

Turnitin: Carrot or Stick?

Using the Similarity Report to Improve Academic Writing

Context

- In 2012/13, there were 162 cases of students being found guilty of misconduct at UoM.
- More than 100 were international students and the vast majority were for plagiarism.
- Most, 94, were postgraduate students.
- Turnitin is software that is used by the University to help to identify **plagiarised work**. It allows you to submit your work via your Blackboard course, where an originality report may be generated.

Aim

To evaluate whether Turnitin can be used as a supportive learning tool

Premise

Providing students with access to their Turnitin similarity report will enable them to improve their academic writing

Questions

- Can student access to similarity reports -
 - improve academic writing?
 - increase student understanding of plagiarism?
 - improve feedback about academic writing using examples from the report?

Methods

Using 2 course units of the Master in Public Health programme (online DL) -

- Setup draft and final Turnitin inbox for each assignment – could submit 1 draft up to 1 day before final submission
- Compared draft to final submissions for changes made based on similarity report feedback
- Compared similarity scores between draft and final
- Conducted telephone interviews with students to understand their experience of the process and whether they believed access to the reports was beneficial to their learning
- All data anonymised (MPH Admin)

Students enrolled on the course

83 Course A

32 Course B



Students agreeing to participate

23 Course A

9 Course B



Use of draft submission box

9 Mid term, 9 Final

5 Mid term, 5 Final



Agreed to telephone interview

12 Course A

5 Course B



Participated in telephone interview

7 Course A

3 Course B

Course A

Changes to similarity score

Mid term: 7

Final: 3

Range: $\uparrow 10\%$, $\downarrow 9\%$

Grades: 2 <50%

7 >70%

Course B

Changes to similarity score

Mid term: 5

Final: 5

Range: $\downarrow 1$ to 6%

Grades: 1 <50%

2 >70%

Review of document changes

- After review by the working group. Only **3 Course A** and **1 Course B** students appeared to have changed their assignments as a result of the sections highlighted in the Turnitin similarity report.
- In **3 cases** this resulted in an improvement in referencing or academic writing.
- In **1 case** this resulted in a change which was not considered necessary and did not improve academic writing style.

Example of where use of Turnitin has resulted in an improvement in academic writing

draft

Previous ecological studies suggest an association between low socioeconomic status and advanced breast cancer stage a diagnosis (2). A case-control study would be appropriate to investigate this further and allows the authors to consider the effect of multiple risk factors. A cohort study would be better to investigate association. The target population was women in the Hérault region. No age range was given. A cancer registry was used to identify cases and controls. Participants completed a standardised questionnaire about socioeconomic characteristics and medical history. Medical records yielded additional prognostic information.

final

Previous ecological studies suggest a positive association (2). A case-control study would be appropriate to investigate this further and allows the authors to consider the effect of multiple risk factors. A cohort study would be better to investigate association. The target population was women in the Hérault region. No age range was given. A cancer registry was used to identify cases and controls. Socioeconomic characteristics and medical history were collected by a standardised questionnaire completed by participants. Medical records yielded additional prognostic information.

Example of where use of Turnitin has resulted in an improvement in academic writing

draft

Recruitment of cases and controls was according to an objective and clearly defined set of criteria from the same regional health agency which, theoretically, should help minimise bias.

Bias is systematic error that results in an incorrect estimate of the association between

exposure and risk/outcome.^{1, 2} Geographical specificity and ('tightly') matching controls for

final

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Example of Turnitin being used to enhance tutor feedback

wellbeing (Williams & Bryant, 2017). 307,000 people were calculated to be homeless in 2017 (Shelter, 2017), with approximately half of those estimated to be young people ages of 18-24 (Homeless Link, 2018). Due to limited access to healthcare systems and unsuitable living conditions, homeless individuals are at increased risk for multiple adverse outcomes (Frankish, Hwang & Quantz, 2009).

Although homelessness itself is a cause of ill-health, it is a direct consequence of a person's economic environment (Stafford & Wood, 2017). The conditions in which a person is born, grows, lives and works, the social determinants of health (WHO, 2018), play a crucial role in homelessness.

include in quotation marks.

46

8



Convert to QuickMark



Findings

- Most of the students are high scoring (grades), suggesting that more motivated students made use of the access to Turnitin
- Many students failed to address referencing issues highlighted by Turnitin suggesting that the students have not made use of the software as a learning tool

Student interviews

- Most students had not had access to their similarity report before –those that had were surprised that Manchester does not give students access
- All students said they would definitely use it again given the opportunity and that it should be made available to all
- All students had only used it to check their work for ‘accidental’ plagiarism
- Some students were surprised that it could help them improve their writing
- Those that accessed the instructions/guidance found it helpful

Main Finding

Providing access to the similarity report alone is **not sufficient** to ensure improvement in academic practice

The following universities already support students in providing Turnitin similarity reports as standard:



Edge Hill
University



Colour



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



UNIVERSITY of
BRADFORD



University of
BRISTOL



University of
Bedfordshire



University of Central Lancashire



Queen Mary
University of London



Glasgow Caledonian
University

Key Messages

- Turnitin similarity reports are not just about detecting potential plagiarism
- Students expect to have access, it is standard practice in many other universities
- Just giving students access to their Turnitin similarity report is not enough to ensure they improve their academic practice; access must be accompanied by support, guidance, relevant feedback and encouragement

Key Recommendation

Update University guidance on the use of Turnitin similarity reports so that programmes can make informed decisions about their use and understand their benefits