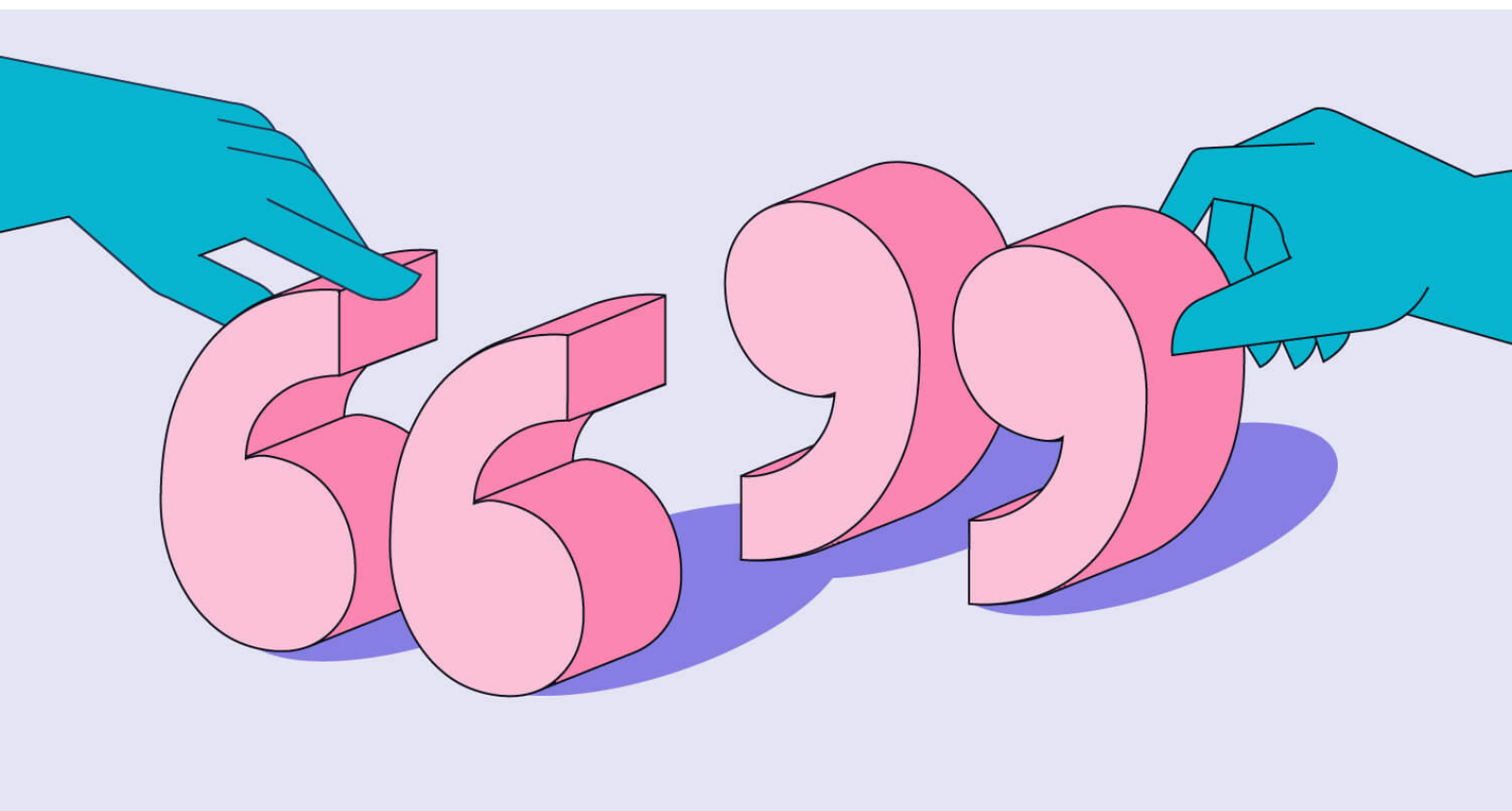


Plagiarism at Crossroads



Considered in academia a serious offence, plagiarism is an act of copying or stealing someone else's ideas or work and presenting them as one's own [1]. In a broader sense, plagiarism is using an author's words, ideas, reflections and thoughts without properly acknowledging them [2]. A well-known and growing issue in academia, plagiarism constitutes a significant proportion of the serious deviations from ethical research practice [3]. The advancement of technology and the widespread use of the Internet and the emerging AI assistance available for all have made it easier to commit plagiarism. Yet, on the flip side, avoiding plagiarism is now more convenient due to the abundance of plagiarism detection tools. Plagiarism applications generate a similarity report that highlights potential manifestations of plagiarism. The accuracy of plagiarism checker tools and their reports on determining the academic integrity of emerging academic writing contents becomes questionable due to the contradicting nature of the concerned variables of plagiarism tool algorithms and that of academic writing ethics. Academic writing ethics taught across global curriculums places a significant value on the use of duly cited direct quotations (verbatim copies) as a strong evidential strategy while plagiarism reports count textual similarity as a key

variable to flag plagiarism. Mindzak and Eaton [4] urge that the complexities, concerns, and questions surrounding plagiarism, originality, academic ethics, and academic labour necessitate further contemplation and dialogue. It is in this context that this article attempts to question the extent of the validity of a similarity report generated by a plagiarism application towards providing a judgment on plagiarism. By exploring ethical writing strategies prescribed to prevent plagiarism and comparatively analyzing how plagiarism tools use technology to detect plagiarism, this paper urges the need for a comprehensive approach capable of optimizing institutional plagiarism policies.

As instructed in academic writing modules worldwide, ethical writing strategies are essential to prevent plagiarism and ensure that work is original and properly cited. As highlighted by Angeli et al., [5], providing proper citation of extracted, paraphrased or summarized text, or obtaining permission from the copyright holder are such strategies considered to be ethical. One of the most important ethical writing strategies is to cite sources properly. This involves using appropriate citation styles such as APA, MLA, IEEE or Chicago, and ensuring that the writer cited all sources correctly in the text and the reference list [6]. Another ethical writing strategy is to paraphrase and summarize information from sources, rather than copying it verbatim. This involves restating the information in one's words while maintaining the original meaning [7]. When using pictures, diagrams, and videos with copyrights, the writer can obtain permission from the copyright holder [8]. These ethical writing strategies are critical in preventing plagiarism, as stated by Howard and Davies [9], writers can employ them to ensure their work is original and ethical.

Plagiarism applications or plagiarism detection tools are software programs that can compare a piece of written work to a vast database of existing texts to identify any instances of similarity or copied content. Among many plagiarism tools, the dominant technology is the lexical and semantic analysis with which a similarity score can be generated on any written text fed into the system.

The most popular plagiarism checkers include Turnitin, Grammarly, and Copyscape, and they use techniques unique to each to detect plagiarism. Textual similarity detection is the technique used in Turnitin to compare the submitted work to a vast database of academic sources [10]. Grammarly uses machine learning algorithms by which it analyses the syntax, semantics, and vocabulary of the text and compares it to a database of academic papers and web pages [11]. Copyscape plagiarism checker uses URL matching to identify instances of duplicated content on the Internet [12]. These tools use different algorithms and methods to detect plagiarism, and each has its inherent strengths and weaknesses [13]. These tools generate similarity reports and are objective measures of the degree of similarity between two documents, which can certainly be used to determine whether plagiarism has occurred.

Solely relying on a similarity report generated by a plagiarism tool may not always be a better judgment since plagiarism is not always a matter of verbatim copying. It can also involve paraphrasing, which plagiarism apps may not always detect. As agreed in academia, plagiarism can be in the form of paraphrasing without referencing, or among other forms submitting another person's work without proper acknowledgement [14]. Plagiarism tools may not identify such instances of plagiarism or even may detect the similarity of texts used in both texts irrespective of the fact that it is cited or not, thus leading to a false sense of originality. Additionally, plagiarism apps may flag a document as plagiarized, even if it contains common phrases or technical terms that are used in academic writing. Furthermore, a similarity report generated by a plagiarism app cannot determine the intent behind the similarity between two documents. There may be instances where the similarities are coincidental or incidental, and the writer may not have intended to plagiarize. With such contradictions, the similarity report generated by the plagiarism tool may not accurately judge plagiarism. Plagiarism, therefore, is a complex phenomenon that requires a more nuanced approach. Therefore, relying solely on the similarity report for judgment on plagiarism is not sufficient. Other factors, such as intent and context, need



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consideration in determining whether plagiarism has occurred. Educators, therefore, need to use plagiarism tools as a starting point and carefully analyze the similarities identified in the report to determine whether plagiarism has occurred. To optimally judge the quality of an academic text, a viable plan would be to create a compromise between the technologically generated similarity report of the plagiarism tool and an examination of the similar material for ethical academic writing strategies performed by an expert academic.

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