**UGC Regulations on Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism: Some Reflections**

**Introduction**

The UGC regulation titled *Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions, Regulations 2018* dated 23rd July 2018 (UGC, 2018) can be considered as a revolutionary step towards ensuring truth and justice in the learning-teaching processes in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country. Though the UGC took a tough stand against plagiarism even before, a comprehensive regulation on the matter is for the first time. Besides, the regulation emphasises the promotion of **Academic Integrity,** a term which is not that familiar to our academic community, but which has an enormous influence on the academic life of faculty and students of HEIs abroad, especially, in developed countries like UK and USA.

**What is Academic Integrity?**

 The term **Academic Integrity** denotes a set of core values that the members of an academic community, including the faculty, students, and administrators should practice while performing their respective duties. According to the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI), a non-profit organisation that promotes academic integrity, it is a commitment to six fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility and Courage (Fishman, 2012). In other words, in order to achieve and maintain academic integrity every member in the academic community should involve in scholarly activities with honesty, fairness, responsibility, mutual trust and respect, and they should have the courage to act on these values.

The violation or breaching of academic integrity is known as **Academic Dishonesty.** Plagiarism,anacademic menace widely discussed in India in recent times, is considered as the most heinous form of academic dishonesty. Other fraudulent practices such as copying during examinations, helping others for copying, giving proxy attendance for someone else, multiple submission of assignments and term papers, falsification of research data and fabrication of research findings, act of taking someone else's examination, preparing fake educational documents and certificates, stealing or destroying of other’s intellectual works, getting the research works and documents prepared by others and illegally availing educational benefits also come under the purview of academic dishonesty. Disciplinary actions against academic dishonesty in HEIs in the western countries range from a warning to expulsion/ termination from the organisation depending upon the nature and severity of the case.

The ICAI prescribes the following steps for establishing a climate of integrity in educational institutions:

* Develop and publicize clear, fair, academic integrity policies, procedures, and statements that can be effectively understood and consistently implemented.
* Promote positive aspects of academic integrity amongst all segments of the campus community. Promotional activities should include discussions of the fundamental values, development of ethical decisionmaking capacities, and highlighting the link between academic integrity and broader ethical concerns.
* Educate all members of the community about academic integrity standards so that expectations are well understood as integral components of the community culture.
* Practice the actions described in campus policies consistently and fairly. Provide support to those who follow the policies and uphold standards.
* Develop, explain, and administer equitable, transparent systems for adjudicating integrity violations.
* Stay abreast of current developments in technology and educational practices in order to anticipate increased risks and address potential problems.
* Regularly assess the effectiveness of academic integrity policies, procedures, and practices. Revise and revitalize as necessary to update and improve. (Fishman, 2012, pp 30-31).

**UGC Regulations**

According to the UGC regulations mentioned above, the actions that are to be taken by the HEIs in the country for promoting academic integrity and preventing plagiarism can be summarised as below:

* Organize awareness programmes on academic integrity and training classes on scholarly writing skills, and incorporate relevant topics on academic integrity including the responsible conduct of research and publication ethics in the syllabus of undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes.
* Establish a technology-based mechanism for the prevention of plagiarism.
* Form expert panels to detect, report and handle plagiarism and act on the decisions taken by the panels.

Unawareness of the concept of academic integrity and the lack of academic writing skills are widely considered as the causes of academic dishonesty, especially those associated with plagiarism and associated issues (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014; Bethany, 2016; Das, 2018; MacLennan, 2018). In such a scenario, the UGC’s appeal to the HEIs to conduct awareness and training programmes on academic integrity and related topics deserves significance. In the HEIs in western countries, the Library and Information Centres of the respective organisations are responsible for conducting such programmes as a part of their Information Literacyactivities. Information literacy is a “set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 1989). The information literacy has been receiving much attention in Indian academic libraries in the recent years, and training programmes and workshops are being conducted on various topics, including those suggested by the UGC in its regulation such as plagiarism detection and reference management. However, in most instances, the concerned library and information centres are conducting such programmes by inviting experts from other organisations. This situation must be changed, and the library and information professionals should themselves be empowered to train their faculty, staff and students on matters related to the academic integrity. Moreover, the HEIs must adequately plan and incorporate appropriate topics of academic integrity in their undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral level, based on the nature and type of programmes that they offer at each level.

 Establishment of a technology-based mechanism for preventing plagiarism as suggested by the UGC is the need of the day for the HEIs in the country. The primary issue in this regard is the selection of an appropriate tool for detecting plagiarism as there are several free as well as commercial tools available. The efficiency of these tools in detecting plagiarism (*in a strict sense, the ability to find similarity with the already published literature*) vary widely depending on their coverage of the published literature. Hence, it is better if the UGC itself decides a standard tool for detecting plagiarism in HEIs across the country. In this regard, a recent announcement made by Shri. Prakash Javedkar, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development that Turnitin software,  a US-based commercial software tool used by thousands of organizations in hundreds of countries across the world, will be made available for all the higher education institutions for plagiarism checking received much attention in the academic community (“Centre to use 'Turnitin' software,” 2018). However, the UGC has not yet issued any formal communication in this regard.

The UGC instructs the HEIs to constitute a Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP) to investigate the allegation of plagiarism at the level of the individual [teaching] department of the Institute and an Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP) to act on the recommendations of the DAIP as well as to act on the directly reported cases of plagiarism. The DAIP should have three members with the Head of the Department as the Chairman of the panel, and a Senior Academician from any other department and a person well-versed with anti-plagiarism tools as members. The IAIP should have four members with the Pro-Vice Chancellor/ Dean / Senior Academician of the Institution as the Chairman of the panel, and one Senior Academicians other than the Chairman, one from another organization and a person well-versed with anti-plagiarism tools as members. Constitution of such panels/ committees will undoubtedly facilitate an effective monitoring system to prevent plagiarism and ensure academic integrity. However, incorporating a subject expert in the area of the alleged plagiarised document either in the DAIP or IAIP as an invited member will make the decision making more objective and judicious.

The broad categories of research works that need to be subjected to scrutiny for plagiarism as per the UGC regulation are Theses and Dissertations and Research Papers for Publication. It exempts assignments, term papers, course works, essays and answer scripts from scrutiny which will be a relief for the students. Another notable type of scholarly work exempted from plagiarism checking is project reports. The regulation is not clear whether the excemption is applicable only for the student project reports or not. Because, there are hundreds of funded projects worth crores of rupees going on in different Universities and other institutions across the country sponsored by various government and non-government agencies, and the authenticity of such project works will become questionable if the reports are excluded from plagiarism checking. A clarification on the matter from the UGC will be helpful and avoid confusion.

The regulation excludes the following types of content in a research work from similarity check for plagiarism: quoted portions with permission and attribution; table of contents, preface, acknowledgements, references, and bibliography; generic terms, laws, standard symbols and standard equations; common knowledge up to fourteen consecutive words. The exclusion of relatively unimportant portions of a research work such as preface, table of contents and acknowledgements, and those which are more likely to be matching with the published literature covered by the antiplagiarism tool such as references, bibliograpy, generic terms, laws, standard symbols and equations and the common knowledge will undoubtedly reduce the similarity rate in the research work. Of these, the HEIs can instruct the researcher herself to omit the portions such as preface, table of contents, acknowledgements, references and bibliograpy before submitting the work for plagiarism ( similarity ) checking. However, exclusion of generic terms, laws, standard symbols and equations as well as the common knowledge constituted of 14 consecutive words from a research work can only done by a subject expert in the area of the research by screening the similarity report generated by an antiplagiarism tool.

The similarities existing in a research work with the published literature, after making all the exclusions, will be considered as plagiarism and penalty will be imposed depending on the severity of the case. For deciding the penalty, the HEI should quantify the plagiarised content and fit it into any one of the four levels ranging from Level 0 with similarities up to 10% to Level 4 with similarities above 60%. An issue that deserves attention here is the calculation of percentage of similarity. Anti-plagiarism tools calculate the percentage by the amount of similar or matching text compared to the total number of words in the research work. Thus the percentage of similarity will vary significantly among the research works depending on the number of words in the work. E.g., the percentage of similarity caused by the presence of a block of 10-15 continuous words in a 3-page work will be much higher than that of a lengthy paragraph in a 200-page work. Moreover, the percentage of similarity will vary depending on the anti-plagiarism tool used.

The penalty clauses for plagiarism in the Regulation are different for ‘Theses and Dissertations’ and ‘Academic and Research Publications’. Here, the notbale point is that the Regulation considers persons committing plagiarism in ‘Theses and Dissertations’ as students and those in ‘Academic and Research Publications’ as employees such as faculty and staff, and the penalties are decided accordingly. Penalty for plagiarism in ‘Theses and Dissertations’ ranges from resubmission of the script within a stipulated time period to cancellation of registration of the programme. Penalty for plagiarism in ‘Academic and Research Publications’ ranges from withdrawal of the manuscript from publication to denial of permission for research supervision for three years and termination from the service for repeated offense. However, the regulation is silent on the penalty for the postgraduate and doctoral students committing plagiarism in academic and research publications.

**Conclusion**

Academic dishonesty has become more prevalent in Indian HEIs than ever before, and even some of our University Vice-chancellors came under suspicion of committing plagiarism. In this context, the UGC, the apex body mandated to coordinate and determine the standards of higher education in the country deserves appreciation in drafting and implementing the regulation on curbing the menace. It will help in creating and maintaining a new culture that upholds the values of academic integrity in our higher education institutions.

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