PLAGIARISM SYNDROME – TOWARDS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

T. Hungwe
Department of Computer Science, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
(SOUTH AFRICA)

Abstract

Plagiarism is a major problem for innovation, especially in academic writing. It is considered a form of stealing work developed by innovators when impostors pretend to be innovators. This raises a number of questions. Is it stealing? Stealing what? Yes, taking someone’s academic writing and ideas and pretending that you are the originator of it is stealing ideas. This paper presents a critical analysis of the use of Turnitin software in assisting in the detection of plagiarism. Turnitin, a proprietary Internet-based plagiarism detection system, is one of the tools designed to ease plagiarism detection. It provides a fast way of electronically checking documents and encourages correct citation of other literature sources. Often academics focus on the similarity index without holistically analysing the contents on the Turnitin report. A number of questions require interrogation regarding what is acceptable and not, self-plagiarism, the similarity indices which maybe applicable to levels of studies such as undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. The paper also seeks to instill a common understanding of the use of plagiarism software and finding benchmarks, which can be used to assist the SMU academic community. It also discusses the limitations/weaknesses of Turnitin.

Keywords: Turnitin, plagiarism, plagiarism software, contract cheating, copyright, databases/repositories.

1 INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism problem may be viewed as a disorder in research as it stifles expansion of knowledge by repeating what is known and lying to have found new ideas. It is an unlawful seizure, stealing, then publishing someone else’s words, opinions, ideas, or expressions, and then depicting them as if they are one’s own innovative work (O’Connor, 2015). Because of this notion, plagiarism may be regarded as academic untruthfulness and an immoral conduct in education. Due to the extent to which plagiarism is considered an offence, it is subject to sanctions such as punishments, suspension, and even academic exclusion or expulsion from an educational institution. The main reason that led to the discovery of tools for detecting plagiarism was that there were huge losses and wastages in research due to it. Thus, there were cases of extreme plagiarism that had been identified. Some of the funding is wasted on work that is repeated by others when it was intended to be groundbreaking. A waste of time is also involved when these repetitions of work occur. In some cases, it causes embarrassment to institutions that are already counting research output.

Apart from plagiarism being such an evil, it can also constitute violation of copyright (Newton & Lang, 2016). However, plagiarism and copyright are not the same, but do overlap. Plagiarism is neither defined nor punished by law or adjudicated by courts. It is punished within institutions and publishing companies, among others. Copyright offence, on the other hand, is a legal issue that is administered using the copyright law. Industry and academia regard plagiarism as a severe ethical breach. It is therefore prudent that awareness about plagiarism is extended to student and academia at the same extent.

2 AIM OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to establish a common understanding that researchers may be having regarding the implication of information repetition, plagiarism and use of plagiarism detection software in the information presented as original. It also gauges the interpretations of researchers’ use of plagiarism detection tools and software.
3 LEGAL OUTLOOK ON PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism in some contexts is considered theft or stealing, but cannot be addressed generally through the courts as a criminal offense. The concept does not exist in a legal sense, but using of someone else’s work in order to gain academic credit without acknowledging this fact may meet some legal definitions of fraud (Patrzek, Sattler, van Veen, Grunschel & Fries, 2014). Plagiarism itself is not even mentioned in any statute. However, Clarke (2006) insinuates that the increased disposal of copyrighted material as a result of the development of information technology has expanded the debate as to whether copyright offences are criminal. Concisely, writers are urged to acknowledge the authors from which they use the material and not claim it as their own.

Plagiarism and copyright flouting are not identical concepts (Sattler, Graeff & Willen, 2013). The dishonest claims of authorship constitute plagiarism irrespective of whether or not such material is protected by copyright. Copyright violation is a breach of the rights of a holder of the copyright. Copyright requires that the material may be used only when permission from the copyright holder has been granted, which often occurs when the copyright holder is satisfied with the way the material requested is going to be used. Plagiarism, in the contrary, entails the undeserved growth and the gaining of academic credit that is achieved using a false claim of authorship.

Moreover, plagiarism is regarded as a moral offense against anyone who promotes the plagiarist work, such as those who give the plagiarist credit for work that is not original content, such as the plagiarist’s publisher, employer, or teacher (Sattler, Wiegel & Van Veen, 2017).

4 PLAGIARISM IN OTHER CONTEXTS

In academia, plagiarism is an academic crime, and may in some instances such as a doctoral study, it may (and should be) be regarded as unforgivable. According to Colella-Sandercock and Alahmadi (2015), among other authors, in academia, plagiarism by students, researchers, and higher education (HE) management is regarded as a serious academic corruption and academic offense amounting to academic fraud. As a result, offenders are subject to academic condemnation that may go up to even expulsion. Many academic institutions are using a software for detecting plagiarism to expose possible plagiarism and also to discourage students from plagiarising. They also address the issue of academic integrity by giving students in-depth orientations, required writing courses, and evidently expressed honour codes. Leung and Cheng (2017) enlighten that there is a generally uniform understanding among HE students and academics that plagiarism is immoral. Despite these, each year many students appear before their institutions’ disciplinary boards on plagiarism charges in which they have misused sources in their academic work.

Plagiarism is rife in academia to a point where it is even considered by some as an issue exclusive to academia or HE, though it extends beyond education. It is fundamentally not limited to academic settings (Roig, 2005). Politicians tend to plagiarise when making speeches or analyses. Journalists also commit this offense. This is an area where in the case of developing countries, plagiarism will not be able to be criminalized because perpetrators are dictators often with power over the law, such as in the case of state presidents in Africa. In journalism, for example, plagiarism is considered a breach of journalistic code of ethics. Reporters are often caught plagiarising and when caught, they classically face disciplinary measures that may range from suspension to even employment termination.

5 CONTRACT CHEATING

There is a new form of plagiarism which has surfaced, in which some immoral knowledgeable people are hired to produce academic thesis and dissertations for them. This is an extreme form of plagiarism known as contract cheating (Lipson, 2003), which basically involves a student paying someone else to do his/her research work for them.

6 COMMON FORMS OF PLAGIARISM

There are several forms of plagiarism, which are not exhaustive (Roig, 2005). One is to include submission of someone else’s work as if it is their own. The taking of a passage(s) from one’s own previous work without providing citations is another form. Then there is rewriting of someone else’s work without properly citing sources. The use of quotations without citing the source is also plagiarism. Some plagiarism entails intertwining various sources together in the work without citing. When citing some but
not all passages that should be cited is another form of plagiarism. Some plagiarists combine cited and uncited sections of the piece. The providing of proper citations but failing to change the structure is plagiarism as wording of the borrowed ideas is not enough. The inaccurate citing of the source is viewed also as plagiarism. Another plagiarism is to rely heavily on other researchers’ work and failing to demonstrate original thought into the text.

7 PENALTIES FOR PLAGIARISM
In academia, student plagiarism is regarded as a severe punishable offense that can result in failing an assignment, the entire course, or even expulsion from the institution. Mostly, the punishment increases as a person moves into HE. The seriousness with which HE institutions address student plagiarism may be affected by a recognition that students do not fully understand what plagiarism is. On repeated and severe plagiarism cases, expulsion or suspension may be imposed.

8 PLAGIARISM DETECTION
In order to impose plagiarism sanctions to offenders, plagiarism needs to be detected first (Clarke, 2006). Strategies that are used to detect plagiarism include prudently reading students work and noting inconsistencies in student’s written work, and detecting errors in citation.

9 METHOD
This paper benefits from literature review on the concept of plagiarism, and the cases involved entailing issues of plagiarism. A literature search is conducted to provide the way relevant people understand the plagiarism concept. In addition, examples of plagiarism are presented in the study where plagiarism illustrations are made. This paper will be followed by a second phase of a quantitative study on the interpretations of plagiarism detecting software by researchers.

10 STUDY
Research is expected to break new ground. Investments are made in order to find ways of solving new problems and in finding new ways of addressing old problems. Any research accomplished in the past already has a contribution. Therefore, any repetition of work, whether in the original or in new form, is a waste of time and money.

However, there are scenarios of academic dishonesty, which go undictated. There are instances where students hire other people to do research and submit the work as their own (contract cheating). The software cannot track and identify such cases.

11 DISCUSSION
Even though the developed world understands the concept and impact of plagiarism, it seems that the developing world has a limited understanding. The impact of waste due to plagiarism seems to be not appreciated, and this results in continued or perpetuated incidents of plagiarism. Selfishness seems to be one of the causes as well. The case of contact cheating shows deliberate cases of fraud by both the ‘buyer’ and the ‘seller’. The buyer is supposed to undertake research work and decides to ‘cut is short’ by soliciting full help. The basic error is on lying that the work is their which is done in the declaration, which is a form of oath. Then the seller knows that they should not be doing any research for another person and sell full copyright knowing fully that they transfer ownership. The former would have not gained from the education that the study should have provided. Therefore, the recipient would have failed to be equipped with the skills that were supposed to be imparted on them.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS
In HE, students and academics should be provided with plagiarism education in which the concept is explained and trained on the plagiarism prevention techniques. A similar training should be given in other trades, such as journalism. In addition, academics should use detection methods such as text-matching software.
REFERENCES


