

THE ROLE OF TURNITIN POLICY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE OF ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Judith Tafangombe*

Abstract

Academics strive to produce quality academic writing. There is need to ensure that issues of plagiarism are addressed to promote quality academic writing. Plagiarism means using some one's ideas without even acknowledging the source (en.writecheck.com/resources). In academic writing plagiarism is a serious offence. It results in one losing academic or professional standing or failing assignments or courses ([http:// www.examiner.com/ adult –education-in-pittsburg/plagiarism-higher education](http://www.examiner.com/adult-education-in-pittsburg/plagiarism-higher-education)). It is therefore imperative that academics make use of anti-plagiarism software such as turnitin as it would assist them to avoid plagiarism. The study sought to find out the role of turnitin in academic writing. A qualitative approach was adopted and a case study design was employed. The case study allowed the researcher to focus on a particular instance to get an in-depth understanding of the situation (Creswell, 2009). A purposive sampling of 5 lecturers and 5 students was drawn. The lecturers revealed that they have been trained to use the anti-plagiarism but were yearning for a clear policy since it would determine universal acceptable percentage. The students on the other hand revealed that they have not been trained to use it and would appreciate such training to promote production of quality assignments. It is recommended that there be a turnitin policy used in faculties to promote quality academic writing. Students on the other hand should be trained to use turn it in soft-ware in order to produce quality assignments. Thus generally both students and lecturers should be encouraged to use the anti-plagiarism software in all their academic writing

Key words: academic writing, plagiarism, turnitin

* Zimbabwe Open University, P.O. box MP 1119, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe

Background of the study

Copying someone else's text without acknowledging the source is an act of plagiarism. By plagiarism one will be infringing copy rights of the original author. To avoid plagiarism acts, an anti-plagiarism software such as turnitin is used. This software allows authors to check their academic writing on acts of plagiarism. The software assists authors in making citations of works that might have been plagiarized. The software highlights the degree of plagiarism and this allows the writer to perfect his or her work. The writer is also sensitized about the need to cite original authors and not pretend to be the owner of the materials. It is behind this background that the researcher wants to assess the role of turnitin in policy in institutions of Higher Learning (en.writecheck.com/resources)

Objectives of the study

- To ascertain the role of the turnitin policy in academic writing
- To highlight the implications of absence of a policy
- To outline the benefits of the turn- it- in policy

Research questions

What is the role of turnitin policy in academic writing in your institution?

What does turnitin entail?

What are the benefits of the turnitin policy?

How does your institution make use of the anti-plagiarism software?

Literature Review

Turn it in is an anti-plagiarism software used by academics nowadays. It helps to maintain traditional values pertaining to authorship and intellectual properties. There has been an increasing interest in the use of anti-plagiarism software such as this web based turn-it-in system (Dahl, 2007). Academics would improve the quality of their academic writing by making use of this particular software. In addition the use of turnitin would also curb the problems associated with copyright issues as once mentioned above. John (2003) cites two kinds of plagiarism.

Firstly one type of plagiarism is linked to published materials. Academics continue to search for information on the internet now and again as the current trend of the use of the internet has increased tremendously. In higher education institutions both students and lecturers make use of a variety of internet search engines to acquire the required information for a particular subject area. Therefore the use of the turn-it-in software assist authors in producing authentic pieces of work since it helps to trace plagiarized articles. The second type of plagiarism is from unpublished materials such as personal diaries, friends work and many others. Students are prone to this type of plagiarism and this is unprofessional.

In addition, in higher education, both lecturers and students make use of the internet to conduct research and other academic writing and this has opened doors to plagiarism in one way or the other. Hence Savage (2004) confirms that plagiarism has always presented problems in the academic forum in higher education institution.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism can simply be explained as academic theft. Plagiarism includes;

1. Clone copying- in this case the writer copies word for word.
2. CTRL-C- significant copies of text are copied from a single source without making any changes.
3. The third type is whereby key words and phrases are changed but keeping the essential content of the source. (turnitin_educator_network/2419-end)
4. Self-plagiarism use of one's own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously. This type of plagiarism falls under copy-right infringements. (US department of Health, 2011).

University of Pittsburg (2008) also explains plagiarism as:

- One copies some text without acknowledging the source
- The writer uses quotation marks and with no citation of source

- Re-ordering the elements of source text without citation
- Copying pieces of text(sentences, key phrases of source, text) without citation)
- Reproducing information that is not common knowledge or self-evident without citation.
- Incorporating an idea heard in a conversation without citation.
- Using your own past materials or another student's material as a new idea without citation.
- Paying for another to contribute to your work without citation.
- Using online translators to translate materials without citation.
- Paying someone else to do your work.

All the above activities contribute to plagiarism and it is the duty of academics of to safeguard plagiarism to promote professionalism in academic writing. Thus plagiarism results in one losing academic or professional standing or job. Plagiarism can be avoided by doing the following;

1. Paraphrasing
2. Cite
3. Quoting
4. Citing Quotes
5. Citing your own material
6. Referencing

(turnitin_educator_network/2419-end)

Paraphrasing means putting someone's text into your own words and then citing the text. It allows the paper to be more readable. Academics can avoid infringement of copyrights by citing

and quoting, referencing materials that have been used in their academic documents. Thus learning how to paraphrase, quote and properly cite and reference materials is critical. It is therefore imperative that we now focus on the aspects of turn-it-in and their role in curbing plagiarism.

Turnitin

Turnitin is anti-plagiarism software which help academics to curtail problems they may encounter in academic writing (<http://go.turnitin.com/seer-ru>;<http://go.turnitin.com/webcast...>) The software consists a number of facets which academics can apply to critique their academic writing. Academics need to understand these facets use of to improve their academic writing.

Turnitin facets include the following:

- Plagiarism checkers
- Write checker
- Grammar checker
- Professional tutoring checker

(<http://enwritecheck.com/feature/tutoring>)

Plagiarism checker

Plagiarism checker provides instant analysis of similar content as well as feedback on grammar, spelling and word usage.

Write checker

Write checker tries to avoid plagiarism by providing guidance on correct grammar usage as well as improving one's writing style and techniques. One's essay is compares to others available on the world's database and matching text are identified. Instant results are provided and original work is preserved.

Grammar checker

Grammar checker provides instant feedback on grammar, spelling and word usage. Written materials are corrected as the results are instantly provided.

Professional tutoring checker

Tutoring checker improves ones confidence in writing. Expert guidance in writing is instantly provided.

To sum up there is instant analysis of similar content, feedback on grammar, punctuation and professional guidance in academic writing as mentioned above and this promotes quality academic writing.

Benefits of turnitin

The author is given the opportunity of criticizing his or her own work. In higher education setting both students and lecturers can avoid plagiarism by using the turn-it-in software. More so the software assists aspiring writers to learn about how to avoid plagiarism. Writers are guided to avoid common mistakes as well as improving their writing style and techniques. The user turnitin policy would go a long way in promoting academic writing. Therefore it is critical that its application be encouraged in the forum of academic writing.

Methodology:

A qualitative approach was adopted for this particular study and under this umbrella, a case study design was found appropriate. The qualitative approach was informed by a particular worlds view, in this case, epistemology (Gray, 2009). This particular world view enabled the researcher to gain knowledge about the views and experiences of the participants in the application of the turnitin software in academic writing. The knowledge gained in this study laid a foundation for improving academic writing in this institution as well as adding to the body of knowledge. Girbich, 2011; Creswell, 2009 and Yin, 2009 posits that the qualitative approach enables the researcher to use multiple methods to collect data. The researcher employed semi-structured

interviews and documentary analysis as data generation tools. The use of multiple tools enabled the researcher to address various facets of the problem from different angles. Using multiple data collection tools is called triangulation (Yin,2009; Thomas 2009).Triangulation enabled the researcher to generate a rich description of the phenomenon understudy leading to the development of some themes discussed later in the study. In addition the use of multiple methods reduced the elements of bias and increased the level of trustworthiness and credibility of results. Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009; and Creswell, 2009 confirm that rigor used in qualitative research, results in thick description of the participants experiences shedding light on the phenomenon.

Sampling and sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select ten participants drawn from a population of lecturers and students based in the faculties in Harare Region. The sample consisted of five lecturers and five students who have been exposed to the use of turnitin through either, the institution, friends or colleagues.

Research instruments

The researcher was the main data collection tool and semi-structured interviews were employed. Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009) concur that interviews are flexible and allow the researcher to probe further on the issue under study. Documentary analysis of the turn-it in reports complemented the interviews. Hence the aspect of triangulation was put into perspective and that promoted validation as once mentioned above.

Data analysis

Flick's(2009) thematic coding was used. Data were coded and categorized and patterns emerged from this exercise resulting in generation of themes. The themes centered on the role of turn -it – in policy, benefits of the turn-it- in policy and effective use of the turn it in policy. These themes provided the basis of analysis that is explained under section of findings presented below.

Findings

Use of turnitin policy

- There seem not to be a clear turnitin policy although academics are using the anti-plagiarism software in their academic writing.
- Some participants revealed that they have been trained to use anti-plagiarism software but its use is not yet fully flagged. Lecturers are using it for their personal academic work especially when they are writing their articles for publications and writing modules
- Students have not yet been trained to use the anti-plagiarism software. This has implications on the quality of their assignments
- The study revealed that lack of knowledge about the use of the turnitin policy had great implications on academic writing.

Benefits of the use of turnitin anti-plagiarism software

- Participants were aware of the benefits of the use of the anti-plagiarism software and needed more information on its application especially when handling students assignments and giving them guidance. Most lecturers have been trained to use the anti-plagiarism software.
- The students who have been exposed to the turnitin software revealed that they are making use of it and find it very useful in checking their work. Hence they have any opportunity to critique their work before submitting it. However they need a lot of guidance in understanding the reports and how to curb the flaws in their pieces of work.
- Lecturers as module writers have found the software very useful since it safeguarded them from infringing copyrights. The turnitin software assists authors in avoiding plagiarism activities.

Recommendations

Below are some of the recommendations which have been proffered:

- There should be a water tight policy that governs academic writing in the university. All academics should be aware of the policy and need to apply it to all academic writing. The

university needs to be safeguarded by this policy as it will promote quality of academic work.

- Faculties should spell out the policy to both lecturers and students. Information about the acceptable percentage of plagiarism would go a long way in producing credible academic publications.
- Both lecturers and Students need to be sensitized and be trained to use the anti-plagiarism software in order to help them produce high quality assignments.
- Academics should be able to interpret the turnitin reports to get the full benefit of using the anti plagiarism software
- There should be full access to the use of the anti-plagiarism software in the institution.
- Students for assignments should be checked for plagiarism on submission. Faculties could have a desk where assignments are checked.
- Both Information Technology department and faculties should take the responsibility of running in-service courses on the use of turnitin software to promote the production of quality academic work

Summary

The study has been instrumental in unraveling the practices in the use of the turnitin software in Zimbabwe Open University. Although some lecturers and students revealed using this anti-plagiarism software, there is need for a crystal clear policy known to all university academic staff and students to promote credible academic writing. More so, the culture of avoiding plagiarism in the academic forum is noble and the use of the anti-plagiarism has a critical role to play in producing quality academic writing. Higher Education institutions have to observe copyright issues as well as professional integrity and Zimbabwe Open University is no exception.

References

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gate as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A.

International Journal of Engineering & Scientific Research

<http://www.ijmra.us>

Creswell. J.W. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry ad research design: Choosing Five Approaches*, (2nd Edition) Thousand Oaks

Creswell, J.W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (3rd Edition) Thousand Oaks

Flick, U. (2009) *An Introduction to qualitative research* (4th edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications

Gray, D.E (2009) *Doing Research in the Real World: 2nd Edition*, London. SAGE Publications

Grbich, C (2011) *Qualitative data and analysis, AN INTRODUCTION*, London, SAGE Publications.

Thomas, G (2009) *How to do your Research Project, A Guide for students in education and applied social sciences*: Los Angeles, SAGE Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2009) *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (4th Edition) London, Sage Publications

<http://go.turnitin.com/seer-ru>

<http://go.turnitin.com> webcast

http://go.turnitin.com/en_us/resco

<http://enwritecheck.com/resources>

<http://www.examiner.com/adult-education-in-pittsburgh/plagiarism-higher-education>

<http://www.frenchanditalian.pitt.edu/undergrad/about/plagiarism.php>

<http://writingcolostate.edu/guides/research/gentrans/pop2fcfm>

turnitin.com/en_us/resources/blog/517-turnitin-educator-network/2419-end-

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/gentrans/pop2fcfm>

Judith Tafangombe (Mrs)



Judith Tafangombe is a manager in the Materials Development Unit of the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). She joined in 2000 as a part-time tutor under the Department of Social Sciences. She then became a full time employee of ZOU in 2006 as a course designer- Disability Studies. In 2009 she was promoted to Manager – Material Development Unit, a post she currently holds. Her current position involves the development and production of learning materials for ZOU students.

