

**ASSESSMENT OF PLAGIARISM IN UNDERGRADUATE PROJECTS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MINNA, NIGER STATE, NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

The study examined students' plagiarism in undergraduate final year projects for the 2014/2015 academic session in the Department of Library and Information Technology, Federal University of Technology, Minna. Turnitin anti-plagiarism software was used in checking the similarity index and percentage of plagiarized content in the students' projects. The acceptable benchmark for similarity index was 20% in line with the University policy. All the cases of plagiarism are treated as a case of examination misconduct by the University. The study subjected all the projects to Turnitin anti-plagiarism software as the method for determining the rate of plagiarism. The total population of 42 students for the 2014/2015 was considered out of which 31 (73.8%) successfully turned in their work and graduated with percentages ranging from 14% to 20% similarity indexes. The study determined different tricks and methods adopted by students in manipulating the results of Turnitin in order to get the acceptable percentages. Findings revealed some of the challenges faced by students while using Turnitin for plagiarism check. These includes students' lack of basic paraphrasing skills; time constraints; and lack of continuous monitoring of students' progress by Turnitin instructors. The study concluded that Turnitin has helped improve scholarly writings among students and staff and has also ensured integrity in intellectual outputs emanating from the university. This has a consequent effect on the research visibility and global ranking of Federal University of Technology, Minna on the Web. The study recommended among others that students should be advised to start turning in their works early and not at the end of the project, this would give them time to paraphrase the work before submission deadlines. The need for comprehensive training on how to paraphrase contents was also recommended.

Keywords: Assessment, Plagiarism, Turnitin, Undergraduate Projects, Department of Library and Information Technology.

Introduction

Easy access to Internet resources, according to Dias & Bastos (2014), is one of the most contributing factors to plagiarism. Most universities in developing countries now have a campus area network where students can connect to either wire or wirelessly using their laptops, tablets and other mobile smartphones. An academic exercise as basic as individual or group assignments maybe easily copied directly from the Internet and submitted as a finished work with little or no editing. Academic institutions in Nigeria are familiar with instances of students submitting directly copied work from uncited sources including the hyperlinks and format to show it is from the Internet. This act of instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization and the representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not acknowledging the original author is known as Plagiarism (dictionary.com unabridged, 2016).

There have been a number of studies examining reasons for the prevalence of plagiarism across various disciplines and countries indicating the widespread nature of the problem. For instance, Amsberry (2009) as cited in Gunnarsson, Wlodek, & Petterson (2014) shows that reasons for plagiarism are complex and multifaceted. Such reasons can be attributed to the students' cultural, linguistic and educational background. There is also lack of standardization and what is considered as 'cheating'. Plagiarism can also involve copying others' text and copying one's own publication. In the latter case, it is defined as self-plagiarism or the duplication of one's publication (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007). Time constraint, lack of understanding of what plagiarism is, poor training in citation skill, poor academic skills, or inability to paraphrase appropriately may lead to academic dishonesty. The development of search engines and anti-plagiarism software such as Turnitin, have enabled lecturers to identify possible sources of plagiarism. Although in some cases plagiarism will go undetected regardless of hours of detective work (Smedley, 2015).

Turnitin eliminates the time-consuming process of verifying student authorship by presenting easy-to-use reports that show how much of a document is original, cited from other sources, or unoriginal (Sun, 2013). With Turnitin, educators can promote academic integrity in their classroom. Students learn the importance of original writing and attribution and foster critical thinking skills that are important to student success. Turnitin checks students' work for improper citation or potential plagiarism by comparing it against the world's largest academic database. The database contains 58 billion web pages, 570 million student papers and 150 million articles from academic books and publications. Turnitin preserves the original format of the submission, allowing instructors to view the student's original text, formatting, imagery and layout. It shows how much of the student's submission matches content from the databases so that instructors can quickly understand how much content is unoriginal. Unoriginal content is highlighted and color-coded, and the original source appears with the percentage of content originating from that source. Instructors can control what information appears on the Originality Report by filtering out bibliographic, quoted or small match sizes. Students and instructors can also submit assignments from popular cloud platforms such as Google Drive® and Drop Box. Turnitin is completely online and available anytime through a standard web browser (http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/what-we-offer/originality-checking)

The Federal University of Technology Minna uses Turnitin as its official plagiarism checker for all intellectual contents emanating from the University. There is a Sole Administrator, School Turnitin Officers, as well as Departmental Instructors in charge of enforcement of the use and compliance with the plagiarism checker. Currently there are about 221 instructors, 1372 registered students, 20149 submissions and a total of 21195 originality reports generated from November 2011 to March, 2016 (see appendix A).

This paper used the Turnitin anti-plagiarism checker to assess plagiarism in undergraduate projects of Library and Information Technology (LIT), Federal University of Technology, Minna. Turnitin is supported by the University policy as the acceptable anti-plagiarism software for all undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University. As such, all cases of Plagiarism is treated as a case of examination malpractice.

Objectives of the Study

This paper aims at presenting the various levels of plagiarized contents in undergraduate projects of LIT students for the 2014/2015 academic session. To achieve this, the paper will:

- i. Present the various levels of plagiarized contents in undergraduate projects of LIT students;
- ii. Identify the various inappropriate ways adopted by students in trying to 'beat' the system;
- iii. Challenges faced by students in the process of turning in their work; and
- iv. Give recommendations on way forward.

Method

FUT Minna has an acceptable Turnitin percentage or similarity index for different levels of student. This is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Acceptable Percentage Similarity Index of Students' Projects based on Turnitin

S/No.	Degree Type	Similarity Index (%)
1.	Doctorate	10
2.	Master	15
3.	Postgraduate Diploma	15
4.	Bachelor	20

This study focused on undergraduate students (bachelors' degree) only. There were a total of 42 undergraduate final year students in the 2014/2015 academic session. Their projects were all subjected to Turnitin check in the following ways:

- i. Student registers with the departmental Turnitin instructor. Registration is done using the students name, matric number and functional email address;
- ii. Instructor adds the student on the Turnitin database. Turnitin then sends a username and password to the students registered email address;
- iii. Students receives the mail and follow the attached link to begin the turning in process.
- iv. Students are required to upload chapters 1-5 and references to the Turnitin database.
- v. Turnitin compares the students submitted work with millions of databases around the world and return a similarity index in percentage;
- vi. If the similarity index is less than or equal to 20%, the student contacts the instructor for verification and permission to print;
- vii. Instructor downloads and check the work online to ensure that the student did not use any inappropriate method to cheat the system;
- viii. After a successful checking and verification, the student is allowed to print the final copy for internal departmental defense, external examination and final hard bound copy for graduation.

The undergraduate students are required to pay a token fee of five hundred naira (N500.00K) to the University's account while the postgraduate students pay two thousand naira (N2,000.00k).

Discussion of Results

Out of the 42 students' projects subjected to Turnitin plagiarism check, only 31 representing 73.8% had the acceptable percentage of less than or equal to 20% and their results are presented in Table 2. The result shows the breakdown of the similarity index which is an accumulation of various sources consulted by the students. These sources are internet sources, publications, and students' papers.

Table 2: Projects Subjected for Turnitin Plagiarism Check

Project Title	Internet Sources (%)	Publications (%)	Students' Papers (%)	Similarity Index (%)	Remark
1. Preservation and Conservation of Library Materials: A Case Study of Federal University of Technology, Minna	15	9	7	16	Passed
2. Awareness and Compliance with Netiquette Rules for Online Discussion by LIT Students, FUT Minna	16	4	10	17	Passed
3. Availability and Use of Information Resources by Special Students: Department of Special Education, Niger State College of Education, Minna	12	6	12	20	Passed
4. An Assessment of User Satisfaction of Electronic Resources and Services in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU, Zaria	15	10	13	20	Passed
5. Use of Information and Communication Technology Services Delivery in FUT Minna Library	14	2	12	19	Passed
6. Library Facilities and Current Information Resources for Improved Library Services in Niger State	15	8	11	19	Passed
7. Impact of Public Relation on University Library Services: A Case Study of FUT Minna Library	12	5	13	18	Passed
8. Accessibility and Use of ICT Resources by Undergraduate	9	8	7	13	Passed

Students in SSTE: A Case Study of FUT Minna						
9.	The Assessment of Information Needs, Seeking Behaviour and Use by Higher Education Students in Minna, Niger State	17	9	10	19	Passed
10.	Availability and Utilization of Library Resources by Undergraduate Students of FUT Minna, Niger State	15	9	9	17	Passed
11.	Library Resources and Utilization by Undergraduate Students in FUT Minna	14	13	9	19	Passed
12.	Accessibility of Information Resources in Academic Libraries in Niger State	15	9	12	19	Passed
13.	Strategies for Effective Management of Academic Library Resources in Minna Metropolis, Niger State	11	7	6	14	Passed
14.	The Effect of Copyright Protection on the Research Output of Academic Librarians	12	8	8	18	Passed
15.	Knowledge Sharing among Undergraduates of Library Schools in Northern Nigeria	13	12	11	17	Passed
16.	Utilization of ICT Facilities in Academic Library for Effective Service Delivery	14	7	9	17	Passed
17.	Automation of University Libraries: A Case Study of University of Nigeria Nsukka	16	6	11	20	Passed
18.	Information Service Provision and Users' Satisfaction in Academic Libraries in Minna, Niger State	16	12	12	20	Passed
19.	The Impact of ICT Application on Information Service Delivery in National Open University of Nigeria in Abuja	16	8	11	19	Passed

20.	The Use of Information and Communication Technology in Management of Students Academic Records in FUT Minna	19	7	10	20	Passed
21.	Influence of ICT on User Satisfaction in Academic Libraries in Niger State	15	7	9	19	Passed
22.	Availability and Utilization of Information Resources in Kaduna Polytechnic Library, Kaduna State.	14	11	8	19	Passed
23.	An Evaluative Study of Students' Use of Serials in Niger State	18	9	11	20	Passed
24.	A System Study of the Budgeting and Accounting in FUT Minna	12	2	12	16	Passed
25.	The Roles of School Libraries in Children's Literacy Development in Secondary Schools in Minna, Niger State	11	9	11	19	Passed
26.	The Role of Internship in the Development of Undergraduate Students of Library Institutions in Nigeria	12	6	7	15	Passed
27.	Effect of Environmental Factors and Staff Attitude on Students' Use of Academic Libraries in Minna Niger State	12	11	7	18	Passed
28.	Acquisition of Library Resources and Use in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of Federal University of Technology Minna, Niger State	13	8	9	19	Passed
29.	Relevance of Library Orientation and User Education on the Use of Library by University Students in Niger State	14	10	7	17	Passed
30.	Use of School Library and Students' Satisfaction in Two Secondary Schools in Minna, Niger State	16	6	10	19	Passed

From Table 2, the project with the highest similarity index is 20%, while the lowest is 11% respectively. Students exhibit different attitudes and tricks at getting the benchmark. Since there is no guarantee that a project turned in at the first instance will arrive at the acceptable percentage, students, out of fear, frustration and inexperience, employ various tactics to bring down the percentage at all cost. Some of the tricks as listed below, are done either before turning in the work at first login or after:

- i. Conversion of some chapters in the work from text to pictures;
- ii. Changing alphabet 'O' to figure '0' in every word that it appears;
- iii. Changing selected alphabets to a symbol (e.g. e to ϕ);
- iv. Separating every word in the project with a comma(,);
- v. Using unlicensed software to 'paraphrase' before turning it in on Turnitin;
- vi. Paying huge sums of money to outsiders who have no idea on the project to paraphrase for them. These outsiders eventually alter the meaning of the project in entirety which sometimes gets rejected by the project supervisors.

Findings

Undergraduate students' experience with the plagiarism checker has exposed so many issues on paraphrasing and citing across all disciplines in FUT Minna. The experiences of LIT undergraduate students is not too different from those of other Departments in the University. It was observed that students lack basic paraphrasing skills. Time constraints is also another challenge. Awareness on the importance of turning in students' project right from the beginning is also lacking as most instructors do not register their students on time. Although the University policy is in full support of the implementation of the plagiarism check, there is no enforcement and monitoring of students' progress. It is expected that if all these challenges are carefully taken care of by the LIT students and staff as well as the University authority the standard of their final year projects will certainly improve as the level of plagiarism will be minimized.

Conclusion

The awareness and compliance with the use of Turnitin anti-plagiarism checker at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State has helped improved scholarly writings among students and staff of the university. This has ensured that intellectual contents emanating from the university are free from plagiarism and may be safely used and referred to through the institutional repository. This will, in the long term, improve the university's research visibility on the Web and improved ranking among other universities in Africa and the World.

Recommendations

The following are suggestions on the way forward:

- i. The instructors should endeavor to register students early and advise them to start turning in their work right from chapter one;
- ii. Students should be properly trained on how to cite and paraphrase. This should start before they commence project writing;
- iii. Stiffer penalty should be awarded to students caught using tricks or trying to 'beat' the system. However, unintentional plagiarism should be advised on the proper way to paraphrase;
- iv. Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement Task Force should be set up to stop outsiders from exploiting the students in the name of plagiarism check.

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