

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**APPROACH FOR PLAGIARISM CHECKING FOR SUBMITTED THESIS
IN KNUST**

Background

Plagiarism by students in general and graduate students in particular is on the increase. Some instances of plagiarism are:

- Turning in someone else's work as your own;
- Copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks;
- Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- Changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit; and
- Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not.

The practice has even become more sophisticated with the increase in access to online resources by students. It is very common to find thesis submitted by students copied from several thesis or research publications on the same subject, at different academic institutions. In addition, the activities of the so-called thesis contractors have worsened the situation by constant recycling of thesis for their clients who are mainly graduate students. This situation is affecting the quality of thesis submitted by candidates and has the tendency to affect the reputation of the University as far as postgraduate degrees are concerned. In the recent past, the School of Graduate Studies has received embarrassing comments from examiners on thesis submitted to them for assessment. There is therefore the urgent need for the Graduate School to act swiftly to reverse this phenomenon.

One of the effective strategies that a university can use as part of its approach in minimizing the effects of plagiarism, is to deploy electronic plagiarism detection software that can identify identical passages of text in one or more documents. Fortunately, KNUST currently subscribes to **Turnitin**, the leading web-based solution for plagiarism prevention, used by educators worldwide to check originality of submitted works by students. The software can check submitted thesis for potential plagiarism by comparing it against the world's largest comparison database and subsequently producing a similarity report.

Turnitin uses the **Originality Check** tool to compile the **Originality Report**, which contains detailed information about the number of and the use of each primary source in the submitted document. This is done through the **Similarity Index**, which is a percentage of words in the paper that match all the primary sources to all the words in the document. For the School of Graduate Studies, it is proposed that a document is considered plagiarized when the **Similarity Index** is greater than **20 %**.

The **Similarity Index** also shows a copy of the student paper with primary sources. Each primary source is given a color and number. The text within the student's paper, which corresponds to a primary source, will be highlighted in that respective color and attached with its respective number. The percentage of each primary source refers to percentage of words in the entire paper that match the source. It is also proposed that graduate school considers a submitted thesis as plagiarized if it has at least one primary source greater than **5 %**.

This document proposes an approach for adopting **Turnitin** to check thesis submitted by graduate students for plagiarism.

Procedure

A. Before Dispatching the Thesis to the Examiners

1. The following options could be used for submitting the thesis to the Turnitin system:
 - a. A candidate submits the thesis to the Turnitin system
 - b. Submission of thesis to the system on behalf of the student by supervisor
 - c. The Department of the candidate –(Preferred option as there are limited accounts for staff with the current subscription) submits thesis to the system
2. The College / Department reviews and analyzes the Originality report
 - a. If the value of the **Similarity Index** is within the prescribed limits, the thesis should be sent to the Graduate School along with a completed 'Thesis Dispatch Form', **Turnitin** summary report and the first two pages of the **Turnitin** detailed report. The Graduate School will then dispatch the thesis to the External and Internal Examiners
 - b. If the value of the Similarity Index is above the prescribed limits, the Head of the Department (or a Designate) reviews the detailed report and does any of the following:
 - i. Ask the student to make the necessary rewriting and resubmit the revised version into the system. Proceed to point **a** under **2**or
 - ii. The Head of the Department (or Designate) certifies that the similarities produced by Turnitin are not plagiarism issues. Recommend the dispatch of the thesis to Graduate School with a note to the Dean of Graduate School explaining the reasons for the higher values of the similarity index .The thesis should be sent to Graduate School along with a completed 'thesis Dispatch Form', Turnitin summary report and the first two pages of the Turnitin detailed report. The Graduate School will then dispatch the thesis to the External Examiner.

B. Dispatching of the Thesis to the External Examiner

1. The School of Graduate Studies is responsible for ensuring that the thesis is submitted to Turnitin before forwarding it to the External and Internal Examiners.

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2. The Dean, School of Graduate Studies approves the Originality reports and authorizes the dispatch of the thesis to the External and Internal Examiners.