



ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION OF AN ONLINE ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM DETECTOR FOR BRITISH TEACHER TRAINEES

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Abstract

Like everything else in today's digital culture, plagiarism checking is moving online. Educators are concerned with the originality of works presented by students and lecturers either in books, journals, research works or internet sites. Consequently, various online plagiarism checkers now exist.

This study presents an assessment of the efficiency of the application of "turnitin" as an internet-based academic plagiarism –prevention service. It also analytically discuss the utilisation of the technological device to the marking and grading of three essay assignments uploaded on the Institution's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) by the thirty-one students who were undergoing a Teacher Trainee programme. The study elaborates further on the strength and limitation of the technology's device when utilised for evaluation of students' works. Based on this experience, the researcher finally identified how "turnitin" can be used in formative assessment so as to help students learn how to avoid plagiarism, and improve their writing skills so as to become better researchers and writers.

Keywords: assessment, application, turnitin, teacher trainees

INTRODUCTION

From one culture to the other, and from one generation to the next, there are some elements of being economical with the truth. Also, the definition of lying and deception are understood differently by different people in different societies across the globe. This can cause people to doubt or mistrust each other, therefore, putting the integrity at stake. This happens in all spheres of life, including the academics.

In academics, moral integrity is highly valued. There is respect for intellectual property. Individuals and groups are expected to conduct research, think logically and reasonably, and come up with the results that are original in nature, indicating that the piece of work has been carried out genuinely. It should be emphasised again that the originality of ideas is especially prized, and plagiarism is especially abhorred.

Even though plagiarism is illegal today, it was considered to be an art in the ancient times (Bhosale, 2013). He goes further to state that "the modern concept of plagiarism as being immoral ... emerged in Europe only in the 18th century, particularly with Romantic movement". This same view was shared by Green (2002), when he mentioned that although plagiarism is not a crime per se, but in academics and related industries, it is considered to be a serious moral offence. This justifies the point that plagiarism is an immoral act that is unacceptable in the academics.

The Problem

With the advent of the internet, plagiarism has become quite easier and cost –effective for those students and lecturers who wish to get writings and researches done by short-cut methods. Before the arrival of the internet, copying content or information required a lot of efforts; need to find appropriate and beneficial piece of work from limited channels and resources, visit libraries located in different geographical locations, search for the appropriate materials and then write down all the required information. However, as of today, thousands of articles and data are available within few seconds on search engines.

Also, students of today are no longer creative and hardworking as it was in the past. They go in the wrong direction to earn dubious distinctions. They are no longer ready to think with clarity and comprehension. Most



of them are busy doing other things that are not beneficial to them, thereby procrastinating on their studies. Others do not trust in their own abilities. There is the inclination to take the easy way out when writing assignments, term papers or final year projects. Consequently, this gives rise to plagiarism.

Need for the Study

This study is carried out to serve as a palliative to most educators concern with the originality of works presented by students and lecturers either in books, journals, research works or internet sites. Situations on ground indicate that in the developing countries, the lecturers at times found it difficult to prove to the students that their works are not original. This is because some students do travel to higher institutions outside their neighbourhood or even institutions outside the country to make copies of research works which they submit to their project Supervisors in bits. Even, in the developed countries like United Kingdom and United States of America, where search engines are helpful in tracking the source of the data, it must be emphasised that they also have their own limitations which makes tracking difficult.

In addition, since there is an alarming rate of plagiarism, the results of the study is meant to suggest in practicality, ways of avoiding or minimising plagiarism in academics.

This study therefore is carried out to assess the efficiency of the application of an internet-based academic plagiarism-prevention service called "turnitin", in detecting the originality of students' works, and citing the sources of the plagiarised works.

Literature Review

The Concept of Plagiarism

Various individuals and groups, at one point or the other, has examined the issue of plagiarism. It should be stated that the concept remains problematic, most especially in terms of unclear definition and unclear rules. Plagiarism is considered as academic dishonesty and a breach of journalistic ethics. It is considered as academic fraud within academics by students, teachers and researchers. Consequently, it is punished by sanctions ranging from suspension to termination, along with the loss of credibility and perceived integrity (Kork 1999). Simply stated, it is the stealing of another person's language and thought, and passing it off as one's own original work. However, Random House Compact Dictionary (1995) gave an explicit meaning of plagiarism when it refers to it as "the wrongful appropriation" and "purloining and publication" of another author's "language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions" and the representation of them as one's own original work". It therefore implies that when someone use or close imitate the language and thoughts of another author or writer, and presents it as belonging to someone, then, plagiarism has taken place.

Academics in Universities has defined plagiarism in varying ways. The Council of writing Programs Administrator (2006), presents it as "use, without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to, or acknowledging the author or source, of another person's original work, whether such works is made up of codes, formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other forms". Carbone (2006) gave a similar view to that of Stanford when plagiarism was explained as "the use of another's work, words or ideas without attribution" which included "using a source's language without quoting ... without attribution, and paraphrasing a source in a form that stays too close to the original". Masor (2001) collaborates this when plagiarism was viewed as the use of "a writer's idea or phraseology without giving due credit". From all these explanations, one discovers that they were more liberal in their own perception of plagiarism, compared to the other views above. What was of much importance to them is acknowledging the source of information.

Plagiarism and the Internet

As stated earlier, plagiarism is far from a new phenomenon. Claims abound that the internet has contributed in no significant measure to the decadence in the growth of plagiarism. When individuals copy ideas, information and materials for academic or other purposes from different websites, without or without rephrasing the sentences, then, internet plagiarism has occurred. However, if permission is taken, and by giving due credit to the author, website or a source, then, it is not considered as plagiarism.



Notwithstanding the above, lots of students who plagiarise on the internet knows how to use the computer, word processing tools as well as internet and search engine tools. Nowadays, the computer literacy levels of our students are so high that most of them are experts in this area.

Plagiarism in Higher Institutions

Plagiarism is an act that is prominent among students and lecturers in higher institutions of learning worldwide. It happens in various forms and at various levels. Consequently, Rajeev (2012) has identified different types of plagiarism namely ; full, partial, minimalistic and mosaic . He went further to explain that full plagiarism occurs when the writer changes nothing from the original source, and there is an absolute lack of original research. On the other hand, partial plagiarism involves combining data from two or three different sources in a work. Minimalistic plagiarism is in practice when a person paraphrases the same content, but in a different flow. Finally, mosaic plagiarism which is most common among students is in place when a person changes the construction of a sentence, but does not bother to change the original wording.

Since it has been realised in the academics that plagiarism is a serious offence, varying punishments are given based on the level of plagiarism by the student or lecturer. At times, it might be failure grade in the particular assignment, the entire course, or, even been expelled from the institution. For cases of repeated plagiarism, or severe plagiarism, suspension or expulsion is likely. (Zime Chen 2008)

The extent of academic plagiarism is not easy to research. Clarke (2006) reported that " no one knows how widespread the problem is – in the UK or elsewhere" . A 1995 survey conducted by McCabe who was a Professor at Rutgers University in Durham, North Carolina revealed that nearly eighty percent of students have confessed to cheating. Olsson (2005) also pointed out that " during a school year, up to 20-30 academics are accused of plagiarism" and are facing plagiarism charge.

Cheema et al (2011) found that while some plagiarism in higher education research is intentional, some are unintentional and is a matter of ignorance of plagiarism facts. A substantial numbers of researchers also did not realise the penalties involved in committing plagiarism. All these are indications that plagiarism is an issue that is of great concern not only to those in academics, but the entire society in general.

Technological devices and Plagiarism

One of the issues that this study has raised concerning detecting the original source of information of copied work by students can be made easier by the use of research tools that modern technologies offer. Different individuals and organisations all over the world are developing either a free or commercially produced "originality" checking tools comparing writings to that which has already been written to determine whether the writing is genuine or stolen. Originality matters a lot, and its importance is going to constantly increase with overlapping, intricate and complex societies.

Teachers who may have previously cross-examined suspicious students by asking them to orally dissect their term paper's argument are now funnelling college and university funds towards internet-based anti -plagiarism services and software. This was because it was realised that some students in various universities do buy research papers and submit them as their original works. To lend more support to the above, more Universities and higher institutions have begun using anti-plagiarism software to promote academic honesty in the context of peer review dissertations, assignments as well as presentations.

A variety of free and commercial software applications designed to detect plagiarism from different sources – internet, friends or relatives – have appeared to be good for the lecturers at colleges to curb plagiarism. These plagiarism detection softwares has been routinely utilised across Universities in the developed parts of the world, because of the rise in student plagiarism that the internet has facilitated.

Prominent among the online tools to check for plagiarism are "turnitin", "grammarly" and "viper". Viper is a free plagiarism checker and it is seen as an alternative to turnitin. However, turnitin is not free, and it requires subscription by the Secondary School, College or University before it could be utilised. These are all anti-venom to plagiarism.



Turnitin

Turnitin is an internet based plagiarism prevention service. It was created over ten years ago by Paradigms Limited Liability Company . This company developed a software that checks and contest students' work against a collection of web pages, students papers, journals and publications from the institution and other institutions. The essence is to produce an original report which will identify any text in the student's work which match other sources. This is made possible by using a proprietary algorithm. It scans its own databases, and also has licensing agreements with large academic proprietary data bases.

Usually, the company works with various institutions. The Institutions virtual learning environment is configured to support turnitin, so that students' assignments are automatically submitted for originality analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Subject

A total of thirty one students (27 females and 4 males) whose age range between twenty-two and fifty nine years, and , who enrolled in The Preparing To Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) Teacher Education Programme at Redbridge College, Romford, Essex in The United Kingdom, from April to June 2012 constituted the sample for the study. Out of these number, one female holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D), ten were holders of post-graduate degrees, fifteen were University graduates and five were holders of various diploma programmes. In terms of culture and ethnicity, there was diversity because the group was made up of British, Black Africans, Asians, Red Indians, Chinese, Jamaicans, and Europeans. All of them, except one are working as at the time of the study. Most of them were trainers and lecturers in further educational institutions. However, they registered for the programme so as to become qualified adult (post-secondary) teachers and trainers. The qualification to be obtained is equivalent to Level 4. As a result of their academic qualifications, all the subjects have had course at one point in time or the other to submit written assignments or a research work.

Instrument

The major instruments used in this study were:

- 1) The three assignments required to be submitted by the students from the awarding body (Ascentis). These were;
 - Roles and Responsibilities and Relationships in Lifelong learning
 - Assessment methods
 - Understanding inclusive learning and teaching.

2. Turnitin software.

This software, it must be stated are available through blackboard and moodle in various secondary schools, colleges and Universities in the United Kingdom. Prominent among these Universities are Leeds, Glasgow, Newcastle, Southampton, Leicester, Bristol and Staffordshire

Procedure

At the beginning of the programme, the researcher informed the students that part of the requirements for the award of the certificate is the writing and passing of each of the three different assignments at Level 4. All the students were adequately briefed about the submission periods as well as the mode of submission of each assignment. They were made to realise that the department (e-learning) does not encourage the submission of assignments in form of hard copies or the lecturer's e-mail box, but on the designated column on the VLE. Consequently, they were adequately trained, through demonstration method, by the researcher on the step by step procedure for uploading the assignment on the Institutions Virtual Learning Environment. Apart from the demonstration, the procedure was also loaded on the College's Virtual Learning Environment. In addition, they were made to realise that in the course of marking and grading these assignments, the researcher would utilise an online plagiarism checker to detect the originality of their works .

The first assignment which was on "The Roles and Responsibilities and Relationships of a Teacher in Lifelong learning Sector" was handed out during the second week of the programme. Students were given two weeks to submit this on e-bridge (the College's VLE) . However, because the assignment was timed, two students



could not submit after the deadline. This was marked and graded the following week, using turnitin. Students receive feedback immediately. The second assignment focused on "Assessment Methods", and students followed same procedure in submitting just like the first one. However, because it was an adult evening programme for working people, two of the students has dropped out due to commitments. Although, the third assignment was concerned with "Understanding Inclusive Learning and Teaching", only twenty seven students submitted this. This was because the number of students who dropped out of the programme has increased to four. In essence, although thirty one students started the programme, only twenty seven completed the study

FINDINGS

Assessment of Turnitin

Turnitin is one of the most popular internet-based plagiarism detection software used by various higher institutions in the United Kingdom. This software has the potential of giving feedback on marked and graded assignments or researches in five different forms, which are:

1. Originality Report
2. Quickmark sets
3. Voice Comments
4. Grading rubrics and
5. General comments.

With special reference to originality checks, turnitin checks students' work for either citations not well referenced. It indicates the percentage of similarity in index form, quoting the title and author of the work. It breaks down in percentages the source of the plagiarised work, and sums it up. This is possible because it checks the writings against over twenty four billion web pages, over three million student papers, and over one hundred and ten thousand publications globally.

The quickmark is of great benefit to the teacher or lecturer that is grading the work. It takes care of citations (where needed), spellings, punctuations, need to delete, insert information etc. This saves the time because it provides lettered feedback, by allowing the assessor to quickly drag the custom marks and comments directly to the paper.

The voice comments is a very special and unique tool. Here, the lecturer is given the opportunity to give a personalised audio feedback to clarify and explain some quickmark comments where necessary.

Furthermore, the rubrics which are in various levels convey clear expectations and speed grading with pre-loaded common rubrics. However, the teacher is given the privilege to create his/her own rubrics.

Finally, after given comments and correction in the body of the work, the lecturer also have the benefit of giving general feedback and comments, which is broad, and in depth, based on the paper that has just been read.

Although, it is generally believed that this software is good based on the above analysis of its varying and diverse ways of giving feedback to students, however, its authenticity and needed areas for improvement would be revealed after its analysis with the three assignments as well as students' reaction after receiving their feedback from the submitted assignments.

Analysis of the assignments with turnitin

All the three assignments submitted by the 31, 29 and 27 students respectively were subjected to originality check for plagiarism, using turnitin. The assignments were uploaded to e-bridge for assessment, grading and feedback. Each assignment was marked and graded with appropriate comments, based on turnitin guidelines. After grading, it was uploaded and attached to the VLE where each students has access to the feedback.

Results

Assignment 1: Roles and Responsibilities and Relationships in Lifelong learning



As stated earlier, thirty one students submitted this assignment on e-bridge for marking, grading and feedback. When it was uploaded on turnitin, the finding was amazing. Similarity index for one of the papers was a whopping 98%. About five revealed between 65 and 90%, while seven were between 40 and 65%, and others were below 40%. The quickmark was adopted in giving comments in the body of the paper and was supported with voice comments. Grading rubrics was also adopted, and general comments were given last before it was uploaded as an attachment into the VLE for students information.

Assignment 2 : Assessment methods

Only twenty nine students uploaded this assignment. It was shown that the similarity index for most papers had reduced. The similarity index for about twenty percent of the papers was between 40 and 65%, about 40% of the papers indicated between 20 and 40% similarity index against other works, while the rest indicate between 0 and 20%. Same procedure of feedback system as assignment 1 was adopted.

Assignment 3: Understanding inclusive learning and teaching.

This time, there were twenty seven submissions for the above mentioned assignment. The similarity index revealed a somehow different and opposite statistics with the first submitted assignment. It was like a reverse. All the different forms of feedback were given like in previous assignment. However, on purpose, voice comments was not included.

DISCUSSION

After the students had received feedback from the first assignment, the researcher embarked on one to one interview with few students with special cases i.e, those with an extra ordinary high rate of similarity index. Turnitin revealed the author and source of the paper of the student with 98% similarity index. It indicated that the same work which was graded and fed back as good was submitted to the College by an ex-student who came for the same programme in 2010. On interacting with the student, he was surprised to learn that the bag had been let out of the bag. He confessed that the work belonged to his sister, who was on the same programme two years earlier. He said that he just changed the name, and uploaded it to e-bridge within seconds. It is worthy of note that this student was among the two students who voluntarily discontinued with the programme without any notice. Others with high similarity rates mentioned that they did "copy and paste" from the works of two or more graduates of the programme. Honig and Bedi (2012) also confirmed this revelation that students and scholars do actually embark on "copy and paste" from different sources, and present this idea as theirs. However, though some had a high similarity rate, this could not be attributed to actually lifting verbatim from other sources.

Lots of the students were not in agreement with what turnitin indicated as being copied with other sources. The Researcher also agreed with this, because some of those views were the students. However, most of their information were not well referenced. Some of the students even wanted to take it personal with the lecturer who is also the researcher, believing that the researcher has been unfair to them by supporting turnitin's judgement.

Students were quite happy with the feedback style, because of its variation. It was a total departure from the conventional grading system. They really love the voice comments, which was awesome as a result of it, being an innovation. Some of the students stated that it was great, and would love it to be included in all feedbacks. However, in order to ascertain the effects of this voice comments on students, it was included in assignment 2 feedback, but withdrawn in assignment 3. It was realised that few were not happy with this, and so, had to be re-adjusted. The resultant effect of this were special comments by the students on the news and forums section on e-bridge.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study assessed the application of turnitin as an academic plagiarism detector for British Teacher trainees. The researcher analytically discuss the utilisation of the technological device to the marking and grading of



three essay assignments uploaded on the Institution's VLE by the thirty one students who were undergoing a teacher training programme.

From the analysis, one can deduce that turnitin is a powerful online academic plagiarism detector which checks papers against tens of billions of web pages, hundreds of millions of students' papers and over a hundred thousand publications. Also, the varying modalities of giving feedback to the students was awesome. Finally, students become better researchers and writers. On the part of the teacher, it saves them the time for checking the originality of the written work.

The above notwithstanding, the software does not encourage students to paraphrase and use quotation marks when quoting other people's works. These are highlighted as part of the plagiarised works despite acknowledging the source. These, the students were unhappy with.

Based on this general experience with the students, the researcher re-echoed his method of minimising plagiarism with the students before the end of the programme. These were:

1. On the Teacher Education's segment of the College's VLE, it was boldly typed in red "Avoid plagiarism by referencing with the online Harvard Reference generator below.
2. A power point presentation was attached and uploaded, discussing about referencing and plagiarism.
3. Word document was uploaded titled "Guide to referencing"
4. A video clip on Online Harvard referencing generator was also uploaded

Generally, it is hereby recommended that Researchers, students and lecturers should be educated through seminars and formal campaigns on this subject matter. Students need to know at the beginning of the course how to paraphrase, use quotation marks, cite sources and manage their time. Furthermore, a chapter on plagiarism needs to be included in the curriculum of all disciplines. Individuals should have proper knowledge on plagiarism in order to nurture the quality of creative work.

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