demographic information about the study participants. The chapter continues with a presentation and discussion of the findings that emerged from the study data.

### **STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

Seventeen Nigerian nursing students, interviewed between July and September of 2013, participated in the study. Table 4.1 summarizes participants' demographic information. Five of the participants were male and 12 were female. The participants ranged in age from 20- to 52-years-old; six participants were in their 20s, seven were in their 30s, three in their 40s, and one participant in her 50s. The average age of the participants was 33-years-old with a median age of 35.

Table 4.1. Demographic Data

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Graduation Year	Year Entered U.S.	No. of Years in U.S. Schools
A	52	M	n/a	1986	7
B	26	F	2014	2006	5
C	25	F	2014	2008	4
D	29	F	2015	2009	4
E	20	F	2015	2005	8
F	40	F	2015	2001	9
G	41	M	2012	2003	6.5
H	35	M	2013	2003	6
I	35	F	2014	1996	10
J	33	F	2014	2006	6
K	31	F	2013	1997	16
L	38	F	2013	1995	6
M	36	F	2015	2001	9
N	37	M	2014	2000	8
O	26	F	2014	2009	4.5
P	40	F	2012	2010	3
Q	26	M	2014	2009	6

All 17 Nigerian nursing students interviewed were either enrolled in a nursing program at the time of their participation or had been enrolled in a nursing program within the previous 12 months of study participation. Two of the nursing students graduated from their nursing programs in 2012; three were scheduled to graduate or had graduated in 2013. Seven of the Nigerian student participants were scheduled to graduate in 2014 and four in 2015. One participant declined to provide information about when he expected to graduate. Two students were enrolled in PhD programs, 14 either had just obtained or were working toward their Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN), and one student was enrolled in an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program. At the time of the interviews, 13 participants and the researcher lived in the Central Time Zone of the

U.S. two participants were located in the Eastern Time Zone, one in the Mountain Time Zone, and one in the Pacific Time Zone.

The students who participated in the study were asked to provide the year they entered the U.S. and how many years they had been enrolled in U.S. schools. The participants lived in the U.S. between three and 27 years, with an average of 10.4 years and a median of 10 years. One participant entered the U.S. in the 1980s, three participants entered the U.S. in the 1990s, 12 participants entered the U.S. in the 2000s, and one in 2010s. Participants had been enrolled in U.S. schools between three and 16 years with an average of 6.9 years in the U.S. schools system and a median of 6 years. Four of the Nigerian nursing students interviewed had been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than five years, 11 between five and nine years, one between 10 and 14 years, and one for more than 15 years.

## **INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS**

Like all immigrants, Nigerian nursing students who participated in the study came to the U.S. with belief systems distinct from their new country. In particular, students came to the U.S. with unique cultural norms. Study interviews yielded rich data reflecting the students' perceptions and experiences as international students who immigrated to the U.S. and who were attending U.S. nursing schools.

Analysis of the data revealed four main categories: *Values and Viewpoints Prior to Entering the U.S.*, *Distinguishing a Difference*, *Adaptive Transformation*, and *Message to Educators*. The first category revealed the mindset of the Nigerian nursing students when they entered the U.S. and consisted of three subcategories: *Social Responsibility*, *Importance of Education*, and *Nigerian Values Related to Plagiarism*. Distinguishing

differences, the second category, described Nigerian nursing students' realization that plagiarism is treated differently in the U.S. compared to Nigeria. The third category, adaptive transformation, described students' new understanding of plagiarism, what the Nigerian students did with this new understanding, and how they navigated through concerns related to plagiarism. It contained four sub categories: *Learning the Rules*, *Definitions*, *Conditional Acquiescence*, and *Teaching Others*. Learning the rules describes how the students learned about plagiarism through formal and informal learning and by trial and error. The message to educators category included messages to U.S. educators as to what Nigerian nursing students need and how educators can facilitate Nigerian nursing students' understanding of plagiarism. This fourth category consisted of three subcategories: *Scholarship*, *Resources*, and *Welcome*.

Notations used within the section to convey participant response are given in the format [Pz, 146]. This notation indicated data from the interview with participant Z, line 146. An outline of the findings of this study have been presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Findings Outline

Title	Category	Subcategory
I: Nigerian Nursing Students – Values and Viewpoints Prior to Entering the U.S.	Social Responsibility	
	Importance of Education	
	Nigerian Values Related to Plagiarism	
II: Distinguishing Differences		Formal
		Informal
	Learning the Rules	Trial & Error
III: Adaptive Transformation	Definitions	
	Conditional Acquiescence	
	Teaching Others	
	Scholarship	
IV: Message to Educators	Resources	
	Welcome	

**I: NIGERIAN STUDENTS – VALUES AND VIEWPOINTS PRIOR TO ENTERING THE U.S.**

Nigerian students had distinct values and culturally determined guiding principles or standards through which they conducted themselves and viewed the world. Individuals developed these values within the family and cultural environment over generations. These values dictated group morality. Students entered the U.S. with a view of the world shaped by their prior experiences and learning, home culture, and their upbringing. The contrast between home culture and the culture of the U.S. proved challenging during matriculation into the U.S. school system. Although participants’ perspectives of the concepts pertaining to the academic environment were uniquely their own, many commonalities were discovered during the interview and data analysis process.

The social values of Nigerian students prior to entering the U.S. were clustered into three main areas: social responsibility, importance of education, and Nigerian social values related to plagiarism. Nigerian nursing students who participated in this study had been taught to value their family ties and to be supportive of their family members, including extended family and fellow countrymen. They also held high regard for university education and the success they saw as a result of education. Some of the Nigerian nursing students' inherent social mores contrasted with those of traditional U.S. academic expectations.

### **Social Responsibility**

Nigerian culture on the whole encouraged family members to support and help each other, especially those who may have physical or emotional needs. A Nigerian student who had been in the U.S. school system for seven years commented, “the [Nigerian] culture teaches you to be your brother’s keeper, distant relations who have fallen on hard times can get help from family for a long time. Nigerians still have that strong bond [even after they leave Nigeria]” [PA, 171]. Every one of the Nigerian students interviewed alluded to their responsibility to assist and support family members and fellow Nigerians; to become, in essence, their brother’s keeper. The study participants frequently stressed the strong bond Nigerian people have with each other, a bond that required them to support and help each other. A student explained that she could “easily see where there is a group of Nigerians in a program who think they are helping each other by sharing information” [PA, 166]. The concept of Nigerians being one another’s brother’s keeper was reinforced during the member checking when participants

commented that a Nigerian is more likely to have such feelings toward other Nigerians, especially those Nigerians who are viewed as a member of the same ethnic subgroup.

The concept of being responsible to help other Nigerians was a cultural norm that strongly influenced the behavior and attitudes of each Nigerian nursing student in the study. Nigerian culture valued the needs of the group as a whole more than the individual. Nigerian nursing students expected to help others and for others to help them. Nigerian nursing students saw education in the same way they viewed life: that experience and accomplishments were to be shared.

### **Importance of Education**

Nigerian students had come to the U.S. with a strong desire to achieve academic success. A 35-year-old male student who had been in the U.S. for about nine years commented, “[Nigerian] people will do anything to get into college . . . [they see it as an] escape route from endemic poverty” [PH, 18]. Although the Nigerian students were “raised to value honesty and hard work” [PD, 78], Nigerian students reported that in Nigeria there was an “unseen understanding you might have to cheat in order to pass a class” [PL, 73].

Nigerian nursing students reported that Nigerian students or their families could be expected to give money to college admission officers or faculty members to ensure admission to college or to complete college in Nigeria. A 35-year-old male student who had been in the U.S. for 10 years said,

Parents will bribe admission officers to get students into college; students will bribe faculty to pass; faculty will exhort money from students through dubious

means [such as the] sale of academic hand-outs to students who can't afford textbooks [PH, 181].

In summary, education, and success by means of education, was strongly valued in Nigerian culture. Strategies to assure academic success through practices, such as cheating and bribery, were often commonplace and accepted in Nigerian culture.

### **Nigerian Values Related to Plagiarism**

Participants either expressed that plagiarism was not addressed by their Nigerian instructors or the concept of plagiarism had no significance. A 26-year-old female student commented, “. . . plagiarism was just a fancy word . . . my instructor would throw around from time to time and it had no significant meaning” [PB, 82]. The students reported that they had little or no understanding of plagiarism prior to coming to the U.S. This notion was illustrated by a Nigerian BSN student who came to the U.S. in 2006: “[prior to coming to the U.S.] . . . I am serious; I did not know what the word meant” [PJ, 107]. Other nursing students interviewed had similar comments: “I did not know how serious [plagiarism] was until I came to the U.S.” [PJ, 66], and “[plagiarism] was just a big word I didn't understand but I knew it wasn't right” [PB, 68].

This lack of knowledge and understanding of plagiarism was reflected by a graduate student who had been studying in the U.S. for nine years: “I studied in Nigeria all the way to master's level and cannot really recollect any emphasis on plagiarism” [PF, 72]. Although the Nigerian students might have come to the U.S. with some awareness of plagiarism, they entered the U.S. lacking a deeper understanding of the concept. The Nigerian nursing students entered the U.S. with little, if any understanding, of what

plagiarism was according to U.S. academic standards or what their behavior in relationship to plagiarism should be.

**Summary: Nigerian Students Values and Viewpoints Prior to Entering the U.S.**

Nigerian nursing students who participated in this study were reared in a culture that had left a lasting impact on each individual. The students came to the U.S. with cultural values about how they should interact with their family members and fellow Nigerians, with a strong desire to achieve academic and career success, and with a uniquely Nigerian understanding of plagiarism. Nigerian nursing student participants were strongly influenced by their home culture and believed each Nigerian had a responsibility to assist their families and other Nigerians to succeed. Nigerians, as a whole, tended to have a strong emphasis on education and academic and career success. This emphasis on academic success within Nigeria included a cultural norm with an expectation that students, or students' families, should employ whatever actions are needed to assure the student's academic success through whatever means necessary.

Nigerian nursing students came to the U.S. from a culture that placed very little emphasis on plagiarism. Rules regarding plagiarism in the Nigerian academic environment were reported as lax, unenforced, and very different from the strict expectations regarding plagiarism found in the U.S. Nigerian nursing students who were interviewed found this difference of rules related to plagiarism overwhelming and were frustrated when confronted with the emphasis placed on plagiarism within the U.S.

## **II: DISTINGUISHING DIFFERENCES**

Once in the U.S., Nigerian students became aware of the differences in the way plagiarism is viewed within the U.S. compared to their homeland. Sixteen of the 17 participants shared that the process of learning about and adapting to U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism was difficult. As one student said, “plagiarism is the greatest (challenge) to me” [PP, 26]. Nigerian students expressed concern about how U.S. rules related to plagiarism were different from what the students were used to in Nigerian schools: “The ‘rules of engagement’ are different!!!” [PH, 166]; “How we perceive the rules . . . is different from how Americans do” [PH, 175]; “the way plagiarism is handled is different in the states” [PE, 87]. The students described the difference as problematic: “It’s difficult because back home we are not used to such a strict system” [Po, 70], and “It was hard to understand at first” [PM, 51]. The differences between the U.S. and the Nigerian viewpoints about plagiarism were unsettling to the Nigerian students: “the process [of encountering plagiarism in the U.S.] was shocking” [PN, 102]. One student stated that although she had a cursory understanding of plagiarism prior to coming to the U.S., there was a difference because students are required to obey the rules related to plagiarism in the U.S., yet “in Nigeria [rules related to plagiarism] are not enforced” [PL, 73]. In order to follow U.S. rules related to plagiarism, the Nigerian students needed first to learn the rules and to understand the associated expectations.

Encountering U.S. standards regarding plagiarism as an international student was described as challenging: “it’s difficult because back home we are not used to such a strict system” [Po, 70]. Another participant commented on the differences in U.S. and Nigerian sensitivities about plagiarism: “How we perceive the rules and implications of

academic honesty is different from how Americans do. Most Nigerians are desensitized to academic inappropriateness” [PH, 175].

### **Summary: Distinguishing The Difference**

Soon after matriculating to U.S. schools, Nigerian students became aware of the dissimilarities in how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S. compared to how plagiarism was viewed in Nigeria. Students stated that rules in Nigeria regarding plagiarism were either not well understood or not considered important. Nigerian students found U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism to be strict and challenging to comprehend.

### **III: ADAPTIVE TRANSFORMATION**

The Nigerian students described their experience of encountering U.S. expectations of plagiarism as an ongoing process in which their first encounters with U.S. views of plagiarism were challenging, shocking, and unpleasant. These reactions were based on the students’ realization of how different U.S. expectations were when compared to those in Nigeria—especially in the degree of emphasis, the complexity of citing sources correctly, and the severity of consequences. Nevertheless, students responded to this challenge by educating themselves and adapting to their new academic environment. Students’ first step in this process was to begin to change their behaviors related to plagiarism. Participants began to develop an understanding of plagiarism and each participant was able to provide a working definition of plagiarism by the time of their interview. The participants described a conditional acquiescence in which students, although compliant with the rules related to plagiarism in the U.S., would still plagiarize when faced with fatigue or overwhelming course assignment deadlines. Another segment of the Nigerian nursing students’ journey included Nigerian students sharing their

understanding of U.S. academic rules regarding plagiarism by teaching other Nigerian students who had less understanding.

As Nigerian nursing students familiarized themselves with U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism, they adjusted their behaviors accordingly: “I have to adjust and follow the rules and regulations of the educational system” [PQ, 138]. One student clearly felt that it was the Nigerian student’s responsibility, as an immigrant, to adjust to the U.S. ways: “the one coming here [to the U.S.] will have some adjusting to do” [PI, 178]. This transformation from a Nigerian student to a U.S. student occurred over time as they completed more complex coursework.

Nigerian nursing students discussed developing an understanding of plagiarism within the U.S. and changing their behavior regarding plagiarism as a learning process that occurred over time. A student who had been in U.S. schools for eight years stated, “[understanding plagiarism] has been a constant evolution” [PE, 101]. Participant I shared how students “have to sacrifice if you want to graduate” [PI, 168]. Participant L, who had been in U.S. schools for six years, stated, “At first, I assumed that the professor would not notice [if I plagiarized] but as time went on, I quickly found out that plagiarism is socially unacceptable” [PL, 7]. Study participants revealed that the length of time spent in U.S. schools helped to increase their awareness and understanding of plagiarism: “I think [my] awareness [of plagiarism] just increased [with time]” [PG, 57]. Participant M added, “[my opinion about plagiarism changed over time] with new knowledge and education” [PM, 69]. The growth of the participants’ awareness about plagiarism may be attributed in part to student educational advancement: “emphasis on plagiarism increased as my level

of education increased” [PF, 41], and “with more years of education and knowledge, I have become more conscious of [plagiarism]” [PM, 71].

Participant L stated, “I have learned to be less dependent on other people’s work and to use their text as evidence. Also, to give [original authors] credit for their work” [PL, 89]. A similar viewpoint was discussed by another BSN student: “[my opinion of plagiarism] has changed so much, in the sense that an article or paper I stole is from someone else’s time, energy and idea. I can also use my brain” [PJ, 147]. Other Nigerian students also commented on the ethical implications of plagiarism rules: “the issue of plagiarism kind of has a moral thing to it, one is either doing it or not” [PB, 108].

Nigerian nursing students had developed an understanding of plagiarism and U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism by the time they were interviewed for the study. Although participants did not necessarily accept or assimilate the knowledge, they did, for the most part, align their behaviors to be in accordance with U.S. expectations. A 26-year-old BSN student who had been in U.S. schools for eight years stated, “I now understand that it is unfair for people to cheat to gain advancement. It does not help them in the end” [PE, 101]. A 26-year-old BSN student who had been in the U.S. for five years discussed her strategies for avoiding plagiarism when completing academic assignments: “writing papers from my point of view and whenever I . . . use a quote or an idea from some other resource, making a citation of it and including it in my references” [PB, 129]. Nigerian nursing students also began to understand the impact of plagiarism on this learning. A 25-year-old BSN student in the U.S. school system for four years stated,

[if] all you do is copy a majority of the topic online, you are done in no time. I realized by doing so it doesn't help you think and also you are not writing what you think but rather copying other people's opinion [Pc, 185].

The view that plagiarism has a negative impact on the learning process was shared by 11 of the 17 Nigerian nursing students. A BSN student, who had been in the U.S. schools for 16 years commented,

[now that] I understand about plagiarism, I do not like it because it creates a short cut system for the individual doing it, which becomes a disservice to them because they miss out on really knowing the information [Pk, 182].

Nigerian students' strategies included the idea that students needed to "adjust and follow the rules and regulations of the educational system" [PQ, 137]. The most frequently mentioned strategy was learning how to cite properly and to be diligent in citing their references. As participant M noted, "I am more careful of my citations and references while also trying to keep up with APA format" [Pm, 71], while Participant N commented, "citing your quotes properly is the best way to avoid [punishment]" [Pn, 164].

### **Learning the Rules**

Once the Nigerian students were aware that expectations concerning plagiarism were different in the U.S. compared to Nigeria, the students struggled to learn and understand U.S. requirements, "I just saw it as part of an institutional rule that had to be obeyed" [Pa, 72]. Eleven students described the process of learning the new rules as challenging: "[Nigerian students] are challenged with American school standards" [Pc, 236]; "it was very hard" [Pi, 137]. Students expressed a desire to meet U.S. expectations

regarding plagiarism because they wanted to succeed in their course of study and earn their degree:

The Nigerian [in the U.S.] as a nursing student comes with the mindset of passing all their courses at all costs . . . failure is not an option. So if plagiarism is what stands in the way of success, they are willing to adjust to the rules to meet their success goal [P1, 182].

In addition to desiring to be successful in their coursework, the fear of being caught and the punishment that would follow appeared to be an important motivation for students' diligence in learning the rules related to plagiarism and quick adaptation because "the consequences are not pleasurable" [PQ, 176]. Students stressed the need to learn and understand the U.S. rules regarding plagiarism to avoid unwanted consequences: "A Nigerian student needs to be conscious of [plagiarism] or get into trouble" [PP, 26]. Participant L said she "knew that I could not plagiarize because my degree would be at stake" [PL, 7]. Strategies to avoid plagiarism included following the established procedures: "it's more following the system if you want to be in it, you got to go by the rules" [Po, 98].

Nigerian nursing students' adherence to the rules regarding plagiarism was not universal. Many participants revealed that they might plagiarize in academic situations when they found it difficult to place information in their own words. This was illustrated by a Nigerian BSN student who said,

I have copied and pasted things like steps in doing a procedure or administering a medication, etc., [or] when the information is the same . . . I didn't state that I got

it from someone else's pre-written work because I felt it would be redundant [Pk, 178].

Students also might plagiarize if they were fatigued, lacked adequate time for an assignment, or were feeling intense pressure to pass: “ I have been [tempted to plagiarize] in the moment when I felt like if I did not pass the class it would be the end of the world” [PE, 164].

### **Formal Learning**

Nigerian students learned about plagiarism most often in formal classrooms settings. Fourteen of the 17 participants mentioned learning about plagiarism through interactions with instructors, written coursework instructions, or the use of plagiarism detection software: “I did not know how serious it was [and] I did not even know what the word plagiarism was, not until I took a sociology class” [PJ, 66]; “I learned about plagiarism from my instructors” [Po, 74]; “the instructor gave us a curriculum guide at the beginning of the class and it contained a paragraph which talked about plagiarism and the consequences of it” [PQ, 128].

The use of plagiarism detection software was considered helpful by many of the participants. The software added to their learning about plagiarism, “I learned about plagiarism . . . when . . . my instructor said we had to send my essay through [turnitin.com] [Pc, 139]. The use of this software helped the Nigerian students to understand in a graphic display what part of their writing was considered plagiarism. Participant C shared her story of how she had submitted a paper to a plagiarism detection software site of which she had “copied a majority from online and . . . was surprised and was speechless when 90% came out red . . . [I] had to rewrite the whole essay” [Pc, 145-

154]. Participant J shared how her instructor set limits on the software detection percentage amount considered acceptable for student's work: "my teacher would not even take 5% plagiarism [Pj, 113].

Plagiarism detection software reports were especially useful to students because the reports contained feedback on the students' own work and helped them to see what part of their assignment was considered plagiarism. The students could then use this feedback to correct their assignment and, in some cases, resubmit the assignment for grading.

Study participants did not appear to learn from institutional policies. One student commented that written policies on plagiarism, "were more printed documentation than living documents. Nobody paid attention to [them]" [PH, 136]. Simply receiving a copy of rules regarding plagiarism and being referred to course documents that discussed plagiarism was not meaningful to Nigerian students.

Nigerian students acknowledged that student plagiarism in U.S. schools was punishable and were aware that penalties for plagiarism could range from course failure, being required to retake a course, to being expelled from the institution. The students diligently sought to understand plagiarism and to avoid plagiarizing because they viewed the consequences for plagiarism as a possible obstacle to their successfully completing nursing school. Almost half (7 of 17) of the Nigerian nursing students stated they believed the faculty and institutional responses to plagiarism were too harsh. They were particularly critical of expelling students for plagiarism, stating that such punishment was excessive: "I feel like the response of kicking the person out of the university is a little too much. I understand making them fail [a single course] . . . or retaking the class" [PE,

129]; “I think the consequences should not be that severe. I do not think people should be kicked out of school for [plagiarism]” [PQ, 138]. One student thought that failing a student in a course for plagiarism also was too harsh: “giving a person a letter grade of F in a class I think is too severe” [PQ, 148].

Participant F shared an experience when she and other nursing classmates had ambivalent feelings regarding the punishment of a fellow student for plagiarism:

We knew that the action of copying someone else’s work was inappropriate but we felt kicking her out of the program was a little extreme but I guess it was necessary and the right thing to do. But we had student-to-student sympathy . . . the school should make [the student who plagiarizes] redo the class but not kick her out of the program. I would make her do remediation like a writing class or something because I really don’t think she understood the weight of what she was doing [PF, 59-67].

This participant believed that faculty members should consider a student’s understandings of plagiarism and the student’s possible motive to plagiarize prior to determining the consequences for plagiarism. Some students advocated for less severe punishment for plagiarism. One example was participant J who commented that a paper that 100% plagiarized should be given a low passing score and not failed: “[her paper was] 100% plagiarism . . . so, I think I might give her a C” [PJ, 79].

Participants learned most often about U.S. academic expectations regarding plagiarism in formal classroom settings. Formal settings included interactions with faculty members, classroom attendance, and instructor feedback on assigned coursework. Participants found the use of plagiarism detection software a helpful educational tool by

which they were able to see in graphic display what part of their written coursework was not considered original and may require a citation. Most participants said that they did not learn about plagiarism from written institutional policies. Participants were motivated to learn U.S. rules of plagiarism to avoid any possible punishments for plagiarizing. The study participants believed punishments for plagiarizing in U.S. schools was often excessive and harsh.

### **Informal: Learning from Other Nigerian Students**

Nigerian nursing students experienced informal learning encounters through their interactions with other Nigerian students. These informal encounters enhanced their understanding of U.S. views of plagiarism. Nursing students' diligence to adhere to the U.S. rules regarding plagiarism appeared to increase when students had awareness of an incident in which classmates were caught plagiarizing. Nigerian nursing students learned about plagiarism by observing and interacting with other Nigerian nursing students and hearing other students' stories of their own experiences in the U.S. with plagiarism. They learned vicariously of what can happen when a student in the U.S. was caught plagiarizing, and they also learned how to prevent common mistakes that by U.S. standards were considered plagiarism.

A 35-year-old Nigerian nursing student who had been in the U.S. for 10 years shared his vicarious learning experience,

[I] first found out about [plagiarism] through a buddy who almost got kicked out of graduate school [after being caught plagiarizing a school assignment]. He was traumatized for months. He was my roommate and also Nigerian. That was my first introduction to plagiarism and the rules of engagement!! I pretty much

became instantly sensitized after that. We were scared he was going to lose funding and be sent packing back to Nigeria [PH, 59 to 69].

Six other participants related stories about Nigerian friends who had been punished after being they were caught plagiarizing. One 33-year-old nursing student's friend was expelled after plagiarism, "I had a friend who was kicked out of nursing school for plagiarizing another student's clinical note" [PD, 98]. Participant H shared how a classmate had been expelled from nursing school: "I know someone in my ADN program who used the work of another student and was kicked out of the program" [PH, 55]. Another participant's family member had received a low grade on an assignment due to improper citing: "I remember once my sister being very upset about writing what she thought was an excellent paper, but she got a low grade because she quoted some statements in her work, but [did not] give the proper citation" [PK, 204].

Nigerian nursing students learned of plagiarism informally through interactions with other Nigerian students. Participants related many stories of fellow Nigerian students' experiences with plagiarism during their studies in the U.S. These vicarious experiences added to the participants' overall learning experiences by providing examples of U.S. rules regarding plagiarism and consequent punishments.

### **Trial and Error**

Many of the Nigerian students learned from their own experiences through trial and error: "I just had to learn from my mistakes" [PP, 30]. Participant L, a 38-year-old BSN student, described her experience:

I learned the hard way! I did a paper [that contained plagiarism] one time and my professor gave me a failing grade and warned me that if that should happen again,

I would be kicked out of school and that [would] reflect in my record. Since then, that mistake never repeated itself again [PL, 81].

Participant Q shared his story of learning by trial and error:

I did a paper [in which] I copied a couple of paragraphs from an article and did not make reference to it and the instructor failed me on that paper. When I approached her about my grade she told me what was wrong and then I told her I had just moved here and I had no idea it was a big deal. She understood the reason for my actions and made me write the paper again [with the instructions to] always give credit to the owner of an article [PQ, 132-134].

Another student explained how she struggled with the daunting task of redoing the assignment after it contained a large amount of plagiarism: “. . . and the thought of rewriting the essay was depressing. I was struggling with it considering the fact that the majority of the writing had to come from my head” [Pc, 145-154]. The student’s comment of writing an assignment using her own thoughts revealed a shift from the student memorizing academic coursework to cognitive learning.

Participants explained that often they learned about U.S. expectations of plagiarism through trial and error. Participants said that they learned the rules of plagiarism by making a mistake, breaking a rule, and learning from their mistakes.

### **Summary: Learning The Rules**

Nigerian students learned the U.S. rules regarding plagiarism formally and informally. Formal instruction included interactions with faculty members, completion of required coursework, and the use of plagiarism detection software. Nigerian students did not appear to learn about plagiarism or U.S. academic expectations regarding plagiarism

from written policies or honor pledges. Informal learning occurred through Nigerian students' interactions with other Nigerian students and through trial and error. Despite many of the students' travails in learning U.S. academic expectations through the process of trial and error, Nigerian students persevered to meet their instructor's requirements.

### **Definitions**

The researcher asked the Nigerian nursing students to describe their current understanding of plagiarism. Each participant provided at least one definition of the term yielding differences and similarities. Twelve of the 17 students mentioned improper citations, nine students included plagiarism as part of academic dishonesty in general, eight students used the term cheating to describe plagiarism, and six students equated plagiarism to stealing. Examples of comments that conveyed the belief that plagiarism was similar to, or was associated with, cheating and plagiarism through use of someone else's words without citing the source included: "it means copying a great majority of someone's work and calling it yours without proper identification" [PM, 67] and "it means representing or using other people's words as if they were yours" [PC, 230]. Plagiarism was defined by one student as "an act or instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization" [PD, 118].

Examples of students comments that considered plagiarism a form of stealing include: "it means stealing or copying someone else's ideas or words, and publishing it without giving due credit" [PG, 115], and "it is equivalent to stealing. When you take something that is not yours without permission, this constitutes theft" [PA, 128]. Another student stated, "I define plagiarism as a form of pretense or deception; when an

individual presents another's work as their own without acknowledging the original person for it" [PI, 148].

Some of the Nigerian students equated plagiarism with academic dishonesty in general:

Basically [plagiarism is like] copying a friend's work, helping in exams, passing info on a test you just took to someone about to take it, copying and pasting with no references, submitting a friend's work and forgetting to change it to your name, getting stuff off the internet or buying papers from the net [Po, 108].

Although all of the nursing students had at least a general idea of plagiarism at the time of the interviews, it was apparent that many of the study participants had some uncertainty and unanswered questions regarding what plagiarism was. For example, Participant F stated, "since [the copied material] was [from] another student's work, I don't know if I should call it plagiarism" [PF, 55]. Another student's comment revealed that she viewed plagiarism as not causing harm: "it is not like they were caught [doing something] that was a danger to anyone" [PE, 131].

### **Summary: Definitions**

All of the Nigerian nursing students had a basic definition of what plagiarism was at the time of interview. Most of the students viewed plagiarism as a type of academic dishonesty and used words such as stealing or copying in their explanations of plagiarism. Some of the students expressed that they had questions regarding what plagiarism was and were not confident of their current understanding of plagiarism.

## **Conditional Acquiescence**

Nigerian students were candid in remarking that despite knowing they might suffer in the long run, fatigue and time pressures might lead Nigerian students to plagiarize. Students made statements that, in certain situations, they would continue to plagiarize. Nigerian students might plagiarize in a spur-of-the-moment decision, “I have been [tempted to plagiarize] in the moment” [PE, 164]. Or students may choose to avoid word-for-word replication of what they read and choose instead to paraphrase: “I wouldn’t have lifted word-for-word. I would have paraphrased. Not saying I haven’t paraphrased in my academic journey too . . . \*wink\* \*wink\*” [PH, 91]. Some students might resort to plagiarizing by cutting and pasting when they feel they do not have the time to write original passages: “Unfortunately I am comfortable with copying and pasting when I get pressed for time [but] I know I miss out on information that would have stuck with me if I had otherwise done it on my own” [PK, 186].

Study participants did not appear to learn from institutional policies. One student commented that written policies on plagiarism, “They were more printed documentation than living documents. Nobody paid attention to [them]” [PH, 136]. Simply receiving a copy of rules regarding plagiarism and being referred to course documents that discussed plagiarism was not meaningful to Nigerian students.

Nigerian students acknowledged that student plagiarism in U.S. schools was punishable and were aware that penalties for plagiarism could range from course failure, being required to retake a course, to being expelled from the institution. The students diligently sought to understand plagiarism and avoid plagiarism because they viewed the consequences for plagiarism as a possible obstacle to their successfully completing

nursing school. Almost half (7 of 17) of the Nigerian nursing students stated they believed the faculty and institutional responses to plagiarism were too harsh. They were particularly critical of expelling students for plagiarism, stating that such punishment was excessive: “I feel like the response of kicking the person out of the university is a little too much. I understand making them fail [a single course] . . . or retaking the class” [PE, 129]; “I think the consequences should not be that severe. I do not think people should be kicked out of school for [plagiarism]” [PQ, 138]. One student thought that failing a student in a course for plagiarism also was too harsh: “giving a person a letter grade of F in a class I think is too severe” [PQ, 148].

Participant F shared an experience of when she and other nursing classmates had ambivalent feelings regarding the punishment of a fellow student for plagiarism:

We knew that the action of copying someone else’s work was inappropriate but we felt kicking her out of the program was a little extreme but I guess it was necessary and the right thing to do. But we had student-to-student sympathy . . . the school should make [the student who plagiarizes] redo the class but not kick her out of the program. I would make her do remediation like a writing class or something because I really don’t think she understood the weight of what she was doing [PF, 59, 67].

This participant believed that faculty members should consider students’ understandings of plagiarism and their possible motive to plagiarize prior to determining the consequences for plagiarism. Some students advocated for less severe punishment for plagiarism. One example was Participant J, who commented that a paper that was 100%

plagiarized should be given a low passing score and not failed: “[her paper was] 100% plagiarism . . . so, I think I might give her a C” [PJ, 79].

Although the Nigerian students found punishments associated with plagiarism harsh they recognized that to successfully complete their coursework they would need to avoid plagiarism and adhere to the U.S. standards. There was evidence that students’ agreement to follow the rules of plagiarism was conditional and that the students might, on occasion, plagiarize when faced with fatigue or pressing academic deadlines.

### **Teaching Others**

Once they had a fairly good understanding of U.S. rules about plagiarism, the Nigerian students began to teach other Nigerian students about the topic. A middle-aged BSN student described how she had taught another Nigerian nursing student about plagiarism: “When I realized she was new to the system I sat her down. I told her this was one serious concept in America academics that she needed to be careful about. I told her the consequences of going to jail if not noted” [PP, 39]. Another BSN student said: “I told them [other Nigerian students] about my experience [with plagiarism]. They were surprised and I helped them to the best of my knowledge. At first, it was hard for them, but after some time they found their ground” [PL, 113]. Study participants taught fellow Nigerian students about several aspects of plagiarism including techniques to avoid plagiarizing and why they should not plagiarize: “I had to explain to her that just because you put things in quotations doesn’t mean you still do not give proper respect the author deserves. We talked at length about it and she understood in the end” [PK, 208]. Another individual commented, “I have made the person understand the risk [of plagiarizing] does

not outweigh the benefit. Also it is up to that individual if they will risk their entire educational career for a test or exam” [PE, 115].

Teaching others was a common activity reported by Nigerian nursing students who participated in the study. They shared their academic experiences about plagiarism as well as techniques to avoid plagiarism while completing their own coursework with fellow Nigerian students to guide and instruct other students to adapt to U.S. expectations of plagiarism within American nursing schools.

### **Summary: Adaptive Transformation**

Nursing students described how they adapted and changed their behaviors as they learned more about U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism. They described this transformation as coming to terms with their new environment and modifying their academic performance as an evolution that occurred incrementally over time. After immigrating to the U.S. and entering the school system, Nigerian students learned U.S. views of plagiarism and what behaviors are expected regarding plagiarism within the U.S. Nigerian students adapted to their new environment incrementally while they remained in U.S. schools. The Nigerian students saw U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism as rules they must obey to conform with expected standards and avoid punishments associated with plagiarizing. In this way, students could successfully complete their education. Participants in the study had varied yet similar working definitions of plagiarism, most of which connected plagiarism in some way to academic dishonesty. Nigerian students shared what they had learned about U.S. views and expectations regarding plagiarism with other Nigerian students as a way to help newer students understand plagiarism and adapt to U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism.

Teaching other Nigerian students to understand and adapt to U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism was a way of helping others. Teaching other Nigerian students was an important activity to the students interviewed and served as a way to uphold their Nigerian cultural standards of helping and supporting their fellow countrymen.

#### **IV: MESSAGE TO EDUCATORS**

Nigerian students wanted U.S. educators to know of the difficulties related to plagiarism that Nigerian nursing students faced when entering U.S. colleges:

Basically most Nigerians come here at the college level and at that point in time most schools and instructors in the U.S. already expect you to know about plagiarism and the consequences but unfortunately most of us [Nigerians] are new to the concept [PQ, 176].

Nigerian students wanted U.S. educators to be more culturally sensitive to the struggles of their international students, to “take into account other cultural perspectives/perceptions just like in healthcare” [PM, 98]. Nigerian participants also expressed concern that the workload of nursing school was a reason why students might be tempted to plagiarize: “Even when you get students’ attention, the amount of writing [required for nursing courses] make compliance [with plagiarism rules] almost impossible” [PH, 142]. This student also recommended plagiarism detection software as a useful tool for assisting students to learn about and avoid plagiarism. “Turnitin.com® is a great tool” [PH, 112].

Participants offered additional suggestions for faculty members about what could help Nigerian nursing students. One suggestion was tutorials: “I think a tutorial on how to avoid plagiarism would be helpful” [PP, 128]. Students had several other suggestions for

faculty members, most involving more discussions on how students could avoid plagiarism: “in addition to asking for references, it would probably be helpful for students to be informed on how to properly acknowledge their sources” [PA, 86]; “Lengthy discussions. Clearly established policies. Stress at beginning, middle and end of semesters” [PH, 108]; “give them enough information about what [plagiarism] means and the consequences of it, and also have them [explain] what they understand plagiarism to be and actions that constitute plagiarism” [PB, 142]; and “make it clear to [the student] what is expected on the first day of class” [PC, 215].

Nigerian nursing students suggested leniency toward students who plagiarized, including giving students a second chance. “Whoever plagiarizes have them rewrite the first paper and if [plagiarism is] repeated give them an F” [PC, 215], and “[the student caught plagiarizing] should be warned and made to write [the paper] again” [PQ, 150]. Participant I, a former teacher who was a nursing student at the time of the study, stated “If the student doesn’t know what they are doing is wrong you can’t penalize them for that. I think they have to be told why it is inappropriate” [PI, 97].

Nigerian nursing students wanted faculty members to understand that there were times when Nigerian students had trouble understanding the course material and assignment instructions. Students desired straightforward explanations and instructions about course expectations: “I noticed earlier on while studying in the U.S. that when words are used double negatively, I get very confused and discombobulated. However when it is written in a straight forward manner I totally understand what I am being told” [PK, 198]. This desire for clear explanations was repeated by other participants:

[we need] a clear explanation of what plagiarism is . . . we are so used to the system back home [in Nigeria] that we forget how strict the U.S. is and tend to ignore some stuff. [Faculty] could provide resources to help students evaluate their work for plagiarism, like the website Turnitin ®” [Po, 114].

Students expressed a desire to establish a good relationship with their instructors: I feel like if the students are doing well in the class, they would never consider cheating. Both the teachers and the student need to work together to make the material understandable. If a Nigerian student understands how a teacher teaches the material, what they like to focus on a test . . . it might decrease the prevalence of plagiarism [PE, 146].

The students also desired that their instructors make them feel welcome, “have a good relationship with students of other ethnicity . . . make them feel welcome at all times” [PE, 150].

### **Summary: Message to Educators**

The Nigerian students wanted U.S. educators to understand that the Nigerian students’ transition to U.S. plagiarism standards was difficult. The students desired U.S. educators to treat the Nigerian students in a culturally sensitive manner and to offer the students leniency during their process of learning the U.S. rules of plagiarism.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Study findings were based on web-based dialog with 17 Nigerian nursing students who had immigrated to the U.S. and who were currently enrolled in nursing school or had graduated from nursing school within the past 12 months. Of the 17 participants, five were male, 12 were female and their average age was 33. The average time that the

participants had been in the U.S. was 10.4 years, with an average time in U.S. schools of 6.9 years. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential and participants were frank and outspoken in their discussions.

Nigerian students had entered the U.S. with a worldview shaped by prior experiences and learning, home culture, and upbringing. Participants valued what they saw as their social responsibility to support and help other Nigerians. Nigerian nursing students viewed education in the same way they viewed life: experiences and accomplishments were to be shared. Participants placed great value on the importance of education. Education, and success by means of education, was strongly valued in Nigerian culture.

Although Nigerian students might have come to the U.S. with some awareness of plagiarism, they entered the U.S. lacking a thorough understanding of the concept. Soon after matriculating in U.S. schools, Nigerian students became aware of the dissimilarities in how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S. compared to in Nigeria; they found the U.S. expectations strict and challenging to comprehend.

Once in the U.S., Nigerian students learned about plagiarism most often in formal classrooms settings through interactions with faculty members and by use of plagiarism detection software; study participants did not appear to learn from institutional policies. Informal encounters through interactions with other Nigerian students enhanced students' understanding of U.S. views of plagiarism. Many of the Nigerian students also learned from their own experiences through trial and error. Students persevered to meet U.S. academic rules regarding plagiarism and their instructors' requirements. As students

familiarized themselves with U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism, they adjusted their behaviors accordingly.

Although Nigerian students found punishments associated with plagiarism to be harsh, they recognized that to complete their coursework successfully they needed to avoid plagiarism and adhere to U.S. standards. There was evidence that students' adherence to the rules of plagiarism was conditional: students might, on occasion, plagiarize when faced with fatigue or pressing academic deadlines.

Nigerian students did not learn about plagiarism in a single moment, rather their knowledge grew incrementally over time. Faculty members can facilitate this learning process by being aware of these differences and actively engaging with Nigerian nursing students as they learn U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism. Interactions between faculty members and Nigerian students should not be limited to faculty members referring students to institutional policies. Interactions should include ongoing dialog and instructional techniques to allow feedback on student paper drafts or the use of plagiarism detection software as a learning tool prior to students' final paper being submitted for evaluation.

Nigerian nursing students wanted faculty members to understand that there were times when they had difficulty understanding the course material and assignment instructions. Students desired straightforward explanations and instructions about course expectations. Students also recommended plagiarism detection software as a useful tool to assist students to learn about and avoid plagiarism. Nigerian students expressed a desire to establish good relationships with their instructors. Participants wanted U.S. educators to understand that Nigerian students' transition to U.S. plagiarism standards

was difficult. They desired U.S. educators to treat the Nigerian students in a culturally sensitive manner and to offer the students leniency during the students' process of learning the rules of plagiarism.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This NI (Erlandson et al. 1993) study explored Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism. Chapter five begins with a review of the research problem and the methodology utilized to answer the research question. The chapter presents a discussion of findings of the study and a comparison of the study findings to current literature, followed by a discussion of the significance of the study and suggestions for further research, then presents study conclusions. The research question that guided this study was: what are Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism? The aim of the study was to explore Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism as they encountered U.S. standards and expectations regarding plagiarism, a topic of which little was known.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Plagiarism has become a concern throughout the world, yet how societies view plagiarism is impacted by ideas about ownership, individuality, and appropriate academic behavior. U.S. expectations about academic behavior, including plagiarism, have been strict (Green, 2002). Students who plagiarize in U.S. schools have faced severe consequences, with punishments including failing the associated course or expulsion from the academic institution. Large numbers of international students have been studying in American schools; Nigerian students have been one of the largest groups of international students. Nigerian nationals who have immigrated to the U.S. and become students in U.S. schools, have reported struggling to understand and meet U.S.

expectations. Students who were reared in Nigeria grew up with values and expectations regarding plagiarism that were unique to Nigerian culture—standards different from U.S. standards.

## **REVIEW OF METHODOLOGY**

NI was selected as the appropriate methodology for this study because NI used interpretive and exploratory techniques to discover patterns in behavior, also allowing for various valid viewpoints of the same concept (Erlandson et al., 1993). Thus, NI was deemed uniquely suited to exploring human constructions of reality within a complex social context.

The study utilized a web-based chat dialog developed specifically for the study. The web-based chat format resulted in an intact verbatim transcript of the interview. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the constant comparative method (CCM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized throughout the data analysis process. CCM allowed for comparison of each item of data to all other items within that individual dataset, comparison to data items in other datasets, and comparison within emerging categories. This resulted in the emergence of a defined pattern or gestalt from the data (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Trustworthiness was addressed by utilizing Beck's (1993) modification of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria; these criteria were credibility, fittingness, and auditability. Participants' own words resulted in vivid and true descriptions that were used to illustrate study findings. Nigerian nursing students, other nursing PhD students, and the researcher's dissertation advisor served as peer de-briefers throughout the study. The peer-debriefing provided the researcher with feedback to refine and re-direct the

inquiry process. Accurate transcripts of the interviews, the researcher's journals, in-depth explanations, and transparency of the data gathering and data processing activities—as well as precise documentation of the coding process and decision trail—enhanced the trustworthiness of the study procedures and findings (Beck, 1993; Erlandson et al., 1993).

## **DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS**

Seventeen Nigerian nursing students who were enrolled in U.S. schools at time-of-study or who had graduated from a U.S. nursing school within the past 12 months participated in the study. Participants lived within the U.S. across four time zones. Participants ranged in age from 20 – 52 years old, and included five males and 12 females. Participants included students from all types of nursing programs: associate degree programs, bachelor degree programs, master's programs, and doctoral programs.

Nigerian students had entered the U.S. with a worldview shaped by their prior experiences involving learning, home culture, and upbringing. Participants valued what they saw as their social responsibility to support and help other Nigerians. Nigerian nursing students saw education in the same way they saw life: that experiences and accomplishments were to be shared. Participants placed great value on the importance of education, which is a tenet of Nigerian culture.

Although Nigerian students might have arrived in the U.S. with some awareness of plagiarism, they lacked a full understanding of the concept. Upon matriculation in U.S. schools, Nigerian students became aware of the dissimilarities in how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S. compared to Nigeria; they found the U.S. expectations to be strict, challenging, and perilous.

Once in the U.S., Nigerian students learned about plagiarism most often in formal classroom settings via interactions with faculty members and use of plagiarism detection software. Study participants did not report learning about plagiarism from institutional policies or written documents. Informal encounters with other Nigerian students enhanced students' understanding of plagiarism views in the U.S. Many Nigerian students also learned from their own experiences through trial and error. Students persevered in learning how to meet U.S. academic rules regarding plagiarism and adjusted their behaviors accordingly. Although Nigerian students found punishments associated with plagiarism to be harsh, they recognized that to complete their coursework successfully they would need to avoid plagiarism and adhere to U.S. standards. Learning about plagiarism did not occur following single encounters for the Nigerian students; rather, it was a process that occurred incrementally over time.

Faculty members may facilitate Nigerian students' learning process by being aware of differences in American vs. Nigerian views of plagiarism and by actively engaging with Nigerian nursing students as they learn U.S. plagiarism expectations. Interactions between faculty members and Nigerian students should not be limited to referencing institutional policies; instead, faculty members should implement ongoing dialog and instructional techniques that allow for feedback on student paper drafts and promote the use of plagiarism detection software as a learning tool prior to students' submission of final papers.

Once Nigerian students gained an understanding of differences in how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S., U.S. academic rules related to plagiarism, and specific information on U.S. academic expectations, Nigerian students entered into a process of

adaptive transformation. During the adaptive transformation process, Nigerian students adjusted their academic behaviors. For example, Nigerian students adapted and altered the ways in which they wrote their papers, striving to write papers from their own viewpoints. This behavioral change was in contrast to Nigerian expectations that students recreate instructors' lectures and texts verbatim. Nigerian students also increased their vigilance in source citations, which they came to view as giving credit to original authors for their work. Participants indicated that Nigerian students adapted and conformed to expected behavior when they understood American faculty members' expectations.

Nigerian students revealed possessing, for the most part, a conditional acquiescence in which they abided by U.S. school rules regarding plagiarism when in that environment. Nigerian students changed their behaviors because it was necessary to successfully complete their courses. This change in academic behavior did not necessarily result in Nigerian students accepting or assimilating to U.S. views on plagiarism. Rather, students' adherence to American rules of plagiarism appeared to be conditional—students may continue, on occasion, to plagiarize when faced with fatigue or pressing academic deadlines.

Nigerian student participants admitted that although they had learned how to meet U.S. standards and avoid plagiarism, situations could arise that would cause them to take a risk and plagiarize. Several nursing students characterized their programs as having heavy workloads and large time commitments. Five of the 17 study participants revealed that stress, feeling overwhelmed, or not knowing a better way to say something could result in Nigerian students violating plagiarism norms.

Nigerian nursing students wanted faculty members to understand that there were times when Nigerian students had difficulty comprehending course materials and assignment instructions. These students needed straightforward explanations and instructions about course expectations. Students also recommended plagiarism detection software as a useful tool for learning about and avoiding plagiarism. Nigerian students wanted to establish good relationships with their instructors; they also wanted U.S. educators to understand that the transition to U.S. plagiarism standards was difficult for Nigerian students. Participants asked that U.S. educators treat Nigerian students in a culturally sensitive manner and offer students leniency while they learned American rules of plagiarism.

#### **COMPARISON OF STUDY FINDINGS TO EXTANT LITERATURE**

Study findings were supported by extant literature. Findings also highlighted the unique experiences of one group of international students within the U.S., i.e., Nigerian nursing students.

When Nigerian nursing students who participated in this study immigrated to the U.S., they brought Nigerian cultural standards about ownership and individuals' responsibility to the group. Although these students were highly motivated to succeed in their educational endeavors, they quickly realized that U.S. cultural standards on plagiarism were different from Nigerian standards, and that violations could result in severe consequences. Students were shocked to discover that they were expected to know and adhere to U.S. standards regarding plagiarism immediately upon enrollment in U.S. schools. These findings were reflected by Croxford (2001), who found that international students were expected to accept American university norms regardless of their having

prior exposure or a full understanding of the concepts. Duff et al. (2006) concurred that many international students are “surprised, confused, affronted, and distressed” (p. 675) when accused of academic plagiarism.

Study findings revealed that common practices of U.S. universities regarding orienting and informing students about plagiarism and academic conduct were inadequate for Nigerian students. Merely expecting students to read and sign statements of academic conduct or referring them to manuals or websites where standards and expectations were discussed did not meet Nigerian students’ needs. Instead, Nigerian students benefitted from courses informing them about plagiarism or from opportunities to practice (via software programs or instructors) and receive feedback for identification of and overcoming the tendency to plagiarize. Duff et al. (2006) commented that the remedy for plagiarism was not punishment but clear statements of “expectations of scholarship” (p. 677). The researchers also found that international students had a period of adjustment upon entry to Western academic systems. International students needed time and feedback to learn how to avoid plagiarizing.

Nigerian nursing students who participated in this study had several suggestions for U.S. educators to assist international students in understanding plagiarism rules. Most strikingly, Nigerian students suggested that faculty members should embody the dictum that nurses be culturally sensitive by themselves becoming sensitive to the situation and needs of their international students—particularly when students’ national cultures conflict with U.S. values. Nigerian students asked U.S. faculty members to be aware that international students do not automatically comprehend all U.S. standards nor know how to meet those standards. And whereas Payan et al. (2010) suggested that differences in

values and culture were often a source of discord between faculty and students, study participants simply asked educators to be patient, informative, and to allow Nigerian students time to learn how to perform to U.S. standards.

Hussin's (2007) posited that international students needed "practical examples" (p 366) to learn to avoid plagiarism, which was supported by study findings. Nigerian students requested examples of plagiarism and examples of proper writing techniques to avoid plagiarism. Nigerian students found the graphic examples provided by plagiarism detection software to be helpful, as it allowed them to learn what constitutes plagiarism in their own written papers.

Study findings suggested that institutional policies have little impact on student perception or understanding of plagiarism. These findings contradict those of Heitman & Litewka (2011) who believed that institution policies play a key role in defining, governing, and controlling plagiarism. Lagone (2007) also placed a high level of value on the use of institutional policies and academic honor codes in plagiarism prevention.

#### **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

Study limitations included that the study was limited to students from only one country, Nigeria, and that the study was limited to current nursing students or recent nursing graduates. Thus, generalizability of the study findings is limited. Only students from the country of Nigeria were included, in part, because English is the native language of Nigeria so communication was facilitated between researcher and participants. Study participants were limited to nursing students because the researcher was a nurse and also because the nursing profession possessed high ethical standards. These decisions

provided a format for Nigerian nursing students to share their perceptions of the adaptive process to becoming U.S. nursing program students.

A further limitation of the study was that participants were self-selected. Self-selection allowed interested and outspoken participants to participate in a research study about their real-life experiences. Thus, the study recruited Nigerian students who could reflect on their experiences regarding plagiarism, had opinions about those experiences, and were open to discussing the topic. The study provided participants with an opportunity to describe their personal struggles and those of other Nigerian students in coping with different cultural plagiarism values and to inform educators about their experiences.

Study findings provided practical suggestions for U.S. educators to deal with Nigerian students. Suggestions were informed by Nigerian students' real life experiences dealing with U.S. interpretations and consequences of plagiarism, and revealed useful information to increase U.S. educators' understanding of their Nigerian students. Students clearly identified teaching techniques that were helpful and unhelpful to help them learn about plagiarism.

One potential study limitation was that the researcher was born and raised in the U.S. Thus, the researcher undertook the study with a clear understanding of how plagiarism is perceived in the U.S., but may have been limited in her understanding of Nigerian viewpoints. Moreover, interactions and understanding between the American researcher and Nigerian participants may have been impacted by differences in nationality. Nevertheless, Nigerian nursing students were open and frank in their discussions and eager to participate in the study. Input of the researcher's Nigerian

colleagues during study development as well as the member checking process enhanced the cultural validity of the study procedures and the researcher's interpretations.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY**

Large numbers of Nigerian nursing students have enrolled in U.S. nursing schools, particularly within Texas. These students have struggled to adapt to plagiarism standards that can be very different from the standards in Nigeria. Although Nigerian students desired to meet faculty and academic institutional expectations, it can take time for these students to learn the rules related to plagiarism and the academic skills to master writing papers to U.S. standards. It is important for faculty and nursing schools to recognize that Nigerian students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism vary from Western views of plagiarism, and for faculty to address such differences by clearly explaining expectations related to plagiarism and teaching the students what is considered plagiarism and how to avoid it. Faculty members should assist Nigerian students by providing clear examples of how to quote other authors, what type of writing is considered original, and how to cite references correctly.

The present study revealed that Nigerian students helped other Nigerian students. One way in which Nigerian students helped each another was by sharing learned information about U.S. plagiarism expectations. Although initially more likely to help other Nigerian students similar to themselves, students shared what they knew and what they learned to help each other.

Plagiarism can be a painful topic for Nigerian students. Nigerian students chose to participate in the study because their own experiences or observations of other Nigerian students' experiences regarding plagiarism caused them concern. If study participants or

their Nigerian colleagues plagiarized, they indicated doing so due to a strong desire to succeed and often because of their poor understanding of what constituted plagiarism.

This study shed light on Nigerian nursing students' perceptions of plagiarism and facilitated understanding of Nigerian students' unique experiences upon immigration to the U.S. Nigerian students who enrolled in U.S. nursing schools were highly motivated to succeed. The study may also inform U.S. educators. Faculty members should be aware that everyone suffers when Nigerian students are expelled from school or fail a course due to plagiarism: 1) Nigerian students suffer because they have failed, become embarrassed, or lose tuition; 2) the institution and faculty members suffer because of the loss of that student; and 3) society suffers because it may have lost a good nurse.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research is recommended to evaluate how international students from other countries perceive plagiarism, and how these international students adapt to U.S. academic views and expectations regarding plagiarism. Further research could explore the experiences of international student populations that have views of ownership similar to those views held by Nigerian populations, e.g., China, Greece, Korea. Further research is also recommended to facilitate understanding of U.S. faculty members' perceptions of plagiarism and to determine how faculty members interact with international students.

#### **STUDY SIGNIFICANCE**

This study shed light on concerns and experiences of Nigerian nursing students regarding plagiarism and how plagiarism was viewed in the U.S. Insights gained in the study can help faculty members who interact with Nigerian nursing students. Study findings can help U.S. faculty members to avoid applying negative labels to students

whose behaviors do not conform to Western academic expectations. Study findings also can help faculty members to be aware of their international students' cultural differences and adjust their interactions accordingly to allow for successful outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

U.S. views and consequences of plagiarism can be challenging, shocking, and unpleasant to some international students. Nevertheless, Nigerian students responded to this challenge by educating themselves, sharing their experiences with other Nigerian students, and trying to adapt to their new academic environments.

Nigerian nursing students who were studying in the U.S. encountered many challenges in understanding plagiarism and the U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism. Nigerian students came to the U.S. with their own personal perceptions of plagiarism based on their home culture and interactions with Nigerian academic environments. These perceptions were often very different from the U.S. academic view of plagiarism. This difference in perception often lead to confusion, stress, and in some cases academic punishment and penalties for Nigerian students studying in the U.S.

Nigerian students did not learn about plagiarism in a single moment but incrementally, over time. Faculty members can facilitate this learning process by being aware of the cultural differences that exist between U.S. faculty members and Nigerian students. Faculty members can assist further by actively engaging with Nigerian nursing students as they learn U.S. expectations regarding plagiarism. Interactions between faculty members and Nigerian students should not be limited to references to institutional policy. Rather, interactions should include ongoing dialog and instructional techniques to

provide faculty feedback on student paper drafts as well as the use of plagiarism detection software as a learning tool prior to students submitting their final papers for grading.

## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT PROTECTIONS  
Institutional Review Board

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02-Jul-2013

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Deborah George, MSN, MBA/Carolyn Phillips, PhD

*Andrea McKing*

FROM: Janak Patel, MD  
Vice-Chairman, IRB #2  
Institutional Review Board 0158

SUBJECT: IRB #13-0243 - **Final Approval** of Expedited Protocol.  
Nigerian Nursing Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism

Having met the requirements set forth by the Institutional Review Board by an expedited review process on June 10, 2013, your research project is now approved, effective July 1, 2013.

This project will require annual review and will expire on July 1, 2014. **Research that has not received approval for continuation by this date may not continue past midnight of the expiration date.**

Attached is the research consent form with the date of the IRB approval. Please use this form with the IRB approval date and make additional copies as they are needed. **In accordance with amendments to 21 CFR Parts 50, 312 and 812 effective 12/5/96, consent forms must be dated when consent is obtained.**

JP/ak

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## Appendix B: Recruitment Business Cards

**WERE YOU BORN IN NIGERIA?  
ARE YOU A NURSING STUDENT  
[OR]  
A RECENT NURSING GRADUATE?**

Are you willing to take part in an online research study regarding your experiences and perceptions of plagiarism? →

**IF INTERESTED, PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Deborah George RN, MSN, MBA**  
UTMB Doctoral Nursing Program Student  
Email: [PerceptionsOfPlagiarismStudy@gmail.com](mailto:PerceptionsOfPlagiarismStudy@gmail.com)  
Phone: 979/240/8982

This study is under the direction of Carolyn Phillips RN, PhD and has been approved by UTMB IRB



## Appendix C: Study Website

Nigerian Nursing Student's Perception of Plagi...

perceptionsopl...  Search

Nigerian Nursing Student's Perception of Plagiarism Study

HOME DOWNLOADS CHAT WITH DEBBIE

### Were you born in Nigeria?

Are you a nursing student or a recent nursing graduate?

Are you willing to take part in an online research study regarding your experiences and perceptions of plagiarism?



**If interested, please contact:**  
**Deborah George RN, MSN, MBA**  
[djkarges@utmb.edu](mailto:djkarges@utmb.edu)  
979.240.8982

UTMB Doctoral Nursing Program Student

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## **Appendix D: Research Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate as a subject in the research project that will explore the Nigerian nursing students' experiences and perceptions of plagiarism. This study is being conducted by Deborah George RN, MSN, PhD student at UTMB- Galveston.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to study the experiences and perceptions of Nigerian nursing students or recent nursing graduates. You are being asked to participate because you are a Nigerian nursing student or recent graduate.

### **RISKS OF PARTICIPATION**

There are no identified risks to participation in this research project.

### **NUMBER OF SUBJECTS PARTICIPATING AND THE DURATION OF YOUR PARTICIPATION**

The anticipated number of subjects involved in the study will be 25. You will be interviewed a minimum of one time; which is expected to take thirty to sixty minutes, but will not exceed ninety minutes. The researcher may need to contact you again if questions should arise during data analysis, but you will not be contacted for follow-up interviews more than twice and no follow-up interview will exceed thirty minutes.

### **BENEFITS TO SOCIETY**

The direct benefits to society include an increased understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Nigerian nursing students.

### **REIMBURSEMENT FOR EXPENSES**

The participant will not incur any expenses and thus there will be no reimbursement of expenses for participation in this study. At the conclusion of each first interview the participant will be offered a one-time gift of a twenty dollar (US) gift card to either Starbucks or Target as a token of appreciation for their time to participating in the interview. The participant's choice of gift card will be sent by mail to the participant within ten days of the conclusion of the interview.

### **COSTS OF PARTICIPATION**

There will be no cost for participation in the study.

### **PROCEDURES FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY**

All participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or discontinue participation in this study at any time including prior to the interview, during the interview, and at the end of the interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the researcher by email. You may refuse to be contacted by the researcher. You may refuse to participate any future interviews.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints before, during or after the research study, you should immediately contact Deborah George at 979.240.8982.
2. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have been told that you may refuse to participate or stop your participation in this project at any time without penalty
3. If you have any complaints, concerns, input or questions regarding your rights as a subject participating in this research study or you would like more information, you may contact the Institutional Review Board Office, at (409) 266-9475.

The purpose of this research study, procedures to be followed, risks and benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told whom to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time. You may withdraw your consent by notifying Deborah George at 979.240.8982. You are encouraged to print a copy of the consent form you have signed electronically.

Informed consent is required of all persons in this project. Whether or not you provide a signed informed consent for this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with UTMB.

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Signature of Subject

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Date

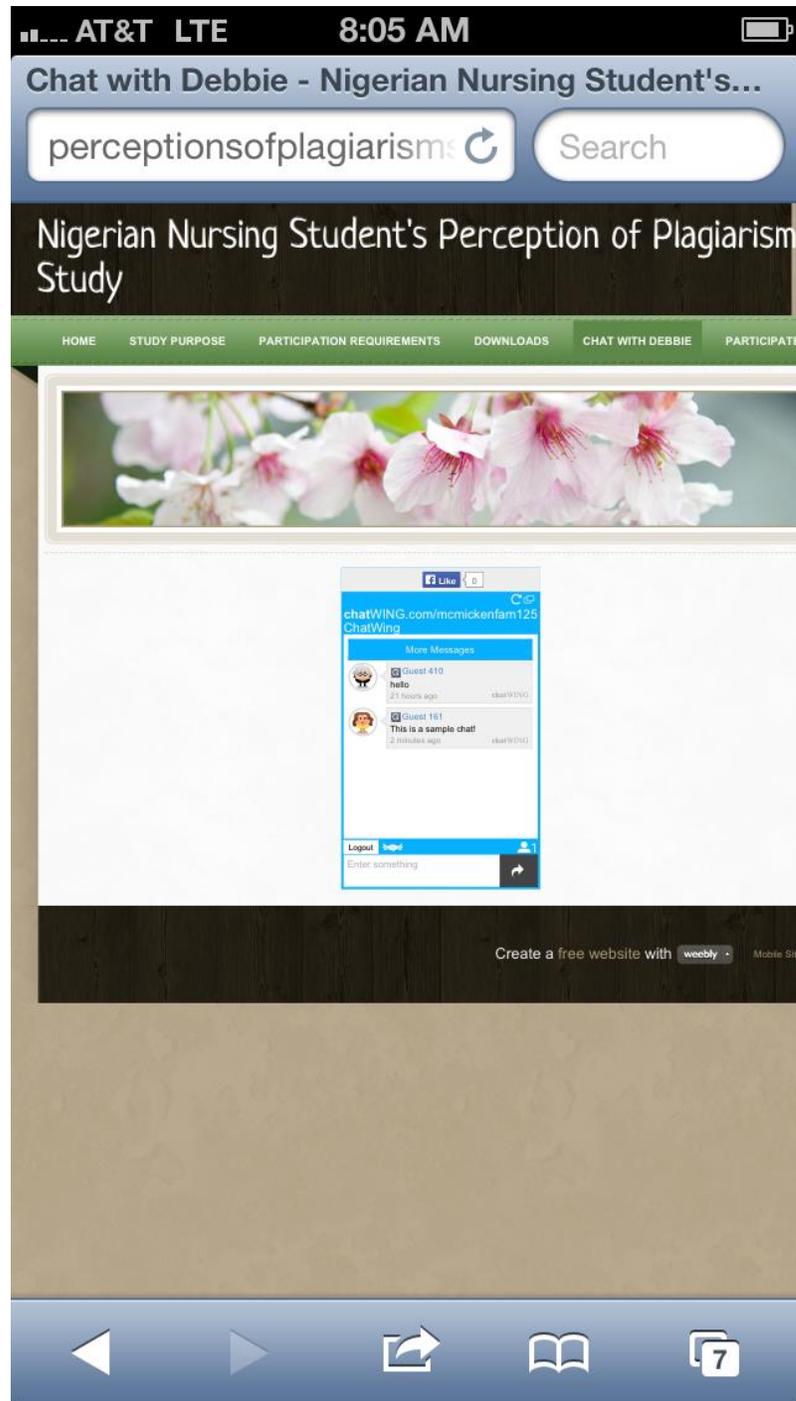
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Date

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Signature of Person Obtaining  
Consent

## Appendix E: Screen Shot of Chat



## Appendix F: Screen Shots of Study Purpose and Participation

### Requirements Sections of Web Site

Nigerian Nursing Student's Perception of Plagiarism Study

HOME STUDY PURPOSE PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS DOWNLOADS CHAT WITH DEBBIE PARTICIPATE



**What Are The Nigerian Nursing Student's Perceptions of Plagiarism?**

This study will use naturalistic inquiry to discover Nigerian nursing students' perception of plagiarism. Online interviews will be used to gain insight into each participant's perceptions. This information will aid in understanding the student's viewpoint and how their culture impacts their perceptions regarding plagiarism. This study will be useful in informing nurse educators on how perceptions of plagiarism vary. This study will give Nigerian nursing students a voice.



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Nigerian Nursing Student's Perception of Plagiarism Study

HOME STUDY PURPOSE PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS DOWNLOADS CHAT WITH DEBBIE PARTICIPATE



**Participants for this study will need to have been born in Nigeria and:**

- currently are nursing students or have graduated from a nursing program in the past 12 months
- have the ability to speak, read, and write English
- are willing to participate in at least one online interview lasting up to one and a half hours
- are at least 18 years of age

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## Appendix G: IRB Approval of Amended Request



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT PROTECTIONS  
Institutional Review Board

10-Sep-2013

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Deborah George, MSN, MBA/Carolyn Phillips, PhD]

*Carole L. Lacey, MD*

FROM: Janak Patel, MD  
Vice-Chairman, IRB #2  
Institutional Review Board 0158

SUBJECT: IRB # 13-0243 - Administrative Approval of the Revised Protocol to Include a Gift Card and the Revised Research Consent Form  
Nigerian Nursing Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism

The Institutional Review Board acknowledges receipt of your Request for Protocol/Consent Changes received by the IRB on 8/28/13 requesting approval of a revised protocol to include a gift card and the revised Research Consent Form. The protocol was revised to include a one-time \$20.00 gift card for Target or Starbucks. The Consent form was revised to incorporate this change. The revised protocol to include a gift card and the revised Research Consent Form were reviewed and approved through an expedited review process by the IRB on 9/10/2013.

This project will require annual review by the IRB and will expire on July 1, 2014. Research that has not received approval for continuation by this date may not continue past midnight of the expiration date.

The research consent form with the date of the IRB approval has been uploaded into InfoEd. Please use this consent form with the IRB approval date and make additional copies as they are needed. In accordance with amendments to 45 CFR 46, consent forms must be dated when consent is obtained.

JP/cc

Document Uploaded: Research Consent Form

## **Appendix H: Interview Guide**

### **Introduction**

Have you had a chance to read the subject consent form found in the study website?  
Do you have any questions about the consent form, the study, or what we will be doing?  
Are you willing to participate in the study?  
I want to encourage you to print a copy of the consent form for your records.

**Thank you so much. I would like to start by asking you a few questions.**

### **Demographic Information**

Age  
Gender  
Nationality  
Year entered the U.S.  
Number of Years in U.S. school system  
Are you a student in a U.S. nursing school?  
When will you graduate?  
Are you a recent graduate of a U.S. nursing school?  
Year and Month of graduation?  
What type of nursing program- chose one: ADN, BSN, MSN, DNP, PhD,  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Questions**

**What it is like to be a Nigerian person who becomes a student in a U.S. school and encounters the rules about plagiarism?**

How did you learn about plagiarism?  
Did your school have policies regarding plagiarism?  
What does plagiarism mean to you?  
Tell me about experiences have you or classmates encountered with plagiarism.  
\*Do you know of anyone who has experienced reprimands or punishments because of perceived plagiarism? If yes, can you tell me about that?  
Do you have anything to add that I have not asked you about?  
May I contact you if I have further questions or to establish a follow-up interview?

If you have any additional thoughts about plagiarism, please contact me by email at:  
djkgarges@utmb.edu

## **Appendix I: Reminder Email**

Greetings!

Thank you for your interest in my study that will explore the Nigerian nursing student's perception of plagiarism. This message is to remind you of our appointment. During this appointment we will discuss the study, you can decide whether to participate, and potentially participate in the online interview.

Our appointment is scheduled for:

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

I want to encourage you to visit the study website developed for this study at:  
<http://NigerianNursingStudentStudy.com>

When prompted, please create your account by using your assigned:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Password** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at:  
djkarges@utmb.edu or 979.240.8982

I look forward to meeting with you!  
Debbie

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## **Vita**

Debbie George was born May 9, 1962 in Lake Charles, Louisiana to Larry and Julia George. She received an Associates Degree in Nursing in 1994 from Victoria College in Victoria, Texas; a Bachelors Degree Nursing from UTMB in 2004; a Masters of Business Administration from Texas Woman's University in 2007; and a Masters in Nursing from Texas A & M Corpus Christi in 2009. She holds her COHN/CM certification in occupational health and case management and served as a board of directors for the American Board of Occupational Health Nurses from 2008 to 2012. She served as an adjunct clinical faculty for Dallas County Community College and Texas Woman's University Schools of Nursing. She is the mother of three wonderful children and grandmother (Neena) to seven perfect grandchildren.

Permanent address: 4411 Pleasant Trace Drive Houston, Texas 77059

This dissertation was typed by Deborah George.