

USE OF ANTI-PLAGIARISM SOFTWARE BY MASTER STUDENTS OF THREE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Plagiarism poses a major challenge in higher education, threatening academic integrity and research quality. Anti-plagiarism software (APS) offers automated detection of textual similarities, supporting originality and ethical scholarship. This study assessed the types, purposes, and frequency of APS use by master's students in three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design. From a population of 498 master's students at Bowen, Redeemer's, and Fountain Universities, a sample of 298 was selected using 60% sampling fraction. Data were collected with a validated questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = .780-.921) and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, SD) via SPSS. Findings revealed that Grammarly and Turnitin were the most frequently used software, while PlagScan, iThenticate, and Copy Leak were rarely utilised. The major purposes for APS use included avoiding plagiarism, refining writing skills, meeting institutional submission requirements, and ensuring originality for journal publication. Frequency analysis indicated that most students used APS on a quarterly basis, with limited engagement in daily or weekly use. APS is vital in fostering originality and academic integrity among master's students. However, low awareness and limited adoption persist. The study recommends institutional workshops and continuous lecturer encouragement to improve APS usage and maximise its benefits.

Keywords: Plagiarism, anti-plagiarism software, private universities, masters students.

Introduction

Universities, whether public or private, provide higher education and research opportunities, including postgraduate programs such as master's and doctoral studies. Master's research emphasizes originality, but the vast body of literature often exposes students to the risk of plagiarism, defined as using others' work without proper credit. Plagiarism undermines academic integrity and has increased with internet access and ICT (Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013; Gow, 2013). Factors such as information availability, academic pressure, and tight deadlines contribute to its prevalence. To address this, anti-plagiarism software (APS) has been developed as automated tools to detect textual similarities by comparing documents with vast databases (Awasthi & Tripathi, 2021).

Widely adopted globally, APS includes tools like Turnitin, Grammarly, Copyscape, Quetext, Plagscan, Viper, and others. These programs use algorithms, fingerprinting, and machine learning to detect potential plagiarism. APS not only identifies plagiarism but also serves educational purposes. It helps students learn proper citation, enhances research skills, and deters misconduct when students know their work will be checked (Pappas, 2014). However, studies show low usage in Nigerian universities. Ajikumari & Suresh Kumar (2020) found most master's students in Kerala had never used APS, while Opara & Ezeonye (2021) reported poor adoption among master's and Ph.D. students in Port Harcourt despite awareness. This gap underscores the need to strengthen APS use in postgraduate education.

Statement of the Problem

Anti-plagiarism software helps educators, researchers, and master students maintain originality in their work. It checks for similarities with existing sources, identifies

any instances of plagiarism, ensuring that the content is unique, and upholds academic integrity. Sometimes, individuals may inadvertently use someone else's work without proper citation or acknowledgment. Anti-plagiarism software can identify such unintentional plagiarism, allowing users to rectify the oversight and give credit where it is due. Through the use of anti-plagiarism software detailed reports highlighting the similarities found in the text is been provided. This feedback can serve as a valuable learning tool for master students, helping them understand proper citation and referencing practices.

Despite the advantages of using anti-plagiarism software by master students, finding of studies have showed that the use of anti-plagiarism software is low, it is based on this that this study will empirically examine use of anti-plagiarism software by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following research questions derived from the specific objectives:

1. What are the types of anti-plagiarism software used by Masters students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?
2. What is the purpose of use of anti-plagiarism software by Masters students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?
3. What is the frequency of use of anti-plagiarism software by Masters students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Relevance of Anti-Plagiarism Software in Tertiary Education

Anti-plagiarism software is designed to detect identical or similar written material online or in databases, automating what would otherwise be a labor-intensive manual task. Such tools use methods like string matching, bag of words, citation analysis, and database comparisons to quickly identify plagiarism and support academic integrity (Adamu & Dan- Iya, 2020; Youmans, 2014). Turnitin, developed in 1997 by UC Berkeley and Iparadigms LLC, is the most widely used tool, adopted by over 10,000 institutions in 126 countries. It compares submitted work against vast databases of online sources, academic publications, and institutional archives, generating similarity reports and enabling constructive feedback through its Feedback Studio. Beyond plagiarism detection, Turnitin also promotes originality and provides grading and assessment features such as Examsoft and Gradescope (Marsh, 2019; Caren, 2021; Srinivas & Bharathi, 2023).

Other notable tools include PlagTracker, Plagium, Quetext, PlagScan, Viper, DupliChecker, CopyLeaks, and Check for Plagiarism, each varying in accessibility, algorithms, and database scope. Some, like PlagScan and CopyLeaks, serve both academic and business needs, while others like Viper and DupliChecker provide free basic services. These tools employ methods such as fingerprinting, URL-based searches, deep scanning, and multilingual support (Baweja, 2012; Webxen, 2018; Plagiarism-checker, 2019). While AI-driven tools like QuillBot also help paraphrase and reduce plagiarism, they raise concerns about misuse. Research shows that although software effectively detects textual

plagiarism, it struggles with idea theft, collusion, and programming code plagiarism (Kaner & Fiedler, 2008a; Cosma & Joy, 2012). Educators emphasize combining software with awareness campaigns and teaching citation practices to reduce plagiarism and promote independent student work (Harris, 2012). Overall, anti-plagiarism software has become a critical tool in higher education worldwide, balancing detection with educational strategies to preserve academic integrity.

Use of Anti-Plagiarism Software by Master Students

Master's students use anti-plagiarism software (APS) to ensure originality, avoid accusations of misconduct, and improve the quality of their research. APS is valued for its speed, reliability, and role in both detection and prevention of plagiarism (Marjanović et al., 2015). Tools fall into two categories: commercial (e.g., Turnitin, iThenticate, Docoloc) and free (e.g., WCopyfind, DocCop, JPlag). Studies across regions highlight diverse adoption. At Gauhati University, Urkund proved beneficial to 85% of research scholars, though other institutions in Northeast India lag behind (Pathak & Malakar, 2016). In Malaysia, scholars, faculty, and students reported positive perceptions, citing APS as helpful for ensuring originality and learning proper citation (Awasthi, Zain & Kanaujia Sukula, 2022). In contrast, many Tamil Nadu colleges lacked APS due to high costs and perceptions of limited necessity, with 70.9% not subscribing (Subaveerapandiyan & Sakthivel, 2022).

Turnitin remains the most studied tool. Research shows it can effectively reduce plagiarism when integrated into coursework, though it has vulnerabilities (Halgamuge, 2017). Surveys in Karnataka (Kumar & Chikkamanju, 2019) found students use APS to reduce similarity scores, meet submission requirements, identify sources, and enhance

research quality. Similar findings were reported in Malaysia, where over 95% of respondents had used Turnitin (Awasthi et al., 2022). In Ghana, Turnitin use alongside library-led seminars improved students' awareness of plagiarism and academic integrity (Alua, Asiedu & Bumbie-Chi, 2023). APS plays a crucial role in promoting originality, improving research practices, and fostering academic integrity, though challenges such as cost, uneven adoption, and software limitations persist.

Uses And Gratification Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), introduced by Elihu Katz in 1970, explains how individuals actively use media and resources to satisfy psychological and social needs, paralleling Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Applied to this study, UGT captures why master's students use anti-plagiarism software. Such tools meet their needs for reliable information, academic originality, ethical research identity, and integration into scholarly communities. UGT suggests that students adopt the software if they perceive it as fulfilling information-seeking, anxiety-reducing, and social-ethical expectations. Conversely, students uninterested in originality may not use it, as they see no gratification in doing so. Thus, UGT provides a lens to understand the motivations behind master's students' use of anti-plagiarism software.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, collecting data from master's students through a questionnaire, a common method in social and behavioral sciences. The population comprised 498 master's students from three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria: Bowen University (62), Redeemer's University (404), and Fountain University (32),

as obtained from their admissions records (2023). Using single-stage sampling with a 60% fraction, the sample size was set at 298 students: Bowen (37), Redeemer’s (242), and Fountain (19).

Data were collected using a questionnaire titled *“Use of Anti-Plagiarism Software by Master Students of Three Private Universities in Osun State, Nigeria (UAS)”*. It comprised two sections: Section A (demographics) and Section B (40 items on types, purposes, and frequency of APS use). Responses were measured on 4-point Likert scales. Reliability was confirmed through a pretest with 30 master’s students at the University of Ibadan, yielding Cronbach’s alpha values of .780 (types), .806 (purposes), and .921 (frequency). Also, the questionnaires were administered and retrieved by the researcher across the three universities within two weeks. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, SD) were used to answer the research questions, with analysis conducted in SPSS.

Results And Discussion

Research question one: What are the types of anti-plagiarism software use by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?

The types of anti-plagiarism software used by the master students (master degree) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3; Types of anti-plagiarism software use by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria

S/N	Types of anti-plagiarism software	VHU		HU		MU		RU		Mean SD
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	

1	Turnitin	54	22.2	73	30.0	80	32.9	36	14.8	2.60	.993
2	Grammarly	69	28.4	44	18.1	109	44.9	21	8.6	2.66	.984
3	Plag Tracker	35	14.4	19	7.8	57	23.5	132	54.3	1.82	1.082
4	Quillbot	42	17.3	60	24.7	78	32.1	63	25.9	2.33	1.044
5	Quetext	29	11.9	43	17.7	50	20.6	121	49.8	1.92	1.072
6	Copyscape	20	8.2	31	12.8	62	25.5	130	53.5	1.76	.968
7	PlagScan	11	4.5	23	9.5	69	28.4	140	59.6	1.61	.838
8	iThenticate	9	3.7	30	12.3	66	27.2	138	56.8	1.63	.840
9	Viper	35	14.4	14	5.8	64	26.3	130	53.5	1.81	1.067
10	Dupli Checker	3	1.2	53	21.8	98	40.3	89	36.6	1.88	.788
11	Plagiarism Checker X	23	9.5	39	16.0	87	35.8	94	38.7	1.96	.964
12	Plagium	16	6.6	23	9.5	85	35.0	119	49.0	1.74	.884
13	Copy Leak	10	4.1	38	15.6	54	22.2	141	58.0	1.66	.888
14	PaperRater	7	2.9	31	12.8	92	37.9	113	46.5	1.63	.831

Key: Very Highly Used (VHU), Highly Used (HU), Moderately Used (MU), Not Used (NU)

Findings revealed that the most used anti-plagiarism software by majority of the respondents were Grammarly ($\bar{x}=2.66$) and Turnitin ($\bar{x}=2.60$). On the other hand, the least used were; PlagScan ($\bar{x}=1.61$), iThenticate ($\bar{x}=1.63$), PaperRater ($\bar{x}=1.63$), Copy Leak ($\bar{x}=1.66$) and Plagium ($\bar{x}=1.74$).

This shows that the most used anti-plagiarism software by majority of the respondents were Grammarly and Turnitin. On the other hand, the least used were; PlagScan, iThenticate, PaperRater, Copy Leak and Plagium. This reveals that the master degree students recognise Grammarly and Turnitin as useful tools that can enhance their learning

and research activities. It could be that for the others that were not used, the respondents might not have heard about them before. The software used seems to be those that the students were well familiar with. Within the universities in Nigeria, Turnitin seems to be very popular among master students as its use is mandated in some universities.

The result of this study concurs with that of Halgamuge (2017) who conducted a study on the use and analysis of anti-plagiarism software and Turnitin was singled out for assessment. Results showed that Turnitin was highly used due to its role in enhancing academic skills and promoting improved student learning outcomes. In addition, the findings of this study agree with that of Awasthi, Mohd, Muhamad and Kanaujia (2022) who conducted a study to understand usage of anti-plagiarism software in Malaysia and they reported that almost all their respondents claimed that at a point in time, they made use of Turnitin anti-plagiarism software.

Research question two: What is the purpose of use of anti-plagiarism software by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?

Table 4 presents the results on the purpose of use of anti-plagiarism software by the respondents.

Table 4; Purpose of use of anti-plagiarism software by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria

S/N	Purpose of use of anti-plagiarism software	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
	I use anti-plagiarism software	F %	F %	F %	F %		
1	to refine my writing skills.	132 54.3	87 36.8	16 6.6	8 3.3	3.41	.757

2	to paraphrase effectively	97	39.9	124	51.0	18	7.4	4	1.6	3.29	.675
3	to meet up with submission deadlines	96	39.5	109	44.9	26	10.7	12	4.9	3.19	.816
4	to check the originality index of my papers so that they can be accepted for publication by reputable journals.	115	47.3	95	39.1	33	13.6	-	-	3.34	.705
5	to avoid committing plagiarism.	152	62.6	80	32.9	10	4.1	1	0.4	3.58	.594
6	to check my theses/dissertations so that they can be accepted for submission by my school.	135	55.6	100	41.2	8	3.3	-	-	3.52	.563
7	to conform with research ethics.	106	43.6	111	46.7	22	9.1	4	1.6	3.31	.705
8	to meet the standard of my supervisor.	109	44.9	105	43.2	25	10.3	4	1.6	3.31	.722
9	to learn with the intent of teaching others how to use it.	96	39.5	81	33.3	46	18.9	20	8.2	3.04	.957
10	to help people check their works for a fee.	73	30.0	54	22.2	80	32.9	36	14.8	2.67	1.059

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

Results showed that the most prominent reasons why a high number of the respondents used the anti-plagiarism software were; to avoid committing plagiarism (\bar{x} =3.58), to check their theses/dissertations so that they can be accepted for submission by their school (\bar{x} =3.52), to refine their writing skills (\bar{x} =3.41) and to check the originality index of their papers so that they can be accepted for publication by reputable academic journals (\bar{x} =3.34).

This implies that the prominent reasons why a high number of the respondents used the anti-plagiarism software were; to avoid committing plagiarism, to check their theses/dissertations so that they can be accepted for submission by their school, to refine

their writing skills and to check the originality index of their papers so that they can be accepted for publication by reputable academic journals. This reveals that the anti-plagiarism software help in promoting originality and integrity in scholarly writings. For some universities in Nigeria, the master students need to submit their research works on the software and also pass the originality test that the universities already set before they can be considered qualified.

This result corroborates that of Kumar and Chikkamanju (2019) who investigated awareness and use of anti-plagiarism software by research scholars of UAS, Bangalore and UAS, Dharwad in Karnataka. They reported that most of the research scholars used plagiarism software to reduce the percentage of similar content, to overcome plagiarism, to improve the quality of research papers, to know the original source and authors, and to identify new areas of research. Similarly, the result of this study supports that of Awasthi, Zain, and Kanaujia Sukula (2022) who studied the usage and perceptions of Anti-Plagiarism software (APS) among the Malaysian academic community, including faculty, research scholars, and students. The findings indicated that the majority of respondents used it because of the positive role of APS in ensuring originality in academic work and acting as a deterrent against plagiarism. Moreover, it revealed that anti-plagiarism software could aid students in learning proper citation practices and prevent academic misconduct.

Research question three: What is the frequency of use of anti-plagiarism software by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria?

Table 5 presents the results of the frequency of use of anti-plagiarism software by the master (master degree) students.

Table 5 Frequency of use of anti-plagiarism software by master students of three private universities in Osun State, Nigeria

S/N	Anti-plagiarism software	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Quarterly		Never		Mean	SD
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Turnitin	38	15.6	27	11.1	26	10.7	95	39.1	57	23.5	2.56	1.372
2	Grammarly	51	21.0	39	16.0	19	7.8	82	33.7	52	21.4	2.81	1.472
3	Plag Tracker	9	3.7	39	16.0	33	13.6	51	21.0	111	45.7	2.11	1.250
4	Quillbot	35	14.4	31	12.8	8	3.3	75	30.9	94	38.7	2.33	1.425
5	Quetext	25	10.3	33	13.6	41	16.9	31	12.8	113	46.5	2.28	1.425
6	Copyscape	16	6.6	23	9.5	32	13.2	57	23.5	115	47.3	2.05	1.257
7	PlagScan	13	5.3	24	9.9	26	10.7	34	14.0	146	60.1	1.86	1.254
8	iThenticate	17	7.0	13	5.3	22	9.1	39	16.0	152	62.6	1.78	1.232
9	Viper	8	3.3	22	9.1	26	10.7	58	23.9	129	53.1	1.80	1.132
10	Dupli Checker	22	9.1	24	9.9	21	8.6	44	18.1	132	54.3	2.01	1.359
11	Plagiarism Checker X	11	4.5	15	6.2	38	15.6	65	26.7	114	46.9	1.95	1.132
12	Plagium	23	9.5	15	6.2	20	8.2	62	25.5	123	50.6	1.98	1.302
13	Copy Leak	15	6.2	15	6.2	27	11.3	56	23.0	130	53.5	1.88	1.201
14	PaperRater	17	7.0	19	7.8	23	10.3	52	21.4	130	53.5	1.93	1.258

Results from Table 4.5 showed that a significant number of the respondents 95 (39.1%) and 82 (33.7%) used Turnitin and Grammarly on a quarterly basis respectively. While more than half of the master students 152 (62.6%) and 146 (60.1%) never used iThenticate and PlagScan. In addition, most of the respondents 132 (54.3%), 130 (53.5%) and 130 (53.5%) also indicated that they never used Dupli Checker, Copy Leak and Paper Rater respectively.

This implies that a significant number of the respondents used Turnitin and Grammarly on a quarterly basis respectively. While more than half of the master students and never used iThenticate and PlagScan. This result seems to align with the purpose for which the software is used. Scholarly papers are not prepared on a daily or weekly basis and as such the students will make use of the software when occasions call for it. However, based on this result, it can be deduced that the anti-plagiarism software are not used often. This finding concurs with that of Subaveerapandiyan and Sakthivel (2022) which focused on the obstacles in plagiarism software subscribing by colleges in Tamil Nadu. The researchers found out that the anti-plagiarism were not used that often. In fact, well over three-fifth of the respondents did not even subscribe to use them. Further findings from this study revealed that some thought it was expensive to use the software, while others felt that it was unnecessary to subscribe.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. In order to ensure that the master students use other anti-plagiarism software other than Grammarly and Turnitin, the Master College in these universities could organise a workshop that will expose these students to the various types of anti-plagiarism software

and how they can be used. This will improve the knowledge of the students in this regard and also enhance their abilities to use the anti-plagiarism software.

2. The use of the anti-plagiarism software can also be improved if lecturers constantly encourage the master students to use this software to even test the originality of assignments that are given to them and not just for their master degree dissertations. The frequency of assignments will promote the use of the anti-plagiarism software.
3. Universities should provide institutional licenses for software, Subscription costs of software like Turnitin or Grammarly can be a barrier for students. Universities should provide institution-wide access so all master's students can freely use the tools without personal cost. It ensures equity among students, encourages frequent usage, and allows the institution to monitor usage trends for improvement.
4. Use of anti-Plagiarism Software should be integrated into the coursework of students, instead of only checking final thesis submissions, academic programs should require students to use anti-plagiarism software for draft submissions and assignments. This allows students to self-monitor originality and correct errors before the final submission. It also encourages habitual use of the software, reduces last-minute stress, and promotes a culture of academic honesty.

Conclusion

Plagiarism is considered a menace in the academic community as the use the technology, especially artificial intelligence tools, has made it quite easy to copy and paste without due acknowledgement. However, the use of another technology, anti-plagiarism software, has the potential of reducing incidences of plagiarism, especially among master students in universities. This is because, if these students know that they will be

sanctioned if their works do not pass the originality test, they will ensure that employ paraphrasing and due referencing. Thus, it is important for the master students to use this software so that they will become familiar with how it works and also for them to properly work on their research output before passing through the institutional plagiarism test with the use of the anti-plagiarism software that is deployed.

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