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Users' Perception of Plagiarism: A Study of Researchers at MAHE

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is morally and legally wrong, but its occurrence in the academic scene is widespread and sometimes unbridled. Authors have a right to have their works legally protected and at the same time expect that their peers would respect that enough to not steal their hard work. This study aims to analyse the knowledge that research scholars have about academic ethics and academic misconduct. There is an attempt to understand their perception of plagiarism, as a terminology, including understanding why research students plagiarize. There is also an attempt to understand the awareness of anti-plagiarism tools, citation and reference methods and tools among researchers.

KEYWORDS: Plagiarism, Antiplagiarism software, awareness, perception, policy, citation styles.

1.Introduction:

Research is a fundamental entity of society. Any research activity is based on the researcher's nascent thoughts and original ideas. It is the product of hard work, effort, and time put in by the researcher. It is, therefore, heavily frowned upon and often a punishable offence to take content from the original author's work and publish it as their own, which is called plagiarism.

But it is true that, acts of plagiarism are rampant among the research community. For any research project undertaken, the researcher goes through the similar works of other authors for reference. Knowingly or unknowingly, the researcher may borrow ideas, words, or sentences from the original work and publish them as their own. Plagiarism comes in many different forms and there exist many reasons why the researcher may have partaken in it. Universities pride themselves on their original research content and thus, this remains an act of academic dishonesty. Academic institutions must therefore have certain barriers in place in order to combat such acts of academic dishonesty.

2.Review of literature:

Kampa, Raj Kishor et al (2020)¹ explored the widespread phenomenon of plagiarism. They concentrated especially on the students of Food Technology in India. They found that busy schedule, easy availability of electronic resources, unawareness of plagiarism instructions, lack of punishment etc. are the reasons for plagiarism. Conducting orientation programs, workshops on citation styles, etc. are some remedies for combating the issue.

Jilani, Gulam and Ahmad, Naved (2021)² in their work discussed the role of the librarian and information scientists in plagiarism control in the NIRF-ranked engineering universities. The study highlighted the roles that the faculty should also play in combating plagiarism. They found that orientation program and training are the significant methods to curb plagiarism.

Ugvekar, Devashree Devandra (2021)³ focuses on the different factors influencing plagiarism and plagiarism in the digital age, including laws and policies and technological barriers to plagiarism. He also writes about literacy programs etc.

Anaman, Aba Amandzewaa (2021)⁴ focuses on the awareness and attitude towards plagiarism among graduate students in Ghana. She focuses not only on the abject acts of plagiarism but also on the reasons why students choose to do so. She discussed reasons like poor academic writing skills, lack of time, laziness, lack of awareness and understanding of plagiarism, and the constant pressure to do well.

The American Library Association's⁵ views on copyright and the code of conduct were also looked into through their website, which discusses the meaning of copyright and the balance between copyright laws and the obligations that libraries have.

3. Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand the awareness of plagiarism among research scholars at Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal.
- To understand the frequency and nature of plagiarism committed by research students;
- To understand whether research students believe some forms of plagiarism are more serious than others;
- To analyse their understanding of research and citation methods; and
- To understand the scope of plagiarism detection software like Turnitin and researchers' perception of them.

4. Scope and limitation of the study:

The study is restricted to just the MIT Campus, instead of including all the institutes of MAHE, Manipal. As much of the data collection was done when coronavirus was still at its peak, for the safety of both the respondents and the authors of this work the questionnaires and their responses

were exchanged online through the medium of e-mails and the questionnaire are shared through Google Forms.

5. Methodology

The study followed the survey method using questionnaire. 393 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents who fit the required description. The questionnaires were distributed through e-mails with the help of Google Forms and the responses were collected accordingly. The software used for data analysis are JMP 16 Statistical Software (Trial Version) and Microsoft Excel.

6. Manipal Academy of Higher education and Manipal Institute of Technology:

Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Manipal is considered one of India's most promising universities. Having campuses in different locations like Manipal, Mangalore, Bangalore, Jamshedpur, and even internationally in Melaka and Dubai, the university offers more than 300 courses. Established in 1953 as Kasturba Medical College, the university was restructured as the Manipal Academy of Higher Education. It now holds within its fold many colleges that cover more than thirty different disciplines.

The Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT), Manipal, established in the year 1957, is one of the institutes in India that offers a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as Ph.D. programs. It is one of India's first self-financed colleges and in the year 2000, it became a constituent institute of the deemed university, Manipal Academy of Higher Education. The MIT Manipal Campus is spread over an area of 188 acres housing several academic buildings, residential blocks, libraries, food courts, etc. MIT, Manipal has a NIRF rank (2022) of 55 with a score of 48.33

6.1 MAHE Plagiarism Policy:

Every university/college has its own policy when it comes to matters of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. At Manipal Academy of Higher Education, this is covered under the University Policy on Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism. This policy starts with clearly defining what plagiarism and academic dishonesty is to the institution. The University identifies “data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or any other practice that seriously deviates from those commonly accepted within the national and international scientific community.” as acts of academic dishonesty. The Research Directorate of MAHE with the help of the research committee sensitises students, researchers, and faculty members. The MIT Central Library is responsible for using the university subscribed similarity index software, Turnitin, in MIT Campus, to review each researcher’s paper/thesis. Any suspected attempt of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be met with disciplinary actions. The plagiarism percentage allowed in MAHE differs from department to department, but most of them allow 15%.

7.Data Analysis and interpretation

7.1 Response rate

There were 393 questionnaires which were distributed, out of which there were 123 responses, the response rate having calculated to 31.30%.

7.2 Sex : Out of the 123 respondents, 49 of them were female and 74 were male members.

Sex			
Female		Male	
% of Total	N	% of Total	N
39.84%	49	60.16%	74

Table 1. Distribution by sex

7.3 Courses attended by respondents

There is a need to identify whether the respondents are familiarised with or have attended classes or programmes related to research, or citation guides, orientation programs at libraries and so on. These spaces are important because these become powerful mediums and tools that can be used to spread awareness and educate people.

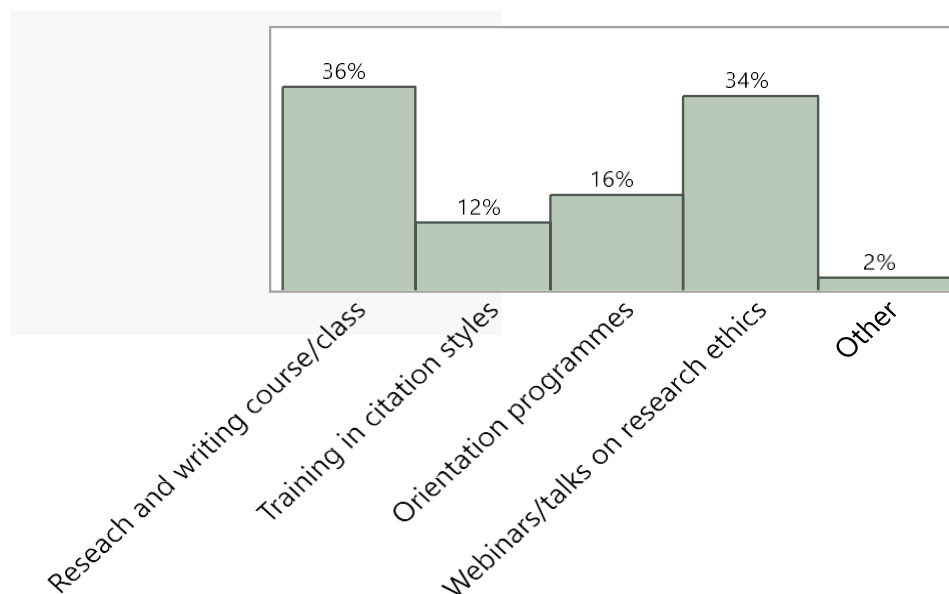


Fig.1 Courses attended by respondents

Totally 36% have attended research and writing classes or courses, 12% have received training in citation styles and 16% have attended orientation programmes, 34% have attended webinars or talks on research ethics and about 2% have not attended any of them.

7.4 Understanding of the meaning of plagiarism

All of the respondents have stated that they are familiar with the term plagiarism. But the perception of respondents differs. The following figure shows the respondents perception of plagiarism.

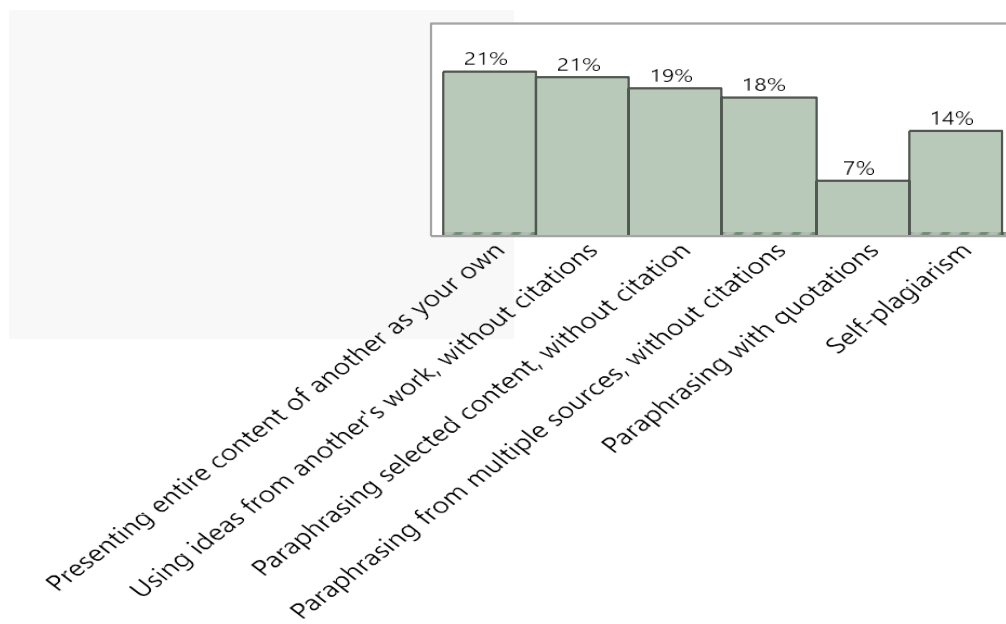


Fig 2. Researchers perception of plagiarism

Here, in the Fig.2, we can see that 21% of the respondents have agreed that presenting entirety of another author's work as their own is plagiarism. Another 21% have stated plagiarism is when a researcher uses ideas from another author's work, without giving due credit. A 19% have stated that when researchers paraphrase selected content from another author's work, it is plagiarism. An 18% of respondents feel that plagiarism also occurs when a researcher paraphrases from multiple places. A 7% of respondents have stated that if there are no citations, then even paraphrasing with quotations can be considered plagiarism. 14% understand that plagiarism can also be self-plagiarism.

7.5 Reasons of plagiarism

It is understandable that there are various reasons why researchers may feel the need to plagiarise. Plagiarism is both morally and legally wrong, but still attempts of plagiarism is rampant and still growing. It is important to understand why this is so. Although, there can be multiple reasons of doing so, some of them have been highlighted in the questionnaire to be identified by the respondents.

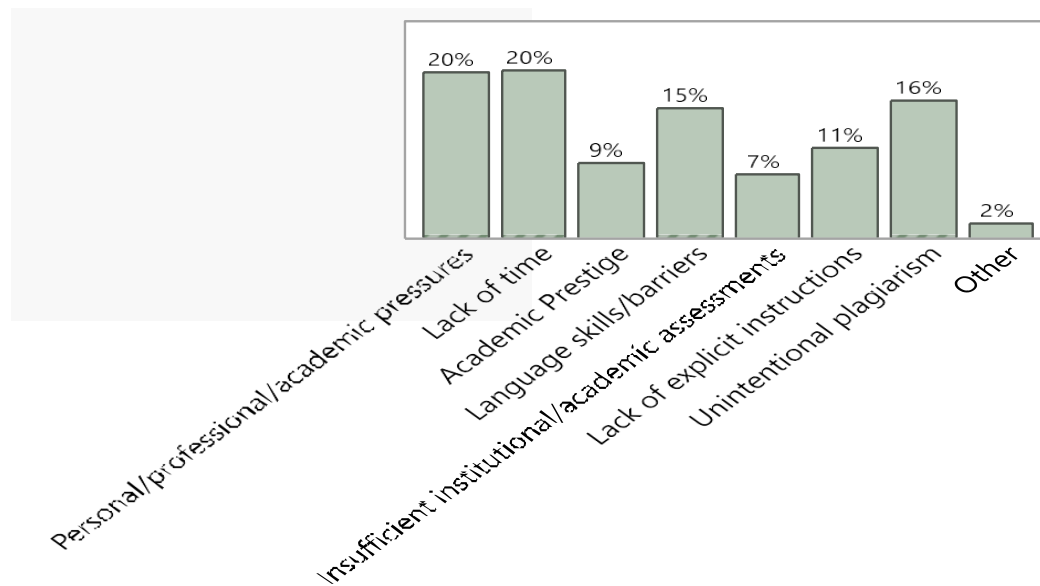


Fig. 3. Reasons for plagiarism

20% of respondents have agreed that researchers are prone to plagiarism because of environmental pressures like personal, professional and academic pressures. 20% have also agreed that researchers plagiarise because of a general lack of time as they scramble to finish their work on time. 9% have agreed that researchers care about their academic prestige which makes them commit acts of plagiarism. It is important here to remember that this same act can also be detrimental to their reputation and academic prestige. Another 15% have agreed that students who are attempting research work in a language different to their mother tongue or a language academically accepted but not something that they researcher is comfortable with, they might see the attraction of picking up words and sentences from somewhere else and presenting as their own. There might also be some embarrassment from not being able to come up with a good writing, so they plagiarise. There might also be a general lack of assessments in their universities or institutions which make it difficult to assess a students work and separate the plagiarised from the original contribution.

7% of the respondents have voted in favour of this. 11% of the respondents have also said that there might a lack of instruction or teaching from the university's side which may hamper the level of awareness that the student has. A 16% of the respondents have said that plagiarism can also be self-plagiarism. Researchers might not be aware that once their work is submitted, they cannot use the same writing for another similar work.

There is also another 2% of responses which state that authors may plagiarise because of general laziness. One person has also said that plagiarism may be because of their situation with less reputed guides and co-guides.

7.6 Attempts at Plagiarism:

The following table shows the rate of occurrence of plagiarism by respondents and their peers.

Rate of recurrence	Plagiarism by peers		Plagiarism by respondent	
	N	% of Total	N	% of Total
Frequently	13	10.66%	7	5.79%
Never	37	30.33%	62	51.24%
Occasionally	27	22.13%	8	6.61%
Rarely	45	36.89%	44	36.36%

Table 2. Attempts at plagiarism

A 10.66% of the people have stated that they have seen their peers frequently plagiarising in one form or the other, 22.13% have seen their peers plagiarising occasionally, and a 38.89% have said that they have rarely seen their peers plagiarising. And lastly, 30.33% of respondents have stated that they have never seen their peers plagiarising.

On the opposite spectrum, only 5.79% of people admitted to committing plagiarism at some point, 51.24% have stated that they have never committed any act of plagiarism. A 6.61% of respondents have admitted to plagiarising occasionally, and another 36.36% have stated that they have plagiarised at some point, but very rarely.

7.7 Awareness of plagiarism check software

Anti-Plagiarism software helps to find out the percentage of plagiarized content in the manuscript. MAHE has subscribed TURNITIN software and all MAHE libraries have exclusive logins to the software. All faculty members of the university have been given access to the software.

Through the survey it is found that 99.2% of researchers are aware of plagiarism check software, while a mere 1% have stated otherwise. The next question that arises from this, is whether they use them or not.

Use of Plagiarism Check software							
10 - 15 times		More than 5 times		Less than 5 times		Never	
% of Total	N	% of Total	N	% of Total	N	% of Total	N
26.83%	33	20.33%	25	52.03%	64	0.81%	1

Table 3. Use of plagiarism check software

It can be seen from above table that while researchers/respondents are aware of the existence of anti-plagiarism software, the percentage of use is different from user to user. Out of the 123 respondents, only one has stated that he/she have never used such a software.

The patterns of use may differ because of a variety of reasons. Researchers in their final stage have to publish papers for which the manuscript has to be checked against plagiarism. Moreover, researchers should use plagiarism software before submitting their DAC reports.

This study shows that 26.83% of respondents have used a plagiarism check software about 10-15 times, 20.33% have used them more than 5 times, a 52.03% of respondents have use such software less than 5 times, and a 0.81% have never used them. After knowing the patterns of use, another question that might arise is which are these anti-plagiarism software that the respondents are aware of.

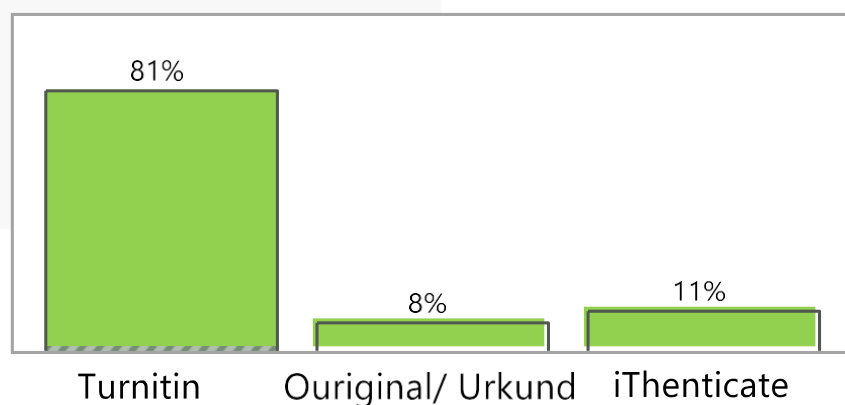


Fig. 4. Awareness of different plagiarism check software

Study reveals that 81% among the respondents are aware of Turnitin, a widely used and popular software, is also a software that is currently being subscribed by Manipal Academy of Higher Education. This in turn also means that a vast majority of the student population, and not just the respondents, would have been exposed to the workings of the software, even as a part of their coursework. Apart from this, an 8% of the respondents are aware of Ouriginal/Urkund and an additional 11% is aware of iThenticate. The responses did not indicate if any of the respondents are aware of any othersoftware, free or commercial.

7.8 Awareness of citation styles and reference management tools

Use and approval of different citation styles differ from university to university and from research guide to research guide. Citing is one of the most important parts of research work, if one wants to avoid going over the maximum plagiarism/similarity percentage allowed by their university. Thus, students, are generally aware of the different citation styles and may even be frequent users and experts in two or more citation styles. Fig. 5. shows the awareness percentage of citation styles in students. A 32% of respondents state that they are aware of different citation styles, but are not very familiar with them. According to 64% of respondents, they are aware of citation styles and are appropriately skilled at using one, two or more styles and about 4% of respondents have stated that they are not aware of any citation styles.

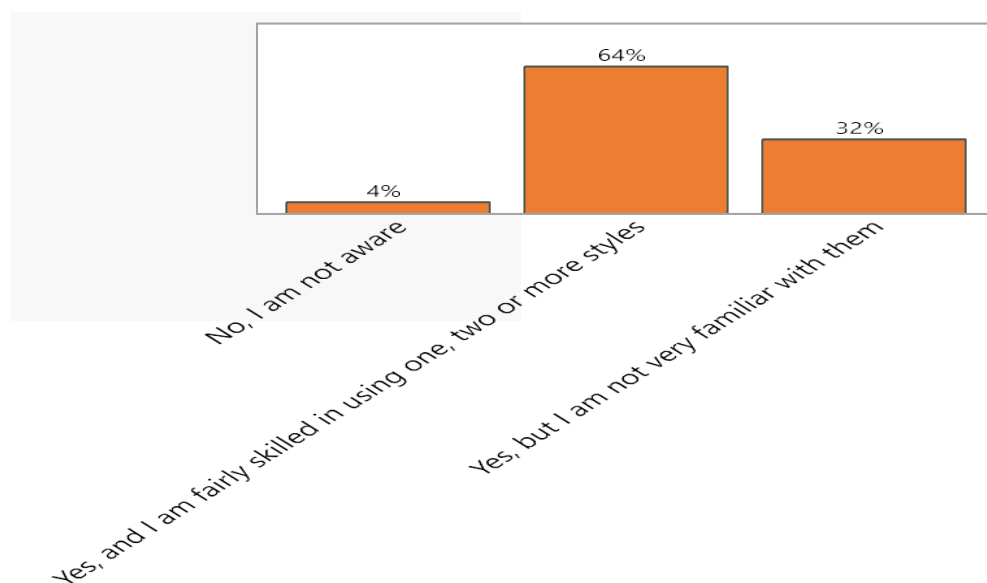


Fig 5. Awareness of citation styles

When considering citation styles, one has to also consider reference management software, which are a boon when managing and storing citations and bibliography and are a huge help for students and researchers. Manual citation and bibliography methods take too long, wasting valuable time of the researcher. So, the use of reference management software has become popular and researchers and students are generally encouraged to do so by their universities.

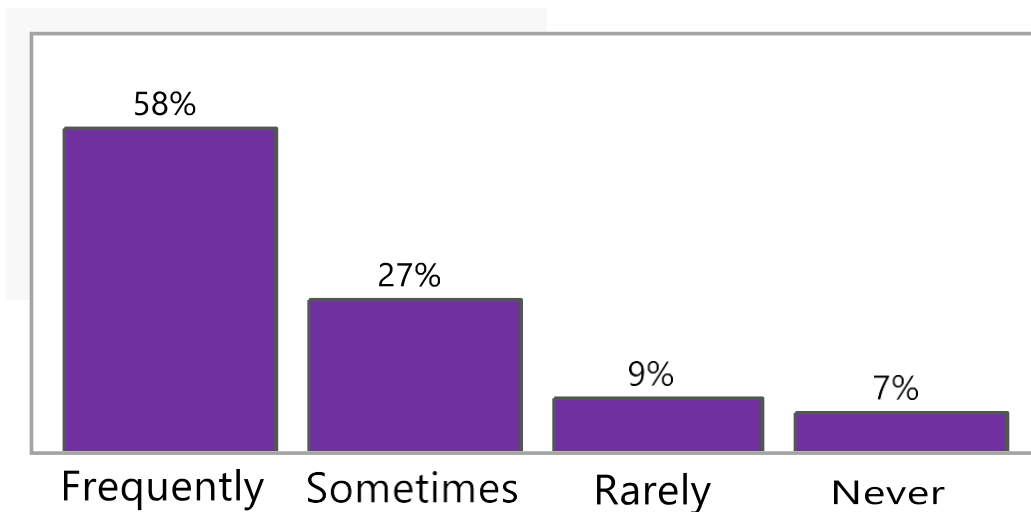


Fig. 6. Use of reference management software

A 58% of the respondents are frequently using reference management software like Mendeley and EndNote, and another 27% state that they sometimes use these softwares. A 9% of the respondents state that they have very rarely used reference management software and finally, a 7% of respondents have stated that they have never used them.

7.9 Awareness of paraphrasing tools

One of the most common methods of plagiarism is through paraphrasing. Students and respondents may paraphrase entire contents of articles or certain passages from one or more articles. This is helped through by various paraphrasing software that exists for free on the internet. The question specific to this section that was asked to the respondents was if they are aware of paraphrasing software that is available free on the internet. The results show that 56.91% agree that they are aware of the existence of such tools, 36.59% of respondents state that they are not aware of such tools, and an additional 6.50% of respondents are unsure about their response.

Awareness of free paraphrasing tools					
Yes		No		Maybe	
% of Total	N	% of Total	N	% of Total	N
56.91%	70	36.59%	45	6.50%	8

Table 4. Awareness of free paraphrasing tools

7.10 Awareness of plagiarism policies

Each and every institution/ university has its own code of ethics/conduct and policies when it comes to research work. Manipal Academy of Higher Education has its own policy for academic dishonesty and plagiarism. A student of MAHE, who is pursuing research work should be aware of this very policy and should be also aware of the consequences of misconduct, if caught.

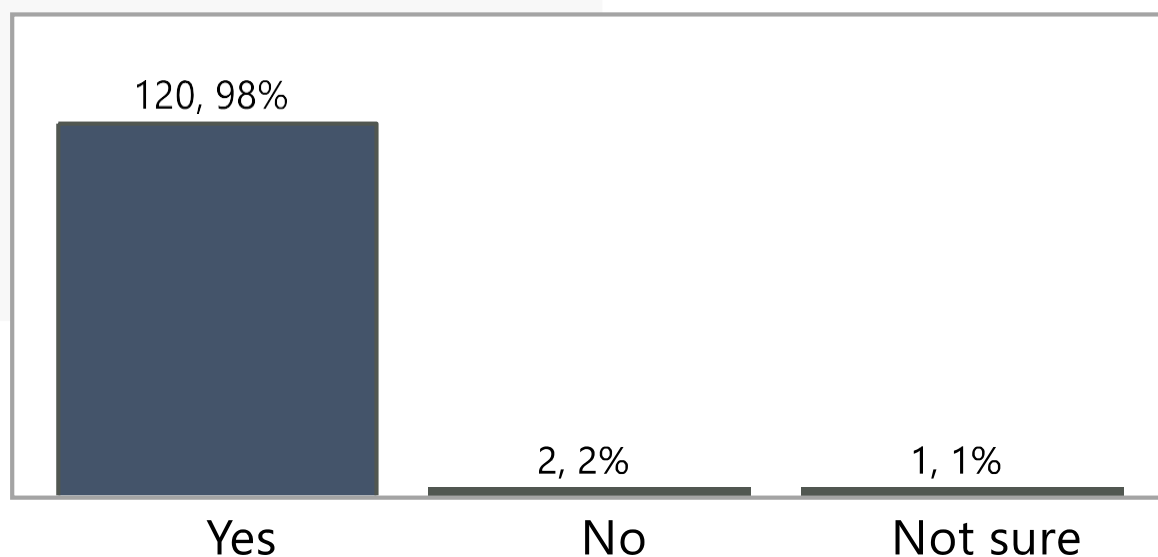


Fig. 7. Familiarity with university's plagiarism policy

The above Figure shows how familiar the respondents are with the university's plagiarism policy. A good number of respondents (98%) are very familiar with it. 2% of respondents say that they are not familiar with the university's policy. Another 1% stands unsure.

7.11 Different degrees of plagiarism as perceived by respondents

This section concerns the last part of the questionnaire which was distributed to the respondents. This is related to one of the objectives of this study which sought to understand if researchers considered some forms of plagiarism to be more serious than others. This is also linked to what their understanding of plagiarism is, and what they consider to be acts of plagiarism. The questions were posed in a Likert style, where the respondents were asked to rate every statement by the level of severity, from 1 to 5.

FreqShare	Presenting the entire content of another author's work as your own					Total Responses
	1 Not Sure	2 Not plagiarised	3 Minor plagiarism	4 Mid-range	5 Highly plagiarised	
All	7 5.7%	2 1.6%	4 3.3%	0 0%	110 89.4%	123
FreqShare	Using ideas from another author's work, without citations					
All	3 2.4%	6 4.9%	12 9.8%	41 33.3%	61 49.6%	123
FreqShare	Paraphrasing selected content from another author's work, without citation					
All	2 1.6%	5 4.1%	22 17.9%	48 39.0%	46 37.4%	123
Freq Share	Paraphrasing from multiple sources, without citations					
All	2 1.6%	13 10.6%	19 15.4%	53 43.1%	36 29.3%	123
FreqShare	'Cut and Paste' or Paraphrasing from your own work/ Self-Plagiarism					
All	14 11.4%	25 20.3%	27 22.0%	27 22.0%	30 24.4%	123
Freq Share	Quoting a paragraph with citations					
All	24 19.5%	44 35.8%	23 18.7%	15 12.2%	17 13.8%	123

Table 5: Different degrees of plagiarism as perceived by respondents

The above table shows that highest percentage of respondents (89.4%) felt that 'presenting the entire content of another author's work as ones own' is considered as more serious as per as plagiarism is concerned. 49.6% of respondents felt that 'using ideas from another author's work without citations' falls under high plagiarism.

8. Findings

- ◆ All of the respondents are familiar with the term ‘plagiarism’ and the awareness came from different places/events. i.e. from course papers (31%), teaching staff (29%), peers (9%), and from the paper publication process(5%).
- ◆ Respondents fix different meanings to the word, depending on their level of awareness. 21% claim *verbatim copying* is plagiarism, 21% feel *taking ideas without citing* is plagiarism, 19% claim that plagiarism is *paraphrasing from selected content*, 18% think it is when there is *paraphrasing from multiple places* and a 7% think that *paraphrasing with quotations* is plagiarism. 14% of respondents think *self-plagiarism* is also plagiarism.
- ◆ Reasons for plagiarism vary from respondent to respondent. 20% think that plagiarism happens because of personal, academic or professional pressures, another 20% feel that students plagiarise because of lack of time, 9% choose academic prestige as the reason , 15% think that language barriers enable plagiarist behaviour. 7% choose poor institutional/ academic assessments, and 11% claim that the reason is lack of explicit instructions. Another 16% think that plagiarism can also be unintentional. The rest of the 2% choose reasons like lack of interest, laziness, etc.
- ◆ The study points out that 5.79% of respondents have admitted to having plagiarised frequently, and another 51% say that they have never plagiarised. Others have admitted to having plagiarised occasionally (6.61%) or very rarely (36.36%). They have also seen their peer plagiarising rarely (36.89%), or occasionally (22.13%). Some have seen them plagiarising frequently (10.66%), and some have never seen them (20.33%).

- ◆ The study also focused on the respondents' view on severity in the different types of plagiarism. A vast majority of the respondents think that presenting the entire content of somebody else's work as your own is the highest degree of plagiarism (84%), and 49.6% believe that ideas without citations are plagiarised, and then again 37% of the respondents feel that paraphrasing content from one author without citing is highly plagiarised. 41.1% feel that paraphrasing from multiple places is moderately plagiarised. A 24.4% believe that self-plagiarism is wrong. On the other hand, 35.8% believe that quoting along with citing prevents plagiarism.
- ◆ Citations present a sure way of acknowledging the original content of other authors and at the same time, avoid being labelled as a plagiarist. The study shows that 32% of the respondents are aware of citation styles, but are not used to them. A majority 64% feel that they are quite capable of handling two or more styles. And only 4% of respondents remain unaware of citation styles.

When it comes to reference management software, the study shows that 58% of the respondents frequently use reference management software, and 27% use them sometimes, and 9% rarely use them. 7% of the respondents have recorded that they have never used reference management software.

- ◆ As per awareness of plagiarism detection software is concerned 99.2 % of respondents have stated that they are aware of these tools. Out of the total population surveyed 26.83% have had the opportunity to use these kinds of software about 10-15 times, and 20.33% have used them more than 5 times. Majority of them have used such tools less than 5 times (52.03%).

- ◆ The study also found that Turnitin (81%) seems to be the most popular software among the researchers, followed by iThenticate (11%) and then Ouriginal (8%).

9.Recommendations

The study recommends that the institutions can have a collaborative role with the library and librarians, as the latter has a wide range of knowledge and skills in tasks like literature search, publication rules and ethics, research methodology and citation methods, etc.

Training and literacy programmes for not only the students and researchers but also for the professors is required. Mandatory workshops or training concerning building good research habits, ethics, etc. are necessary. Teaching staff should promote the institute policy on plagiarism and academic integrity, as well as encourage their students to explore original ideas and writing. At the same time, students should be encouraged to actively attend and participate in webinars, workshops, etc., so that they may gather enough knowledge on how to prevent plagiarism, learn tricks on writing good research papers, learn citation styles, etc.

Libraries should offer more and more literacy programs, research- oriented services, like literature search, making available plagiarism detection software, reference management tools, etc.

10.Conclusion

All of the respondents are aware of plagiarism. The availability of a plagiarism checking software, like Turnitin, is an added advantage for the research scholar of MIT, MAHE. This has also helped in publishing quality papers by the researchers. This, in turn, has helped in getting a good university ranking.

Even after having Turnitin, there are instances of plagiarism among the researchers/respondents. This may be because the respondents are not properly trained in citation styles or research ethics.

Different respondents attach different degrees of plagiarism for the different types of plagiarism. Anyway, the vast majority of the respondents consider presenting the entire content of somebody else's work as the author's own work as the highest degree of plagiarism.

From the study, it is understood that the majority of the respondents are aware of the various citation styles, but they are not using them. So, the guides of these research scholars can insist on the use of these citation styles while writing their reports. This will also bring down the percentage of plagiarism. MAHE has made available the reference management softwares like Mendeley, EndNote, etc.

The plagiarism checking software, Turnitin, is highly used by the researchers. MAHE has made available the enterprise license of the software for its faculty members and libraries. Plagiarism is not a new concept but is there since hundreds of years, and it is not something which can be eradicated easily, if at all. But what can be done is to keep raising awareness, and to keep practicing habits that deter plagiarism.

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