

PDS AND ITS SIMILARITY INDEX REPORT: VIEWPOINT OF RESEARCH SCHOLARS OF UNIVERSITIES OF NORTH-WESTERN REGION OF INDIA

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Abstract: In the past few years, plagiarism has become an alarming threat to the domain of academics as it undermines efforts of the main authors. To curb this ill practice, many plagiarism detection software have come up which catch the copied text. In this way, they keep plagiarism at bay and help in bringing ethics into academics and research. This study is an attempt to know the difficulties faced by the research scholars of selected universities in using PDS, their awareness on similarity report generated by PDS, their understanding in getting lower similarity score, their knowledge on giving responsibility about plagiarism detection in their respective institution. Survey of research scholars from the selected universities of North-Western region of India was conducted through questionnaire method. Data collected was entered into MS Excel and was analysed using percentage method. 51.4% of the research scholars worked on Plagiarism Detection Software. 40.3% of them gave preferences to "percentage as a criterion" for generating Similarity Index Report. 33.1% of the research scholars favoured "<10%" as 'No penalty stage'. Large number of research scholars (65.7%) agreed that quoted text should be excluded to get lower similarity score. More than half of the research scholars (51.4%) suggested that Supervisor himself/herself should have the access to plagiarism detection tool. This research paper is original, fully written by the authors. Due attribution has been given to the previous studies as well as other references

Keywords: Plagiarism, Research Scholars, PDS, Similarity Score, Exclusion Criteria, HEI

1.0 Introduction

For the past many years, plagiarism is hampering the advancement of knowledge. It has come into sight in many ways. Previously, researchers had to explore the resources of the library and jot down the relevant content from them. Plagiarism occurred in the prior to tech-driven era but post that period it has become endemic. The past few decades have witnessed internet unfolding a flood of information at the click of a mouse. Students and researchers can get the needful content on anytime anywhere basis. According to Evans (2008) plagiarism needed lots of efforts in the print era. Paraphrasing was a time intensive process. By all means, Internet has proved to be key to speedy information. On the other hand, fast growth in ICT is unfolding grave challenges for the academic community. Technology is proving to be a boon as well as bane for the academics and research. The rise in unethical academic practices need attention and action so that e-learning and e-research should become fair and just. ICT is enhancing the horizons of education. Its flip side is unfair academic practices which are facilitated by it (Sethy, 2018). The culture of copy paste is gaining momentum, courtesy development in information and communication technologies. Its offshoots are cheating, plagiarism and manipulations (Karim, 2009). According to Razera (2011) taking the information from the internet has become easy and speedy. At the same time "ctrl-c and ctrl-v" have provided cushion to the researchers as the ill practice of copy paste has become prominent among researchers. However, the good part is that it can be detected through timely deployment of various plagiarism detection tools which are available free of cost as well as through paid subscription. Use of Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS) is beneficial for preventing plagiarism by giving speedy feedback and detecting the text which has been copied without attribution. They improve the research and referencing skills of the researchers (Gaur, 2019).

1.1 Definition

Merriam-Webster dictionary explains plagiarism in transitive verb and intransitive verb. "*Transitive verb:* to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (another's production) without crediting

the source” *“Intransitive verb: to commit literary theft: present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.”*

1.2 Aim of the study

Main aim of the study was to assess the awareness of the research scholars of selected universities of North Western Region of India towards plagiarism detection software and its interpreting its Similarity Index Report.

2.0 Significance of the Study

Academic dishonesty is perpetuated by web-based information and easily manipulated text thereby affecting the quality of research and ethical writing. In addition to this, various instances of plagiarism in other realms like art, literature, music, movies, politics etc. are being highlighted in print and electronic media. There is an urgent need to have more realistic and effective intervention to root out this academic menace. For this, every institution of higher education should have short term plan as well as long term strategy to usher in ethics in study and research. This also requires great time and effort so that competence, self-esteem of researchers should be sustained. This will also lead to the generation of original and innovative ideas. This study aimed at exploring the understanding and opinion of research scholars towards plagiarism detection software. In the absence of such studies, research can become a mere replication of previous studies lacking innovation. The significance of the study lies in overcoming the deficit about various facets of plagiarism between research scholars, in select universities of North-western India regarding Plagiarism Detection Software. As an outcome of this study, the awareness of research scholars regarding criteria for generating similarity report and exclusions for getting lower similarity report had come into light. The study has enabled us to know the viewpoint of the research scholars on assigning responsibility about plagiarism detection. Keeping in view all the facts which have emerged from this study, efforts can be made at every HEI level for bringing integrity and values in research. This will lead to enhancement of the reputation and academic credibility of research scholars.

3.0 Review of Literature

Mostafa et al. (2021) in their article entitled “Researchers’ awareness about plagiarism and impact of plagiarism detection tools- does awareness effect the actions towards preventing plagiarism?” have stated that academic publications have increased tremendously due to the development of Internet. This has led to plagiarism which can be found in every domain of academics. The study aimed at finding the awareness of plagiarism and its legal repercussions amongst the university’s researchers. It also aimed at knowing the level of awareness on plagiarism and effect of plagiarism detection software on scholarly works among researchers. Another purpose of the study was to find out the impact of demographic and individual features on the perceptions and actions regarding plagiarism as well as the factors leading to it among the research scholars. The last objective was to know the actions taken by the research scholars to prevent plagiarism after getting awareness about plagiarism. For this study, the questionnaire was distributed among Masters, M. Phil and PhD students from a large public university in Bangladesh covering the period November 2019 to April 2020. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with demographic factors and the second part had questions on the factors leading to plagiarism and the usage and impact of plagiarism software. The study revealed that all the researchers should have a clear idea about plagiarism and its ill effects. It also showed that researchers have high idea about plagiarism and also the actions taken to prevent them. Another fact which came into light was that there is a significant difference in the levels of awareness amongst male and female researchers. The reasons causing plagiarism are lack of interest, stiff competition, lack of formal training, lack of knowledge about proper citation causing unintentional plagiarism. Another fact which was found that the use of anti-plagiarism software is being used on a large scale which can prevent researchers from committing plagiarism. Participation in workshops on plagiarism awareness also have a positive effect on bringing ethics in research. Researchers favoured formulating a policy on plagiarism. It was concluded that IQAC’s in Bangladesh also have an important role to spread awareness on plagiarism. This will lead to more use of detection tools and thus keep at bay the instances of plagiarism.

In the paper entitled “Perceived Effectiveness of Turnitin in Detecting Plagiarism in Presentation Slides”, **Balbay and Kilis (2019)** have analyzed the perception of Turnitin software in detecting plagiarism. The information was gathered from 311 students studying in a noted English medium instruction University in Turkey. The students considered themselves as honest and aware of potential of Turnitin as honest and aware of potential of Turnitin while giving their presentations. Apart from unknown servers from where plagiarized essay trafficking can be done; slide sharing sites are also used by them for making presentations which lead to

plagiarism. This necessitates the need to devise more methods to determine plagiarism. Authors opined that the pursuing morals in academics have been gaining importance. It is ethical to give due credit to the findings of other authors whose work has been taken in one's work. Finally, the authors found from the online survey conducted on 311 students of a Turkish university that they had realized the importance of ethics in academics which lessened the instances of plagiarism. Another finding was that they acquired new methods of plagiarizing. With this, the efficacy of Turnitin in detecting instances of plagiarism has also arisen. The survey revealed that one third of the students were scared of being penalized. More than half of the students denied any good or bad effect on their rapport with their supervisor. Findings of the survey revealed that awareness sessions can be helpful in appraising the students about pursuing good ethics in research. This can help in reducing plagiarism on which students and researchers do not have clarity. This paper focused on the effectiveness of Turnitin in curbing plagiarism as it is taken to be suited for the purpose. Authors were of the view that it is essential to know the outlook of the students and faculty from various cultural backgrounds on plagiarism. Authors have also suggested that students can be interviewed which will help in analyzing the reasons why they plagiarize. The study has revealed that rapid advancement in ICT has eased the access to information leading to plagiarism which has emerged as a threat to learning and research. Use of software and holding of awareness sessions is the need of the hour.

Ali (2013) in his work "Minimising cyber plagiarism through Turnitin: faculty's and students' perspectives" evaluated the experience of fifty Engineering Students and twenty professors in judging the effectiveness and limitations of Turnitin Software in preventing plagiarism. The author expressed his views that plagiarism has become the order of the day since the over excessive use of Internet undermining academic integrity. The Study to adjudge Turnitin took place in a private University College in Oman. 50 engineering students from different engineering departments and 20 faculty members were taken into consideration. The questionnaire was circulated among the respondents and the results were then critically analysed. The results revealed that majority of the faculty members used Turnitin as the anti-plagiarism software and it did help them in detecting the plagiarized texts. The author recommended the use of training and instructions in promoting the use of anti-plagiarism software. According to him students should be encouraged to use such software to check their papers before final submission. Going further he added that faculty should act as facilitator in guiding the students against academic ill practices.

Seadle (2008) in his paper entitled "Copyright in the networked world: plagiarism and its ambiguities" had dealt with the complex cases of plagiarism. The methodology adopted was dealing with real cases of plagiarism with the actors being fictionalized. The purpose was to find out the complex cases of plagiarism where judgment was difficult to give. Author said that in digital era if copying had become easier, ways to detect plagiarism had also become easier with various software like Turnitin, iThenticate etc. Plagiarism also occurred in the absence of any legal protection as happened in USA many decades ago. In case I, the research methodology about a Research Project was similar for three different articles by the same author. In case II with the aid of iThenticate some suspicious text in an article were found to be sourced from author's previous work. It was also found that the author had saved his time in writing literature review on methodology. Description in correct English as English was not his native language. Further search showed that 'change all command' had been used to alter an earlier article in the new topic and also the keywords had been changed in the cited quotations. In Case III, a US University Librarian used an English language summary and took additional information from the website of foreign language research archive and translated it into English translation tools with the help of online translation tools to write a short description of foreign language research publication. In case IV, the text of widely researched topic contained texts from author's previous works and common phrases were used. It was merely cutting and pasting of common ideas. Finally, the paper was accepted as author's own considering the common language of discourse used by all the authors. The author had twin objectives while writing this article. One was to apprise about plagiarism detection tools and other was to highlight the ambiguity in cases of plagiarism and the ways to deal with it.

4.0 Inferences drawn

Previous studies revealed that no such study was ever taken on finding out the view point of research scholars of selected universities of North-Western region of India regarding PDS and its similarity index report.

5.0 Research Questions

- What is the level of awareness of research scholars of selected universities of North Western Region of India regarding criteria for generating similarity report?

- What is the level of awareness of research scholars of selected universities of North Western Region of India regarding exclusions for getting lower similarity score?

6.0 Methods

Survey of research scholars from the selected universities of North-Western region of India was conducted. Questionnaire was circulated amongst the respondents. Data collected was entered into MS Excel and was analysed using percentage method.

6.1 Sample size of the Study: Sample of 50 research scholars from each state university selected for the study has been considered.

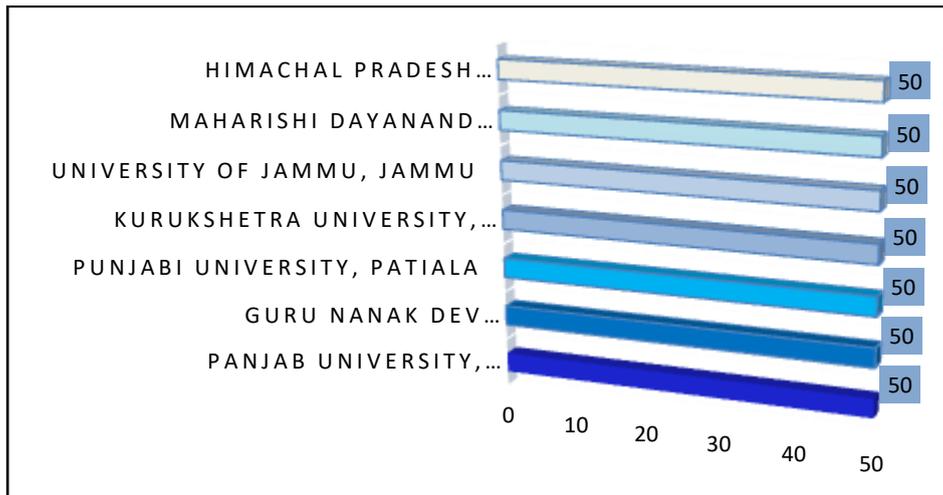


Figure 1 Population of the Study

Descriptive Analysis deals specifically with the results, discussions and interpretations of the data collected from the respondents i.e., Research Scholars through a survey using tools of questionnaire.

6.2 Hands on experience on Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS): Through the below mentioned tables, an attempt has been made to know whether the respondents from the universities under study have ever used any plagiarism detection software.

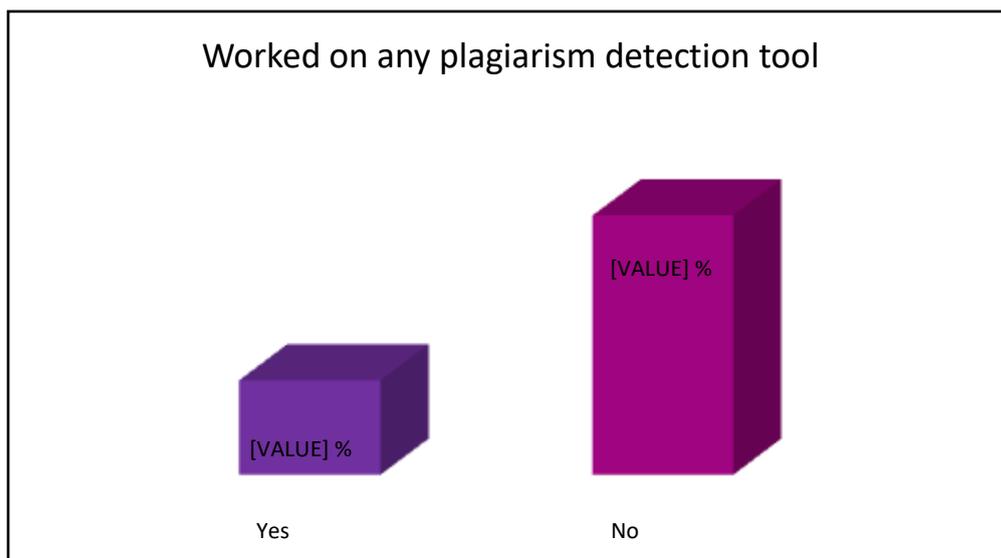


Figure 2 Hands on experience on Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS)

Results: Figure 2 depicted that 51.4% of the research scholars had worked on plagiarism detection software whereas 48.6% of them never worked on any plagiarism detection software.

6.3 Interpreting Similarity Score generated by Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS)

6.3.1 Criteria for generating Similarity Report: An effort has been made to know the viewpoint of the respondents (research scholars, faculty members and library professionals) on the criteria for generating similarity report of plagiarism detection software whether they preferred “consecutive words” or “percentage”. They were also asked about their opinion on the limit of words/percentage at “No penalty stage”

Table 1: Criteria for generating Similarity Report

Criteria for generating similarity score	Responses	Total	
		N	%
The criteria for generating Similarity Index Report of the research work	Consecutive words	64	18.3
	Percentage	141	40.3
	Can't say	145	41.4
Acceptable consecutive words at “No penalty” stage	10-15 words	111	31.7
	16-20 words	63	18
	21-25 words	62	17.7
	>25 words	66	18.9
	Can't say	48	13.7
Percentage acceptable at “No Penalty” stage	<10%	116	33.1
	10-40%	153	43.7
	40-60%	21	6
	>60%	7	2
	Can't say	53	15.1

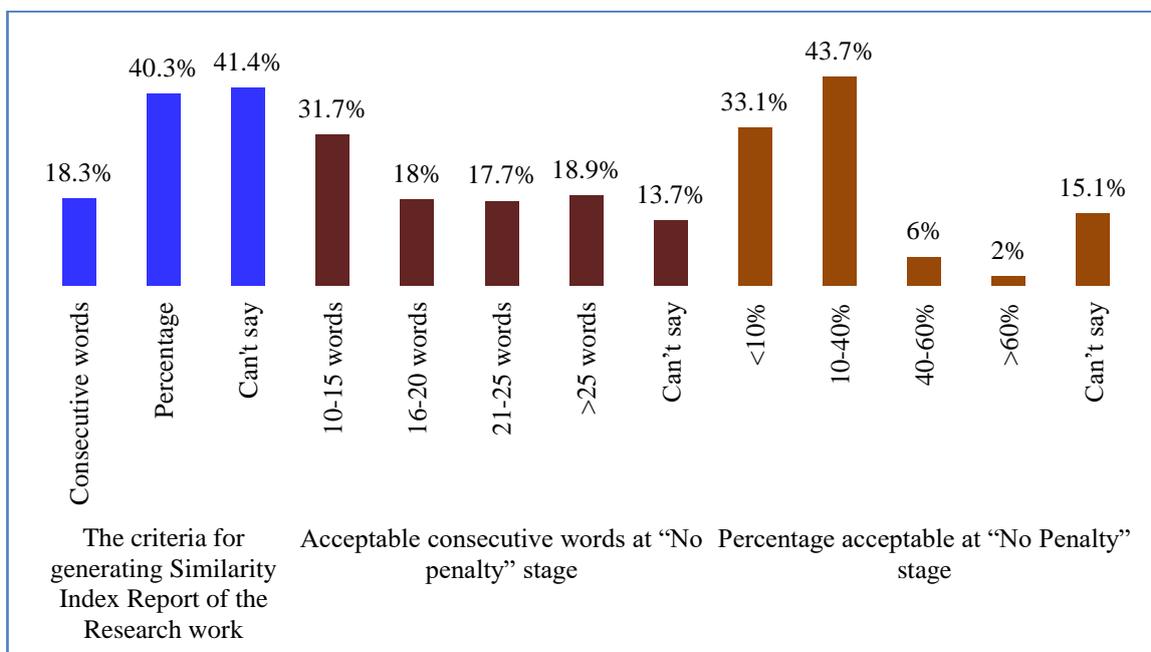


Figure 3 Criteria for generating Similarity Report

Results: The opinions of research scholars of the universities under study towards the criteria for generating similarity report of the research work from any plagiarism detection software was presented in the table. Around 20% (18.3%) of the research scholars opined that "consecutive words" should be the criteria for generating similarity report whereas 40.3% of them gave preferences to percentage as a criterion. However, 41.4% stayed silent on this. Some of the research scholars (37.1%) were in favour of "10-15 words", as no penalty stage. Almost equal number of respondents considered "16-20 words" (18%) and "> 25 words" (18.9%). It has been noticed that 13.7% the respondents remained indecisive. However, in terms of percentage 43.7% of them admitted that 10-40% should be acceptable as "No penalty stage" followed by 33.1% favouring "<10%" as 'No penalty stage'. 15.1% of them did not comment on this.

6.3.2 Exclusions for getting lower similarity score: The tables mentioned below put into forth the opinion of the faculty members on what should be excluded to get lower similarity score generated by plagiarism detection software.

Table 2: Exclusions for getting lower similarity score

Exclusions for getting lower similarity score	Responses	N	%
Quotes	Strongly disagree	32	9.1
	Neutral	88	25.1
	Agree	230	65.8
Bibliography/References/Table of Contents/ Preface/ Acknowledgements	Strongly disagree	28	8
	Neutral	144	41.1
	Agree	178	50.8
All generic terms, symbols, laws and equations	Strongly disagree	33	9.4
	Neutral	124	35.4
	Agree	193	55.1
Less than 14 consecutive words	Strongly disagree	93	26.6
	Neutral	90	25.7
	Agree	167	47.7

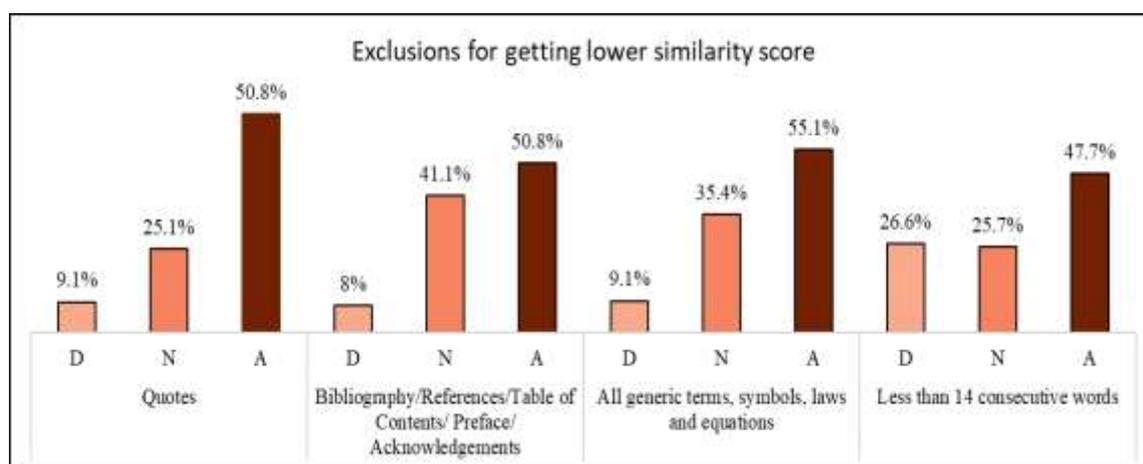


Figure 4 Exclusions for getting lower similarity score

Results: Large number of research scholars (65.7%) agreed that quoted text should be excluded to get lower similarity score whereas 25.1 opted to remain silent and 9.1% disagreed with this attribute. About half of the research scholars (50.8%) opined that "Bibliography/References/Table of Contents/Preface/Acknowledgements" should be excluded for getting lower similarity scores whereas few respondents (8%) disagreed with this and 41.1% remained neutral on this. "All generic terms, symbols, laws and equations" has to be exempted as reported by more than half of the research scholars (55.1%). However, significant number of respondents (35.4%) opted to remain quiet on this while little less than half of the research scholars (47.7%) consented on excluding "Less than 14 consecutive words "for getting lower similarity score. However, 25.7% remained silent and 17.1% disagreed with this point.

7.0 Discussion

51.4% of the research scholars worked on Plagiarism Detection Software.40.3% of them gave preferences to "percentage as a criterion" for generating Similarity Index Report. 33.1% of the research scholars favoured "<10%" as 'No penalty stage'. Large number of research scholars (65.7%) agreed that quoted text should be excluded to get lower similarity score. About half of the research scholars (50.8%) opined that "Bibliography/References/Table of Contents/Preface/Acknowledgements" should be excluded for getting lower similarity scores. "All generic terms, symbols, laws and equations" has to be exempted as reported by more than half of the research scholars while 47.7% consented on excluding "Less than 14 consecutive words "for getting lower similarity score. More than half of the research scholars (51.4%) suggested that Supervisor himself/herself should have the access to plagiarism detection tool followed by central library (40.9%).

8.0 Conclusion

Knowledge and academics have always been the lifeline of any society and nation. They are the prime keys which lead to all round progress starting with the development of the mind. Research is a very important aspect of academics (Pandoi and Gupta, 2018). The problems confronting the human society enable us to look for them deeply and find solutions. This becomes possible only through research. Previous years have witnessed the penetration of unethical practices in academic and research. Apart from worsening the standards of academics and research, it is undermining the hard work of original authors and other content creators. It has become a matter of concern and resulting in many studies which emphasise upon deploying PDS, implementing policies and promoting awareness through training, workshops and seminars etc. to curb plagiarism. Plagiarism is a grave threat to the development of knowledge, academics and research. Efforts are on to curb this ill practice. Studies and research are also being undertaken to prevent this as far as possible. The first and foremost requirement is that the concept of plagiarism should be very clear from the beginning to the researchers. There should be thorough use of software which can help the researcher in finding the similarity in the text. All such measures will enhance the quality and upgrade the standard of research. Plagiarism could be kept at bay and the prime goal of sustaining and promoting academic integrity can be achieved (UGC Rules regarding plagiarism by Indian Academicians, 2018). The writing skills, analytical skills, urge to know and write better and the overall academic reputation of a stakeholder would be enhanced by use of this. All this can also be achieved when all the stakeholders are given proper access rights of the plagiarism detection software. UGCs Regulations 2018 on "Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in HEIs" ensure and sustain the high quality and standards of research and academic integrity. Establishment of UGC- CARE ("Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics", 2019), INFLIBNET's Shodhshuddhi ("Shodhshuddhi", 2019) are also efforts in this direction. They aim at cleansing and enhancing the quality and standards in research and keep the academic environment and scholarly communication free from Falsification, Fabrication and Plagiarism (FFP). They are as important as Swatchh Bharat Campaign which aims at bringing all round cleanliness in India to maintain hygiene and prevent diseases.

9.0 Research Implications

There are positive implications of PDS on research. Its use will be a deterrence for indulging in plagiarism. The similarity index report generated by it will upgrade the quality of research. It will bring and promote academic ethics, thus making learning and writing value based. Researchers will turn to proper citation skills. In this way, the originality of the writing will be sustained and due attribution to the original content creator will be given.

10.0 Suggestions

10.1 Research scholars

- Research scholars of every HEI should be given access to plagiarism detection software in their tenure of PhD.
- Research scholars should know about “Similarity checks for exclusion from plagiarism”, levels of plagiarism in terms of severity and the penalties associated with it.

10.2 Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS)

- There should be an option in every plagiarism detection software for not retaining the document submitted for similarity check. If retained, provisions should also be there in plagiarism detection software to exclude the submitted document (Research paper/thesis/dissertations) from being a part of the repository or Plagiarism Prevention Pool (PPP)
- There should be uniformity in exclusion criteria for generating similarity report through plagiarism detection software.
- Unicode compliant font must be followed in all the non-English documents like Hindi, Sanskrit or other Indian languages for similarity check through plagiarism detection software.
- Efforts should be made to enrich and enhance the research corpus of other non-English languages so that plagiarism detection software can perform similarity checks effectively.
- There should be universal acceptable limit for similarity at “No penalty Stage” through plagiarism detection software in all disciplines (Social sciences, sciences, arts, humanities and so on).

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