Academic Policing via Top-Down Implementation of Turnitin in Pakistan: Students' Perspective and Way Forward

By Adnan Rashid and Athar Rashid

Abstract

The implementation of Turnitin in Pakistani academia has a top-down pattern, i.e. starting from Ph.D. and M.Phil. thesis writing to the lower level of college education. To a Pakistani student, it seems justifiably unfair to be 'judged' on an Originality report, at the usual culmination of her/his academic life.

This paper attempts to probe the challenges and dynamics faced by Pakistani students and to investigate their coping strategies. In order to find out the best possible methods of educating students into academic integrity and conventions of writing, this paper scrutinizes the top-down pattern of tackling plagiarism and its implications.

Considering student's background, this paper explores best possibilities of using Turnitin as an invitation to students into realms of academic ethics and integrity. The paper also suggests inculcation of educational technologies, such as blogs, instructional videos, webinars etc. in order to ensure wider student participation, higher motivation and individual effective learning. The plan is to reinforce and justify use of Turnitin and establishment of a live interactive digital space, wherein students can get their questions, queries, comments and suggestions attended and responded to in a timely fashion. The paper also highlights the current practices of Turnitin (mis)use in a Pakistan, and suggests newer ways of ensuring its proper utilization to facilitate the training of individuals into a tradition of effective and standard writing.

Background

Turnitin product is designed around international standards of referencing, writing conventions and styles. It is, by definition, a text-matching tool that analyses a document for its similarity with digitally available content on internet. It compiles a similarity index, in its Originality Report (Turnitin, n.d.). This similarity index is very much open to human comprehension and interpretation. It is for an instructor/teacher/evaluator to decide about the presence of plagiarism, similarity and referencing issues. This seems fair enough and does not let the 'machine' control and decide 'fate' (grade) of students (Badge 2008). The whole mechanism of Turnitin requires qualifying prerequisites with the instructors and students. For instructors, after essential digital literacy and skills, the key requisite is a vigilant eye that can sharply identify the problem in a work and is able to use Turnitin as an aid in evaluation, rather than as a 'sole' evaluation mechanism. On the students' side the demands are higher: From them is expected academic integrity, proper use and acknowledgment of sources and, most important of all, digital literacy.

This mechanism does not account for instructors and students who have a lot of catching up to do, with skills such as digital awareness, general computing and referencing. In Pakistan, the instructors and students are struggling with the basic issue of digital literacy and are striving to become 'digitally aware individuals,' who can comprehend and utilize the expansive digital space. There are two dimensions to this situation. From the instructor's side the major concerns entail infrastructure, training, capacity building, hands-on practice, etc. (Neville, 2007). The students are more likely to get in trouble, since there is an element of precarity in almost everything that takes place through their academic journey. In this stated backdrop, Turnitin is considered no less than a policeman that will catch them for the 'wrongs' they are never educated in, cautioned about and reprimanded on.

Introduction

Use of Turnitin in Pakistan dates back to 2009 (Ilm ki Dunya, 2009). It has been procured and managed centrally by Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan and further disseminated to all public and private sector universities across

Pakistan. Each university has been allotted a total of 1000 accounts (HEC Annual Reports, 2010) followed by a wide-ranging Plagiarism Policy by HEC, which outlines aspects, such as permissible percentage of Originality Report, permissible number of submissions, actions that follow, degrees of penalties etc. This was done to ensure nationwide consistency. Out of this subscription, from iParadigms LLC. Turnitin OriginalityCheck™ is the most widely used so far (HEC Annual Reports, 2010). According to HEC Annual report 2010, the total number of Turnitin submissions from all over Pakistan, reached 45366, out of which only 18241 submissions were below 25% of the similarity index (HEC Annual Reports, 2010). The following year, 2011, the total number of submissions reached 111,153, and submissions below 25% were 53003, which is nearly the half. If seen closely, there is surely improvement, due to the efforts of HEC and sustained cooperation of iParadigms LLC. in organizing free webinars, suiting Pakistani timings.

The situation in Pakistan is changing fast. The universities and many competent and understanding instructors are striving to educate students and route them towards a cleaner road of original, acknowledged, and referenced written output. Such universities and instructors, although not in majority, are striving hard to make this happen. Still a major population of Pakistani universities and students is facing tough times at the hands of Turnitin implementations. This study has tried to focus on this 'troubled' class of students and tries to explore the 'real' issues, plans a solution and analyses the efficacy of the plan.

The researchers conducted a nation-wide electronic survey, using Google Docs™, in coordination with HEC, and targeted Focal persons of all the universities across Pakistan in order to discern how universities took in Turnitin mechanism. It was discovered that 80% of universities implemented use of Turnitin at Postgraduate level straight, and that too for Thesis evaluation. This was dangerous enough for the students, who would not have a slight inkling about what was waiting for them at the apparent culmination of their academic career. This survey was necessary to find out a common trend of Turnitin use and to generalize the findings of this study over a larger population across Pakistan. This top-down implementation strategy has exhibited many downsides during the three years of Turnitin use, in Pakistan.

The electronic survey was filled in by representatives of 10 universities, from various regions of Pakistan. The findings of this survey are as below:

- Turnitin started being used at Postgraduate level initially. It continues to be used at the same level in 80 % of universities.
- Majority of students do not use/have their accounts.
- Mostly, the users are Administrators/ Focal Persons/digitally literate instructors.
- Instructors and students usually debate about the inefficacy of Turnitin, hence result in lot of negative beliefs and want to continue with the years-old copy-paste culture of assignment and thesis writing.
- Of all of Turnitin Products, OriginalityCheck™ is the most used.
- OriginalityCheck™ is mainly used as a means of cross-checking a written attempt and it serves as an evidence of Plagiarism-free work.
- Originality Report (OR) interpretation is not 'known' (mostly) or not done, usually.

These findings clearly denote that the implementation of Turnitin did not follow requisite amendments in the education policy at higher education. The very fact of including Turnitin at higher education can be contested, seeing from the coping strategies and struggle which both, instructors and students had to undergo. Hence a much-needed capacity-building and gradual orientation of faculty members in Plagiarism-related issues did not materialize. In such a situation, the attitude of instructors and students is/ and has been more of an uneasy compromise. With use of Turnitin, being mandatory for instructors and students, the pressure of producing an OR, along with the award list, results in a mixed practice. With a brief sketch of the working mechanism of Turnitin stated above, the sheer dilemma of students can easily be envisioned.

In order to 'evade' a Turnitin OR, an average student employs practices such as getting assignments done by other computer-adept students or paid writers. There is a decade-old tradition of copy-pasted works in education in Pakistan, like many other developing countries, so the use of internet seems to have facilitated the practice. But with the introduction of Turnitin, there seem to be a lot of disturbance.

In these circumstances, the students suffer due to an impractical scheme of implementation. As the online survey demonstrates, only few students' accounts are really in use, which probably explains the gap between students and the use of Turnitin. This could either be because of a wide-spread unfriendliness towards the rationale of using Turnitin, or due to the students' inaccessibility of Turnitin, reflecting on the not-so-sure instructors. Since this plan is in practice far and wide, all across Pakistan, there is no way that it can be rebooted and started afresh 'properly'.

Keeping this dimension in perspective, the researchers set out on a project to use the given circumstances, and state of affairs, to find a solution that is geared towards creativity and originality. The main objectives were to bring about an attitudinal shift in students about Turnitin, drive them towards the practice of originality, let them experience using Turnitin themselves and to reduce their fears of being 'judged' through Turnitin mechanism.

Using Originality Report as a teaching aid

The idea was to take Turnitin Originality Report (OR) as a starting point of educating students about referencing styles, writing conventions, academic ethics, and use of digital sources and resultantly avoiding plagiarism, both blatant and clandestine. This was an indirect tutoring about the process of using Turnitin as a student. So, it was also silently aimed at making them aware of academic integrity.

Methodology
Participants

Randomly selected 35 Pakistani postgraduate students, of M.A English final semester, henceforth referred to as 'Students,' from a university in Islamabad, Pakistan, were the research participants. This choice was based on the fact that the university offers postgraduate programs in various disciplines and the students here usually belong to various parts of Pakistan, hence adding to disciplinary and regional complexity of the sample.

The Research Plan

There were four components to the study.

- A questionnaire.
- 5 Video Screencasts (*walk-through Tutorials in L1, Urdu, created with CamtasiaStudio® 7, put online with the intent of flexibility of time and number of access by students, uploaded to free video sharing platforms, YouTube™ and Vimeo™)*. These videos touched different areas, ranging from using various sources in a document, to using Referencing Tab in Microsoft® Word® 2007.
- Interactive sessions that were organized to foster face-to-face dialogue on importance and necessity of originality. These sessions were in coordination and gradual combination with Video screencasts. These sessions did not constitute part of the formal taught content of the curriculum.
- Hands-on practice of Turnitin student accounts.

The Research Process and Discussion

Students were introduced with the nature of the project they were engaged in. They were briefed about the utility of these exclusive meetings for their academic writing skills, and for upcoming Thesis. The proposed focus areas were briefly discussed with them, i.e. referencing, plagiarism and Turnitin.

They were engaged after their class timings, in consultation with concerned authorities. The university administration facilitated the researchers with necessary requirements and a venue to have the students' interactions. Considering the expected outcome to be directly reflecting on the performance of students in the upcoming compulsory Thesis writing, in final semester, this project was integrated with Research Methodology module, hence ensuring 100% attendance and seriousness from students.

Students were provided with written consent forms that clearly stated the objectives of the study, and how the information would be used to put up workable suggestions to HEC, for implementation in similar scenario in Pakistan. The female participants had their concerns about their names being used and they were assured of complete anonymity. In the same meeting, after the consent form procedure, students were asked to do three more things:

- Fill an online questionnaire (*designed and hosted on Google® Docs*) *(till the*

next day)
- Write a 200-word anonymous composition, on any self-chosen topic. *(with references from a book, a website and a journal article)*
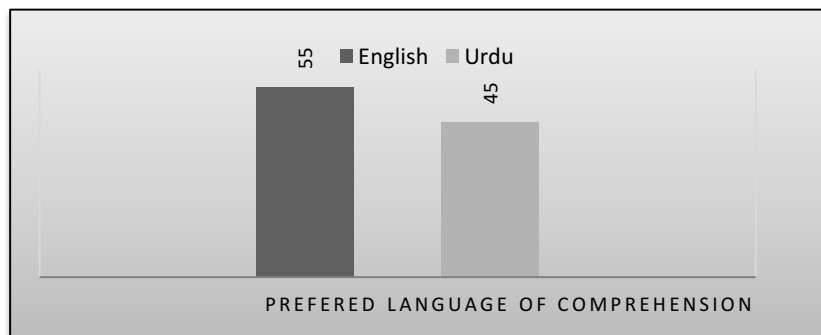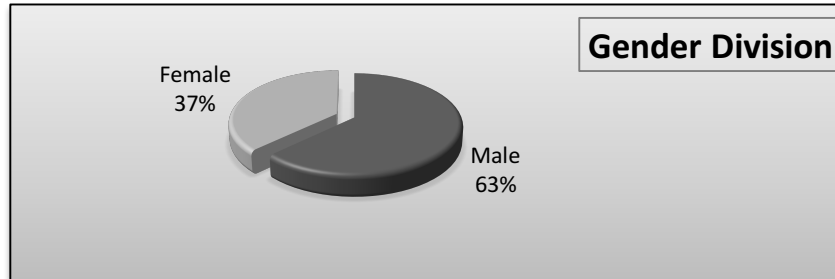- Email their compositions to the researchers *(within next three days)*

The web link to the questionnaire, instruction of paragraph writing, and researchers' email address were provided to all students, in print.
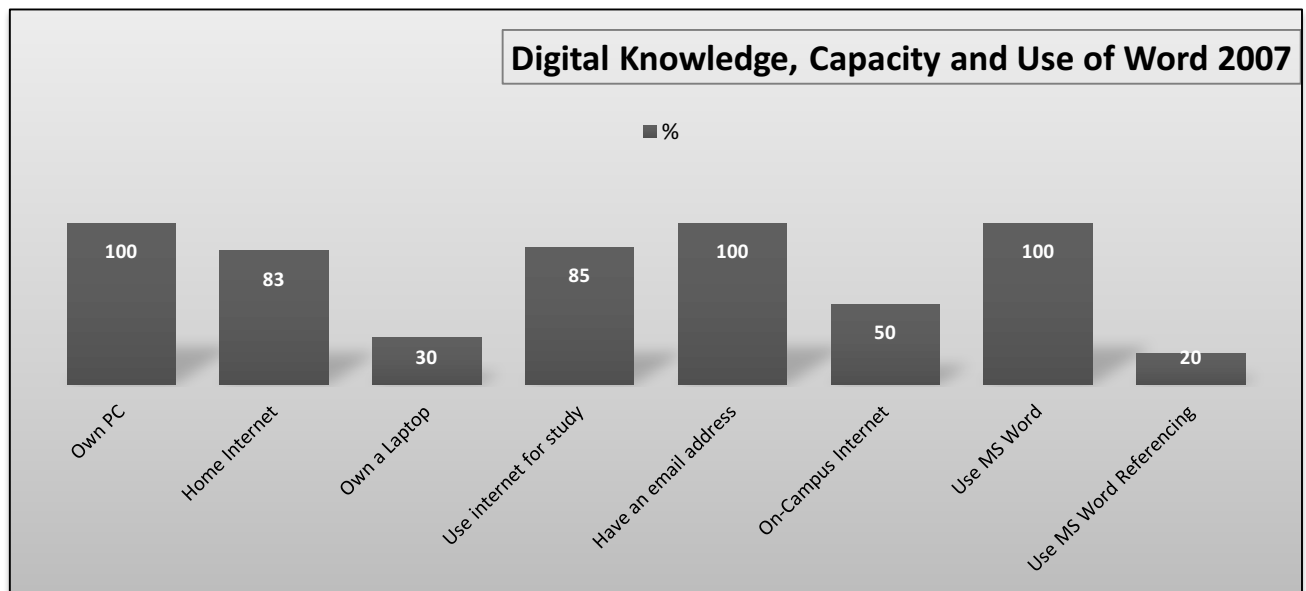
Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was used to collect basic data from the students. This questionnaire specifically was aimed at three main areas. The breakdown of questions per area can be seen in the chart below.
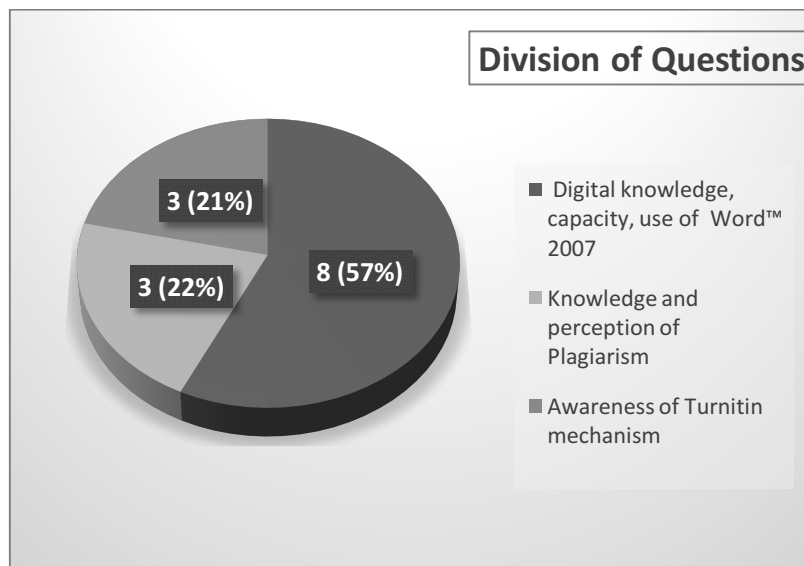
This three-dimensional questionnaire brought forth the following demographics:

Students' Demographics:

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Gender Division

Female 37%

Male 63%

55   ■ English ■ Urdu

45

PREFERED LANGUAGE OF COMPREHENSION

Below is a summary of the first focus of the questionnaire, which is about finding out the patterns of students' digital knowledge, capacity and use of word 2007.

Digital Knowledge, Capacity and Use of Word 2007

■ %

| Own PC	Home Internet	Own a Laptop	Use internet for study	Have an email address	On-Campus Internet	Use MS Word	Use MS Word Referencing
100	83	30	85	100	50	100	20

With these figures it was encouraging learn that the respondents had the basic requirements that were expected from a student of a university, situated in capital of Pakistan.

The second focus of the questionnaire was to find out about the students' knowledge and awareness of plagiarism. The following illustration reflects some major findings, with regards to students' knowledge and beliefs about Plagiarism. There are many cultural renditions to these figures.
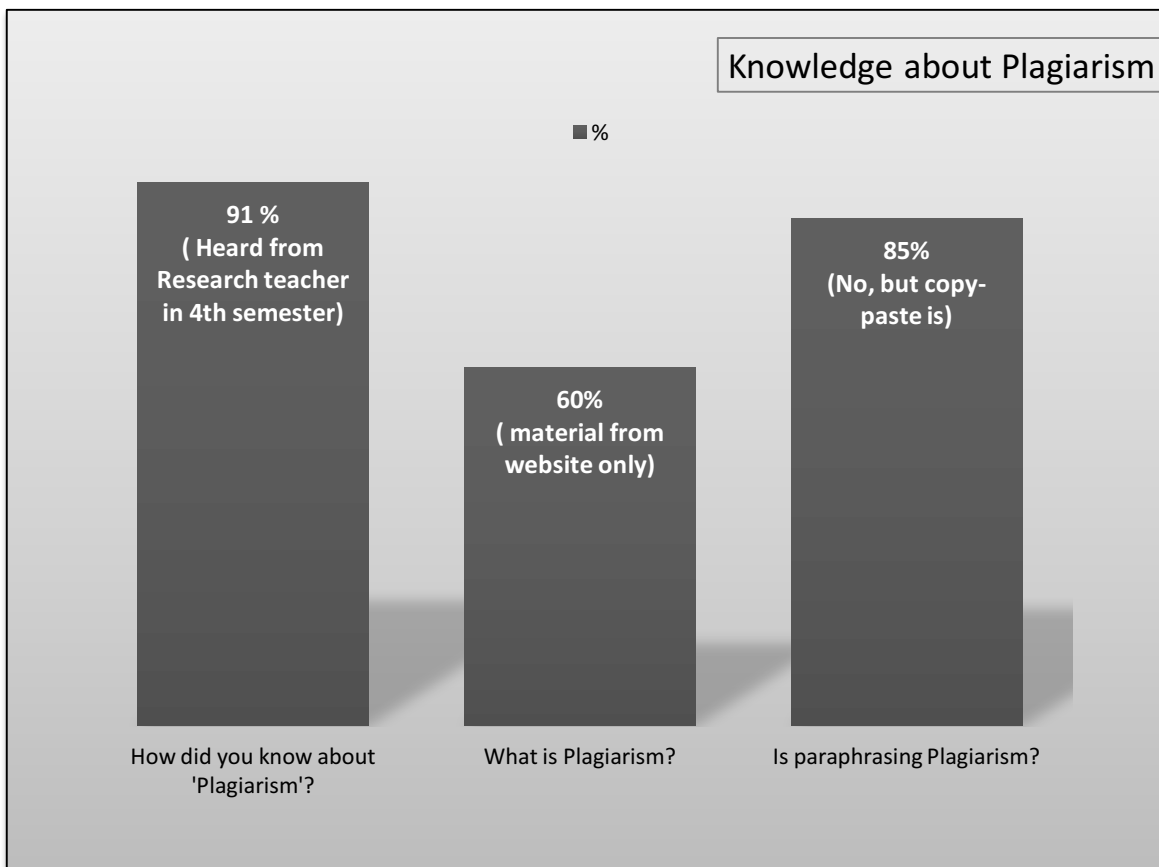
In the last focus area of the questionnaire, Turnitin familiarity the results were fully linked with the findings stated in the second focus area, of Plagiarism knowledge.

Below is an overview of the responses.
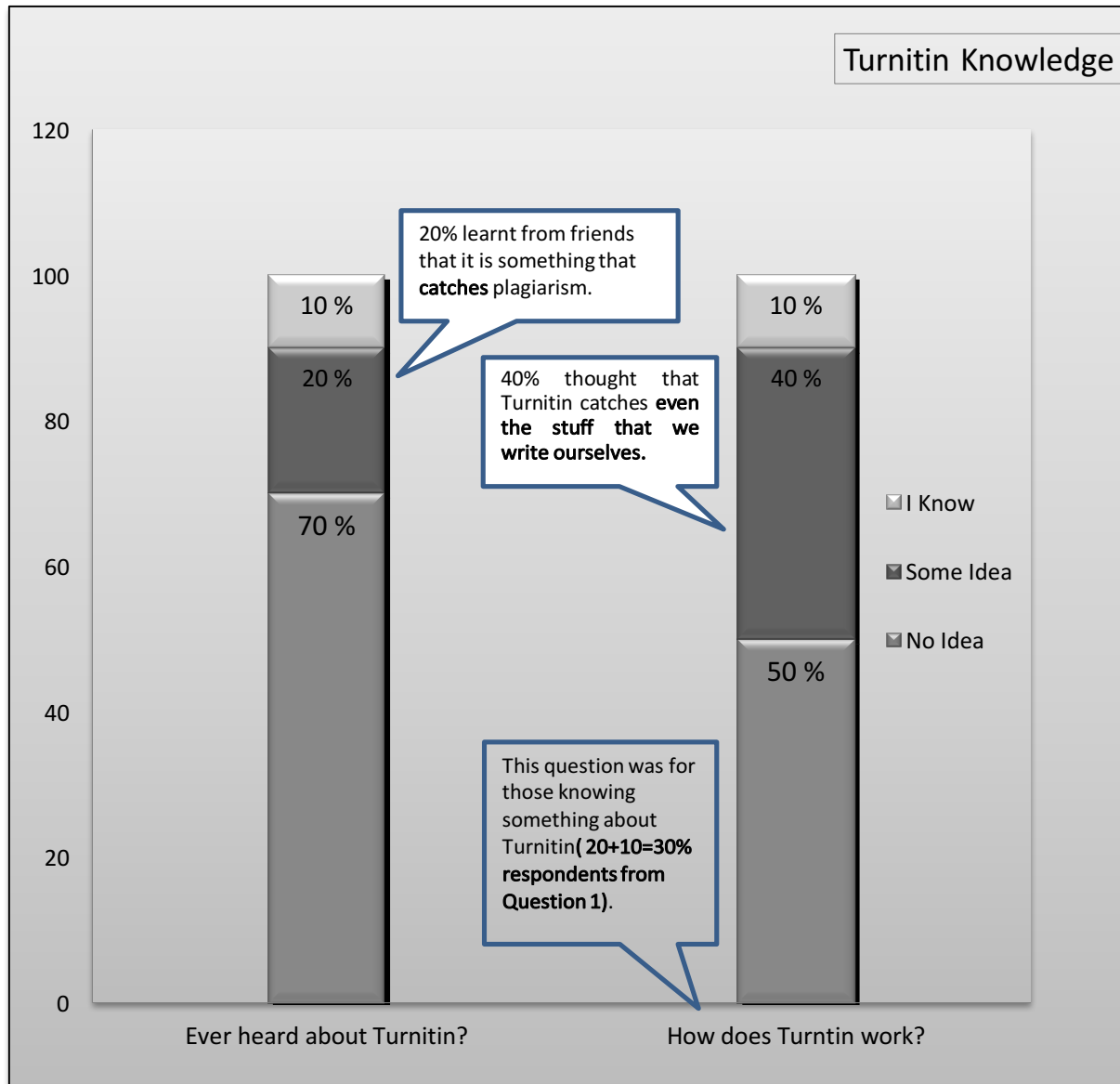
From this questionnaire, it was evident that the common perception, among those who knew about Turnitin, is negative and that it is believed to be an unfair

and inapplicable tool that has been 'forced' on Pakistani students.

Interactive Sessions

As the second component, the students were engaged in three interactive presentations, by the researchers, focusing mainly on opening aspects of Plagiarism, common perceptions and use and acknowledgment of sources and workings of Turnitin. The sessions were not arranged within the regular classes' schedule. They were especially scheduled, coordinated and organized after class timings.

These presentations were conducted with a gap of 7 days each. Each 60-minute long session was conducted in a bilingual mode, of English and Urdu, for maximum comprehension among mixed ability students. The choice of a bilingual mode was in response to mixed responses of students, about preferred language of comprehension. Each session started with a 15-20 minutes of presentation time, in which the researchers discussed the dimension to be focused that day. This followed a dedicated time of 30-40 minutes of questions from students. A multimedia projector was used to live-demonstrate any query that needed it.

Session 1

On the day of first interactive session, after some basic discussion about the findings of the questionnaire, students' works were processed through Turnitin, to familiarize them with Turnitin mechanism. With the similarity index of all students visible and available within five quick minutes, the students were excited yet afraid. Due to the anonymity of the authorship of documents, the researchers opened a few Originality Reports, for everyone to comment on. It was an interesting sight as students had mixed feelings and doubts, and raised many questions regarding many highlighted areas.

Students were asked to point out faults with the highlighted areas. The responses were mixed. Some were wondering about the material in quotation marks, and others spoke about the sentence order change. The researchers explained the full working of Turnitin Originality Report and explained three broad categories of highlights in an OR, that is, referencing issues, plagiarism, and

similarity.

 Starting with referencing, the researchers directed them towards two video tutorials, one about using Word 2007 referencing feature, and the other about the right use of sources in writing. The latter was about the manner in which the sources can be incorporated in a write up. They were asked to go through these video tutorials, and furnish another write up of 300 words on any self-chosen topic, using 2 websites, a book, a newspaper and a journal article. Added to these was a direction to a few links on Owl.perdue.org, about citation manuals, MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. Like the first time, they were asked to email the finished work to the researchers two days prior to the next scheduled meeting. For opinion and questions, they were provided an online interactive space, a Todaysmeet.com page link. So, throughout the week whenever they had any questions, which were more than 20 in total, they would express on this webpage and every participant would look at it and give input. The researchers gave their inputs where necessary, but mostly let students 'talk' to each other. It was encouraging to see that students shared their understandings with each other.

Session 2

 In the second meeting, the discussion was mainly on the issues of paraphrasing, that many questioned as difficult to understand. In this meeting, the reports of a few students, with higher percentage, were discussed for analysis. Some students were of the view that paraphrasing and quotation is difficult. Moreover, there were questions about the appropriate referencing styles like MLA and APA. The researchers had established a blog for students to interact and have all sources pooled from Turnitin.com, Plagiarismadvice.org etc. This blog had many resources embedded from these websites and especially Owl.perdue.org for up-to-date referencing. The latter half of the second meeting was dedicated to discussion on plagiarism sensitivity and identification in students. This was a very crucial part, as it was about changing the common student's belief about authenticity, acknowledgment and originality. In discussion about academic theft, most of the students voiced the concern that since there is so much of the knowledge present already all over the world, in print or on web, a person may not be able to produce

'original' work. This is one of the most-echoed arguments levied against Turnitin implementation in Pakistani education set up. This concern needed to be addressed and resolved amicably. The researchers requested the university authorities for a computer lab arrangement for students to let students undergo online tutorial and quizzes on Plagiarism prevention. For this purpose, free online resources on University of Leicester's website (Plagiarism, n.d.) were chosen, for it offers discipline-based, intelligently timed and designed tutorials about plagiarism prevention. It was necessary to help familiarize students with the right and wrong of using sources, side by side. For a hands-on practice of plagiarism identification, online plagiarism quizzes were also selected.

Upon the availability of computer lab, all students were timed to work on these online plagiarism related study guides on the first day (for 30 minutes). The link to each guide was provided with timed intervals of 5-7 minutes each, on the shared Todaysmeet.com page. Students worked individually and noted the things they were not clear about, on a blank page. After each guide, they were asked to take 5 minutes to pen down the things they learnt, and the things that did not make sense in quick bullets.

In the second half of the lab session, the students were randomly put in groups of three to share their learning experience from the online study guides. They were asked to compile questions that they still had. The researchers visited each group, stood close to them to listen to their discussions and moved on. When representatives of each group shared their questions, paraphrasing-related questions were the most raised. The researchers pointed student's attention towards a handout from plagiarismadvice.org, about paraphrasing, and provided them with links for a few videos explaining the permissible forms of paraphrasing, and their referencing methods.

On the following day, of lab session, students were given three free online plagiarism quizzes. They were selected from websites of Indiana University Bloomington (Frick, 2008)) and Monash University Library (Demystifying Citing and Referencing, n.d.). The link to each quiz was shared on that day's Todaysmeet.com page. Students were asked to share their result on Todaysmeet.com page after each quiz, and write their impressions too. Of all the

students, 11 students exhibited comprehension issues in their attempts to understand Plagiarism quizzes. For this reason, there was an open discussion formed and students with questions were asked to pose their questions in open and other students attempted to answer. The researchers included his input where necessary and quietly moderated the activity for 20 minutes. During this discussion, a student wondered if Turnitin was a tool for instructors only. Knowing the amount of information students possessed about Turnitin, at the outset of this project, this question was no surprise. The researchers took the opportunity to explain a bit about the mechanism of student's account and put the rest of the discussion and practice on the following day of lab session. Students were asked to bring a write up of 200 words, on a self-chosen topic, on a flash drive or as a self-email.

Using students' account in Pakistan is yet to mature at large. No provision of accounts to students, points to trust deficit of instructors, or their sense of insecurity. In order for students to realize and take responsibility of their authorship, the researchers made a 5-minutes step-by-step guide for using Turnitin accounts, for students, after setting up a class for them and creating their accounts the same evening.

The next day lab session was for their practice of Turnitin student's accounts. Like the last two lab sessions, a Todaysmeet.com page was set up for that day. Also, the researchers opened up Turnitin on Multimedia, and walked students through all steps till submission of their paper and generation of an OR. This was a 35 minute long walk-through. There were explanations on every step. In this practice session, students were finally asked to process their own 200-word write up. The excitement in the computer lab could be felt in the air. The students were asked to practice a few submissions in the next couple of days, before the last interactive sessions, and come up with queries.

Session 3
The last session was set up to draw general discussion, impressions, and problem areas from students. This turned into a fun activity. It turned out to be a total recall session. Students were asked to recall every step of the process and

share one by one, the order in which they were given the information and guidelines, by the researchers. It was interesting to see students trying to recall and remind each other. This form of information cluster was aimed at a refreshing of the knowledge items acquired. Students found it difficult to recall process of Turnitin account use, even though it was the most recent. This probably could be remedied with more practice.

Conclusion

The following core recommendations are based on various dimensions discussed by students and observed by the researchers:

- There is a dire need of amendments in education policy and an educational campaign started and implemented at lower levels of education has visible chances of improved and original quality of academic production at higher levels. The main reason is that the current implementation of Turnitin in Pakistan does not follow a chalked-out plan. There are scattered attempts to train and facilitate the instructors and students, in the shape of webinars, workshops and training sessions, held by HEC. These efforts are surely encouraging, but absence of academic regulatory pressure is sure to result in zero motivation by students and instructors in general to participate. Hence these special arrangements remain underutilized.
- With the change at policy level, there should be gradual and extensive training of instructors in digital and non-digital resources. Many instructors resist Turnitin outrightly, mainly due to the sense of insecurity that their students are more digitally aware and capable. It is imperative that the instructors learn these digital systems.
- Students are what teachers make of them. They are easily carried away by the heresy about Turnitin, and how it does (not) apply to Pakistani educational milieu. This and such misconceptions need to be undone, through conscious and systematic training and practice. Organization of face-to-face orientation sessions and establishment of online forums can be good starters for students to clear up their doubts. A blog and/or a Facebook page that carries the essential guidelines, instructional video tutorials in Urdu or even regional languages,

would have a lasting impact.
- There is a dire need to instill the sense of authorship and copyrights in students. They need to be clearly told that their efforts and original ideas need protection too, just like that of any writer on earth. It is imperative to create awareness among students about digital objects, their owners and their privacy.
- Students need to be given regular practice of different forms of using sources, which is quotations, paraphrasing, etc. Majority of the students believe that paraphrasing is fine and does not require acknowledgment. This idea needs to be fixed through mandatory practice on in-text citation.

Significance of the present study

This study is expected to serve as a model for such scenario where students are laden with misconceptions about Plagiarism and Turnitin due to implementation flaws. The resistance that Turnitin implementation faces is mainly due to lack of knowledge and training. Instead of asking students to stop cheating, it is ideal to make them aware that their work can be stolen and used unacknowledged too. The realization and fear of losing one's belongings can stop one from stealing from others. Asking them to protect their work from others is an indirect way of making them aware of fair play of acknowledgment.

There have been many known cases where students have claimed, with proof, that their supervisors/ instructors have used their work and published it without their consent and knowledge. During one of the interactive sessions in computer lab, the researchers had a five-minute online poll, on Urtak.com, from all participants, about their knowledge of authorship and how can Turnitin protect it. Unfortunately, 95% of the respondents had neither any idea about their academic rights as writers, and 100% students obviously didn't know that Turnitin actually helps in keeping student's work under a, figurative, lock and key protection too.

Students would usually try to go the easier way since their instructors would let go of such stuff. The main issue is that students usually believe that there is no such possibility of new or novel and 100% genuine work. There is a growing misconception, or say, nearly a maxim, that all is a manipulation and reproduction of the same knowledge over and over and again, and hence, there is no possibility

of new *knowledges*. This negative mindset keeps students in the dark and they do not have any sense of authorship and their copyright. Turnitin is not only a policeman that catches the violations and anomalies, but it also helps protect student's work, rights, and gives them their due credit. So, it strives at securing intellectual valuables for the genuine owners. Therefore, it discourages and keeps academic thieves and robbers from stealing other's works.

The manner, in which Turnitin has been introduced to students of Pakistan, from Postgraduate level downwards, has resulted in more problems than anticipated. In the present study, all such notions and mindsets were evident from day one. The research participants needed a lot of clearing up of their perception, carefully tailored orientation and practice in referencing, plagiarism sensitivity, and Turnitin use. In this 40-day consistent and gradual practice, there was a visible change in the perception of 85% of students, as was evident in the end-of-project online questionnaire. Yet practice remains conditioned with time. So, it can be safely assumed that in other situations in Pakistan, where Turnitin continues to be implemented from the 'top' only, such projects can be inculcated, as credited components, at all levels. Similar project for instructors, as a part of their in-service training should also be facilitated, so that they can train their students more meaningfully.

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