

Research Ethics and anti-plagiarism software.

A study on *turnitin* users of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU)

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Abstract:

After the influence of digitization of reading materials and web usage plagiarism became a destructive academic phenomenon. It is a serious negative effect on intellectual capital and a threat to genuine academic work. As a solution, anti-plagiarism software such as turnitin and SafeAssign have been introduced. KDU has subscribed to turnitin anti-plagiarism software. However, the users' involvement in using this software is limited

This study aims to measure the amount of usage of the software by KDU academic staff through a survey in order to propose measures to enhance its usage to improve the quality of research and knowledge of research ethics by both academics and students of KDU. Random sampling method and survey strategy was used by issuing structured questionnaires among 120 staff members, and 70.8% had responded from all level of academic staff. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the data. Among the respondents 86% are aware that an anti-plagiarism software is available and out of that 32% of the staff got user names and passwords from the library. Even though the library has organized a few training sessions, the research identified that the majority of the users' ability to use it is inadequate. Therefore, it is suggested that a proper training programme is to be given to all those who need training through the Staff Development Centre (SDC) of the university, which will eventually enhance the overall quality of research in the university.

Keywords: *Ethics in research, plagiarism, turnitin, anti-plagiarism software, academic integrity.*

Introduction:

Rules are imposed in all fields or sectors or actions to avoid destructive effects and to secure others from the effects. Violating rules means that it does contain the nature of destructive effect on others. In order to avoid such effects, rules and regulations are drawn and implemented. Copying at examinations violates examination rules. Copying one's work or stating one's words without quoting and pretending as his/her work is not only violating rules of research but also it is against research ethics and academic integrity. Further, it is an offence against intellectual property rights. The academic honesty does not prevail in the academic domain nowadays. Academics should have academic honesty. What is academic honesty? Charles Lipson (2003) stated that when you say you did the work yourself, you actually did it; when you rely on someone else's work, you cite. When you use their words, you quote them openly and accurately, and you cite them, too; and when you present research materials, you present them fairly and truthfully. That's true whether the research involves data, documents, or the writings of other scholars. If anyone violates these bedrock principles, that means he does not follow academic honesty. In this connection if someone shows one's work or word as his own, he has no academic honesty and he/she is guilty of plagiarism. Due to technological advancement, people attempt to copy and paste others' work and ideas and pretend that they are their own works. Therefore, there should be a tool to detect plagiarism. Ultimately we have received the benefit of having anti-plagiarism software like turnitin and SafeAssign. Turnitin is popular all over the world. Turnitin claims to be currently 'detering plagiarism for nearly five million students and educators worldwide'. Recently, over 400 universities in North America have purchased access to the plagiarism-deterring features of the Turnitin software (*Bulletin*, November 2003) (Jenson:314). In Sri Lanka, ten universities including General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University have subscribed for turnitin.

Methodology:

This study focuses to measure the numbers of users and the nature of usage, and in this research the objective quantitative methodology is selected, and the survey method in quantitative methodology is used. Structured questionnaires with close-ended questions were issued to 120 staff members. 96 staff members have responded. Random sample method is used among lecturers. The data were entered into Microsoft Excel and based on the analysis of the data the research attempt was made to forward their recommendations.

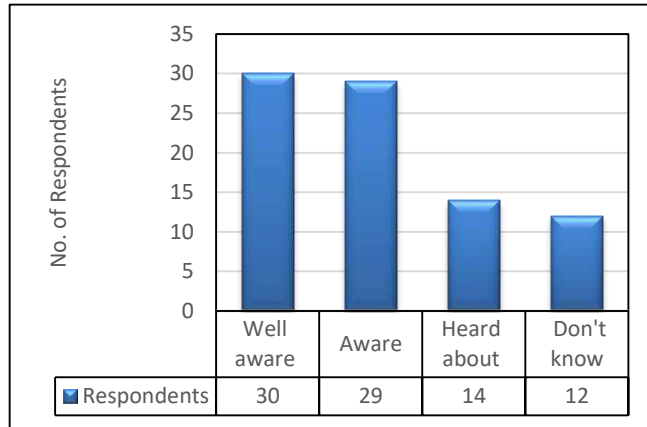


Figure: 1 - Awareness of the software availability

Data Analysis: KDU recruits new academic staff members day by day as it is a fast-growing university. Therefore, the researchers intended to check the awareness of the availability of anti-plagiarism software. As per the figure 1, 86 % users were aware that turnitin was available at the Library.

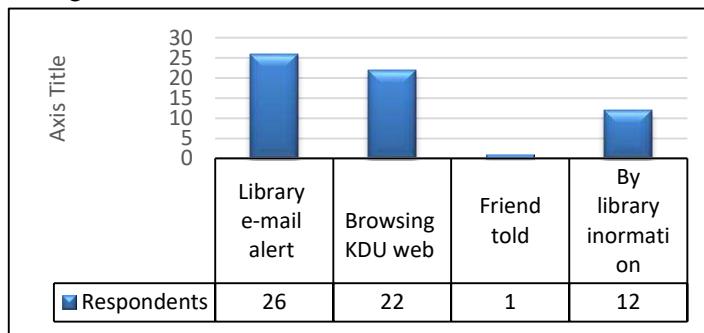


Figure: 2 - Source of Information

As shown in figure 2, 99 % of the staff members were notified by the KDU library network via alert, web information and notices about the *turnitin* anti-plagiarism software which was subscribed by the Library.

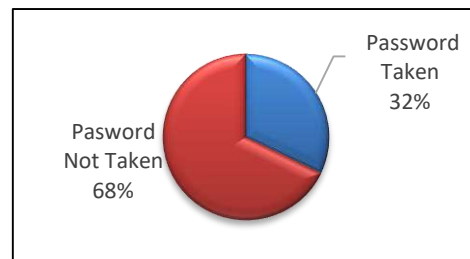


Figure: 3 - Usage of *turnitin*

Even though the library the username and password when anybody requests via e-mail only 32% have got their password due to their inadequate knowledge of handling it. At the same time it is identified that some academics were not interested in it. Going through the Administrator’s statistics, it is identified that there are users not using the turnitin after getting the username and password from the library.

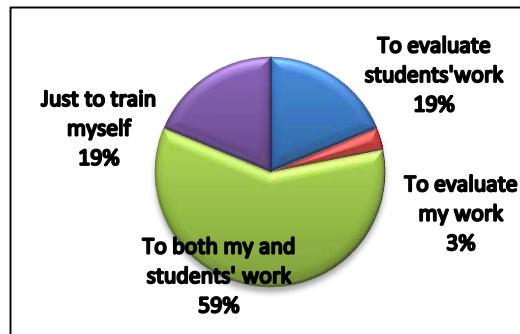


Figure: 4 –Purpose of *turnitin* Usage

To fulfill the knowledge gap, the library organized several sessions of training programmes on *turnitin* for its users. Therefore, researchers verified the purpose of users attending those sessions. As per the findings, 19% have answered they went through the session just to train themselves. Only 3% of those who responded held the view that they use it to measure only their work. A large majority of 78% uses turnitin for evaluating their works and students’ as well. As per the data collected 71% of respondents participated in the turnitin training provided by the Library. Remaining 24% did not participate as they do not have time to attend due to other official

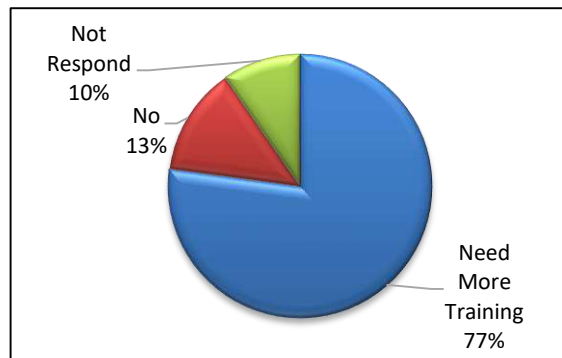


Figure: 5 –Requirement for *turnitin* Training Programme

commitments. A question was posed to know whether they need more training. The figure 5 shows that only 13% had responded negatively as they have adequate knowledge on handling the software. 77% of respondents replied that they need more training and 10% did not answer the question.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

This study shows that all the respondents are aware of the problem of plagiarism and they are aware of the availability of a plagiarism detection software in the library to measure whether the research work is plagiarized. However, it was found that all academic staff members do not use the software available at KDU Library. They acknowledge the importance of having this software to detect plagiarism in research to promote academic integrity, but the usage is less due to various reasons.

The research identified some reasons for not following research ethics. Some academics are not used to

this current research trend even though they know it, and few numbers of staff do not have computer application skills. Further, some staff members do not want to spend time on checking documents for plagiarism as it consumes much time. Some staff did not attend the workshops and seminars conducted by the library and they do not have the required skills to handle the software. More importantly, some staff are confident on their knowledge scope and they think that they can check plagiarism manually even though they understand the difficulty in technologically advancing society.

We found that the awareness on plagiarism must be given not only to the staff members but also to research students in undergraduate and post graduate levels. They do not know the seriousness of plagiarism and the consequences of violating the intellectual property rights. On the basis of these findings it is proposed that awareness programmes on research ethics should be conducted as academic honesty and integrity are important in research ethics. This could be done by the library through SDC.

Referee reports and supervisors' recommendations are essential for confirming the quality of research works. It is recommended that one column should be allocated in the *report* to mention the percentage of plagiarism in research work which could be done by the librarian. As a university, a policy decision must be taken to check all student project reports, articles, theses and dissertations for plagiarism and acceptable limits must be fixed perhaps faculty wise. For instance, if the amount of plagiarized instances is more than the limit approved by the university, the work should be sent back to the researcher in order to minimize plagiarism. If this is implemented the staff and research students will definitely be compelled to use anti-plagiarism software and that will help the university to maintain higher academic integrity.

Researchers, both lecturers and students have to be trained to use the anti-plagiarism software as a tool for genuine writing. If the researchers have the knowledge of using turnitin to detect plagiarism, they can check plagiarism in every step of research documentation. Hence, it will develop integrity in research and honesty in academic endeavour. Researchers recommended to reserve one or two computers for the students within the library to check the originality of their work by themselves.

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