# Reasons for English Undergraduate Students to Plagiarize

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**Abstract:** Plagiarism is associated with a form of research misconducts that falsify another's concepts, opinions, or words and recognize it as private property without giving proper citation of the original source. This article is a part of a larger study on English undergraduate students' attitude toward plagiarism which emphasize on the main reasons that might appear for doing plagiarism. This study was conducted at universities in Malang. The data comes from English undergraduate students' questionnaires. The result shows that the students present their confusion in determining their attitude toward plagiarism. This confusion were at least associated with two main reasons; external and internal factors. Further, recommendations for universities are provided.

**Key Words:** plagiarism reason, undergraduate students, reasons, universities in Malang

**Abstrak:** Plagiarisme merupakan salah satu bentuk pelanggaran dalam pemalsuan ide atau kata-kata seseorang yang selanjutnya diklaim sebagai hasil karya pribadi tanpa memberikan pengakuan sebagai sumber asli. Artikel ini merupakan penjabaran dari penelitian utama, yaitu sikap mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris terhadap tindakan *plagiarism*. Penelitian ini berfokus pada alasan utama yang mungkin muncul ketika mahasiswa melakukan *plagiarism*. Penelitian dilakukan di beberapa universitas di Malang. Data didapatkan dari angket mahasiswa. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami kebingungan dalam menentukan sikap mereka terhadap kasus *plagiarism*. Kebingungan ini dikaitkan dengan dua alasan utama, faktor eksternal dan internal. Selanjutkan, peneliti memberikan rekomendasi untuk universitas.

**Kata kunci:** alasan plagiarisme, mahasiswa sarjana, universitas di malang

## INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism certainly is not a new issue in higher education. Some experts and researchers find it difficult to define plagiarism precisely. Yet, some definitions of plagairism were explained in many sources and it appears some common definitions. Perrin (2010) refers to plagiarism as an act that happens when someone puts the ideas of someone else without giving the proper attribution to the source. Further, another definition of plagiarism related to education context is that unintentional or intentional action not to give reference to ideas or words of others. Plagiarism, specifically, is a phrase to define a wrong act that is done and taking illegally somebody's product or composition and acknowledge it as one's own (C., 2010). From those explanations, the main point that can be concluded is that the act of plagiarism includes stealing ideas, thoughts, or words from another person, using the information without acknowledg-ing the sources with proper formatting, citations, and references, and presenting the original author's ideas as the original thoughts.

When we talk about learning a language, we should learn four major language skills, one of which is writing skill. This skill is considered tempting because students should determine what to write, how to write, and how to deliver their ideas into an attractive writing which requires their creativity and imagination (Petriæ, 2012; Shaw, 2013). As EFL students, students in Indonesia face irritating experiences because students' mother language is unlike English which have different language roots, rules, and rhetorical patterns in writing. It can be quite challenging for native speaker of Indonesian to learn English language. This long process of producing a good writing sometimes makes students feel stressed and under pressure (Mahmood, 2009). Consequently, they commit plagiarism.

There have been some cases of plagiarism either happen in Indonesia or in other countries that attract the society attention. Plagiarism case ever happened in 2012 in one of highly respectable universities in Indonesia (Nashruddin, 2015). Publics were shocked when they realized that this case appeared in a university which is supposed to be the area of education. The lectures who wanted to be promoted as professor found commit plagiarism. Consequently the university gave a proper punishment. Even in the place that is assumed to be plagiarism free environment, plagiarism act could also happen there. Another example of plagiarism case occurred in book writing. The author could not provide appropriate quotation and references when she quotes some words from experts. When society found this misconduct dishonesty, this author got charge for intellectual property violation.

Those reported cases of plagiarism above indicate obviously that plagiarism has become a big concern throughout academic institution. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate why students do plagiarism, especially the major reasons for plagiarizing. Some researchers and experts determine multiple reasons that may be attributed for plagiarism behavior. According to Park (2010), in his study, plagiarism could happen because the students face problems in understanding how to write in appropriate quotation, references, and citation. As we know, English is a foreign language in Indonesia, and thus, students might face some difficulties to write in this language. Besides, sometimes they feel unsure which parts are included in general science and on which parts should use references when quoting them. The study further explained that personal values, students' personal attitude which merged to social pressure also encourage students to plagiarize. Moreover, other researchers found some reasons to plagiarize, which are then summarized into internal and external reasons. Lack of awareness to what constitute plagiarism, personal attitudes, and lack of skill at the technical problem on the process of writing are considered as internal reasons (Ramzan, Munir, Siddique, & Asif, 2012). It is believed that EFL students have inadequate confidence using English effectively in their writing that leads to plagiarism. They might feel distressed to perform grammatical mistakes and penalty for any errors in students' composition (Pecorari & Petriæ, 2014). On the contrary, external reasons deal with pressure either it is task, time, grade, or family pressure, internet facilities, and exposure in the institution.

The purpose of this present study is to explore the reasons that might appear behind plagiarism act committed by the students. This minor study was conducted as part of the larger study as the requirement to pass Magister Degree. The result of this study is useful for lecturers and the institutions along with broader educational community because the problems of plagiarism are still growing and in this digital era, which someone easier to conduct plagiarism, the number of plagiarism cases informed enlarged especially in education field.

## METHOD

This present cross sectional study employed a survey design conducted in some universities in Malang. The population was English undergraduate students who have attended Thesis Proposal Writing course which later become the prerequisite to take their *Sarjana Thesis*. At the time this study was conducted, the English Department of four universities in Malang ran the Thesis Proposal Writing courses. Sample of this study were 251 English undergraduate students which consisted of 146 female and 105 male students. Questionnaire was utilized to assess the students' attitude. Section I in the questionnaire consists of students demographic characteristics. Section II consists of the Attitude towards Plagiarism (ATP) questionnaire developed by (Mavrinac, Brumini, Biliæ-Zulle, & Petroveèki, 2010) was adopted to measure three attitudinal factors: 12 statements of positive attitude towards plagiarism, seven items of negative attitude towards plagiarism, and 10 items of subjective norm. This ATP questionnaire contains 29 statements originally on a five point researcher would Likert Scale categorizing from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) respectively. Later in this findings, the researcher adapted the scale into three point Likert Scale to interpret the result easier. The data for each statement in the questionnaire were calculated by summing and converting into percentage to see clearly the difference and interpret every statement to reveal the reasons behind why students conducted plagiarism.

## RESULTS

After conducting the data collection, the researcher evaluated the questionnaire responses. From 251 students' questionnaires, there are 23 questionnaires excluded from data analysis due to missing data.

So, there were 228 students who could fill the entire questionnaire, obtaining a response rate of 91%. From students' characteristics, the researcher found that there were 101 male students and 127 female students. First of all, the general result of this present study shows that more than 50% English undergraduate students show moderate score in three attitudinal factors, which indicate their confusion, either they have to go against plagiarism act or accept it, due to some factors. However, in this minor study, the researcher will only focus on the reasons that might appear in plagiarism act done by the students.

Table 1 demonstrates that the distribution of answers to the ATP questionnaire on first attitudinal factor, which is positive attitude towards plagiarism. As already explained earlier, items on positive attitude attitudinal factor reflects students' acceptance of plagiarism. This is related to actions they do themselves.

Because low score range (12–28) on this first attitudinal factor indicates students oppose plagiarism act, students who put their agreement responses to the statements show their approval to such a plagiarism issue. Further, this data will affirm why students are engaged in this academic dishonesty.

More than 50% students would take people's ideas without proper citation to conceal their lack of knowledge in referencing (statement 1). Related to self-plagiarism, 50% of the students stated that this type of plagiarism is not harmful and someone who does it should not be punished because people will not steal something of their own (statement 3 and 5). In addition, this finding aligned with statement 6 which shows similar result between response options, disagreement and agreement. Over 30% of students agreed on using our own work without providing citation when they have similar work to do.

### Table 1. Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism among English Undergraduate Students

| No | Statements | Response options | Count | Frequency |
|----|-----------|------------------|-------|-----------|
| 1 | Sometimes someone is forced to quote someone else's work because that is the only way to explain something | Disagree | 66 | 29% |
| | | Neutral | 33 | 14% |
| | | Agree | 129 | 57% |
| 2 | When I have no idea in writing, I transcribe partially of a foreign paper. | Disagree | 117 | 51% |
| | | Neutral | 42 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 69 | 30% |
| 3 | Self-plagiarism is not a crime because it is not risky | Disagree | 63 | 28% |
| | | Neutral | 30 | 13% |
| | | Agree | 135 | 59% |
| 4 | I do plagiarize when I only have limited time to do my task. | Disagree | 129 | 57% |
| | | Neutral | 28 | 12% |
| | | Agree | 71 | 31% |
| 5 | Self-plagiarism perpetrators should get different punishment from plagiarist himself. | Disagree | 42 | 18% |
| | | Neutral | 42 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 144 | 63% |
| 6 | It is okay to take some ideas from other studies and put it as the way it is to finish the writing | Disagree | 130 | 57% |
| | | Neutral | 28 | 12% |
| | | Agree | 70 | 31% |
| 7 | Law should give lenient punishment to inexperienced scientists for plagiarism | Disagree | 74 | 32% |
| | | Neutral | 56 | 25% |
| | | Agree | 98 | 43% |
| 8 | It is okay to take previous description of a research design because that research design is a kind of common knowledge. | Disagree | 32 | 14% |
| | | Neutral | 31 | 14% |
| | | Agree | 165 | 72% |
| 9 | It is okay to take some ideas in similar works from other language when someone gets difficulty in delivering his/her ideas. | Disagree | 143 | 63% |
| | | Neutral | 30 | 13% |
| | | Agree | 55 | 24% |
| 10 | If my friend give the permission to use his/her work, I am not engaging in something criminal | Disagree | 102 | 45% |
| | | Neutral | 43 | 19% |
| | | Agree | 83 | 36% |
| 11 | Plagiarism is not a big problem when that plagiarized paper later become well-known and useful for other studies. | Disagree | 103 | 45% |
| | | Neutral | 29 | 13% |
| | | Agree | 96 | 42% |
| 12 | I could not write a scientific paper without plagiarizing. | Disagree | 140 | 61% |
| | | Neutral | 43 | 19% |
| | | Agree | 45 | 20% |

Moreover, students expressed their view on punishment given to the perpetrators. They tended to be more lenient in responding to the perpetrators of plagiarism if those plagiarists are inexperienced researchers (statement 7). They think that everyone must have made a mistake in everyone learning process, and it also happens in this case.

Data on statement 8 depicts that almost three fourths of students agreed to use previous description of a research design to their research since they think a research design they use is the same and they were not allowed to change it. This response is in line with statement 11 which interpreted students' agreement to plagiarism act towards a work if later this work provides great benefits to science or education community. There was no clear attitude on statement 10 which discusses one of the cases that consider plagiarism. Between students who agree to this case and those who put their disagreement shows in Table 1.

The second attitudinal factor, negative attitude towards plagiarism, on Table 2 expressed various situations which reflect disapproval of plagiarism and criticize plagiarism negative effect both to academic and scientific community and the plagiarists themselves. Students whose response shows their agreement on statement 17 have similar number to those who stand their disagreement. There are 56% of students who believed that plagiarized paper does not harm science and 64% of students disagree to that statement.

Similarly, all students are evenly distributed in giving their response to the statement 18.

Table 3, reports students' responses to 10 statements towards subjective norm attitudinal factor. These statements contain students' personal understanding towards plagiarism which happen in society. There are 61% of students who believed that people do not say truth when they are asked about they never commit plagiarism (statement 20). Similarly, 68% students did not believe that writers claim they do not commit plagiarism in the process of composing their writing (statement 22). The majority of students (57%) agreed that they sometimes take some parts of a work to inspire them in their writing (statement 21). Further, consistent result can be seen on statement 23 where students justify their copying act as acceptable performing.

**DISCUSSION**

The focus of this current study was to determine reasons that might be causing plagiarism. Some main tendencies can be seen from the findings. The most frequent reason which appeared is connected to inadequate students' knowledge to what basic principle of plagiarism act. This is similar to the findings by Pupovac, Bilic-Zulle, Mavrinac, and Petrovecki (2013) which explained that this lack of clear attitude could happen due to inadequate students' ability and aware-

**Table 2. Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism among English Undergraduate Students**

| No | Statements | Response options | Count | Frequency |
|----|-----------|------------------|-------|-----------|
| 13 | Plagiarism decrease researchers' interest to conduct more studies. | Disagree | 40 | 18% |
| | | Neutral | 30 | 13% |
| | | Agree | 158 | 69% |
| 14 | Having a forum discussion about plagiarism is critical in this era. | Disagree | 14 | 6% |
| | | Neutral | 22 | 10% |
| | | Agree | 192 | 84% |
| 15 | Plagiarism is acknowledged as minor problem since it is related to using someone else's ideas. | Disagree | 134 | 59% |
| | | Neutral | 28 | 12% |
| | | Agree | 66 | 29% |
| 16 | Plagiarism perpetrators names should be released in society. | Disagree | 58 | 25% |
| | | Neutral | 42 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 128 | 56% |
| 17 | A plagiarized paper has no effect to science field. | Disagree | 146 | 64% |
| | | Neutral | 42 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 128 | 56% |
| 18 | Plagiarists is not suitable to be called as researchers. | Disagree | 79 | 35% |
| | | Neutral | 62 | 27% |
| | | Agree | 87 | 38% |
| 19 | Committing plagiarism is similar to cheating in the examination | Disagree | 43 | 19% |
| | | Neutral | 25 | 11% |
| | | Agree | 160 | 70% |

**Table 3. Subjective Norm towards Plagiarism among English Undergraduate Students**

| No | Statements | Response options | Count | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | People who claim that they never commit plagiarism are lying | Disagree | 32 | 14% |
| | | Neutral | 57 | 25% |
| | | Agree | 139 | 61% |
| 21 | Sometime I imitate some sentences to encourage me in composing article. | Disagree | 64 | 28% |
| | | Neutral | 35 | 15% |
| | | Agree | 129 | 57% |
| 22 | Writers actually do plagiarism even though they declare that they do not do it. | Disagree | 23 | 10% |
| | | Neutral | 50 | 22% |
| | | Agree | 155 | 68% |
| 23 | I do not consider it wrong for copying directly some sentences from my own previous papers. | Disagree | 61 | 27% |
| | | Neutral | 38 | 17% |
| | | Agree | 129 | 57% |
| 24 | Everyone commit plagiarism and it persuades me to do the same thing. | Disagree | 118 | 52% |
| | | Neutral | 37 | 16% |
| | | Agree | 73 | 32% |
| 25 | Plagiarism is not something to worry about. | Disagree | 133 | 58% |
| | | Neutral | 41 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 54 | 24% |
| 26 | I study in a plagiarism-free environment. | Disagree | 132 | 58% |
| | | Neutral | 49 | 21% |
| | | Agree | 47 | 21% |
| 27 | On certain occasions plagiarism is okay | Disagree | 99 | 43% |
| | | Neutral | 41 | 18% |
| | | Agree | 88 | 39% |
| 28 | Whenever I obtain some other urgent assignments, it is allowed to do plagiarism. | Disagree | 148 | 65% |
| | | Neutral | 32 | 14% |
| | | Agree | 48 | 21% |
| 29 | I keep plagiarizing because I haven't been caught yet. | Disagree | 196 | 86% |
| | | Neutral | 20 | 9% |
| | | Agree | 12 | 5% |

ness of the priority of being honest in academic field. Students justify retyping methodology statements on previous studies because they think that research methodology only covers some rigid literature reviews that should not be changed. Students claim that copying their friend's paper with his or her permission are not included in plagiarism act (statement 10). Based on the response, they know that plagiarism is something bad, yet they cannot sort out what actions are included in plagiarism. Whereas, according to Smith, Ghazali, and Minhad (2007), the situation that can provoke pupils to plagiarize is that copying or even claiming friend's paper as their own, with or without his or her recognition. This can be the evidence to students' belief.

The students also have difficulty in determining the type of plagiarism. This can be seen in the statements related to self-plagiarism. Statement 3 and statement 5 are both the statements which are associated to self-plagiarism. Students tend to give agree opinion in self-plagiarism statements, which means that these kind of activities are not included in plagiarism issue or at least this does not bother them. This is connected to the statement 23 which show students

performing this self-plagiarism. They replicate their previous paper or just some sentences there without further development or having appropriate quotations.

Another possible act that associated with the tendency towards plagiarism is that not knowing how to cite correctly (Octaberlina, 2009). Statement 1 can be the evidence. The students do not deny that they sometimes cannot refrain themselves on taking other people's words without proper citation. This statement is consistent with statement 21, revealing that they sometimes copy some sentences to trigger their idea in their writing. This finding indicates that students have limited skill in academic skills in terms of constructing their arguments and providing the right citations. Major opinion on the knowledge of plagiarism concept where 72% agree on using previous description of method on a research (statement 8) has been another proof that students do not fully understand plagiarism itself. This is also followed that students consider it is okay to let scientific paper which are the result of plagiarism, if this work is useful for society.

This is also believed that students' attitude is also influenced by common thinking about plagiarism in society, whether it is accepted or not. If soci-

ety considers plagiarism as acceptable act, it will influence someone personal belief. He/she might think that plagiarism act is not a big deal. This explanation can be the evidence of statement 20 and 22. It is quite surprising that students believe people around them have done plagiarism in their academic environment. The researcher convinces that students' statement are related to society beliefs to this academic dishonesty or students see and experience it in their academic daily life.

The last thing is that pressure to commit plagiarism can come up due to the influence of cultural differences in learning and presenting the argument in academic writing. EFL learners tend to have oriental writing style which the characteristics are circular and indirect. Students do not deliver the topic in a straight forward way but it is viewed from different perspectives and go around the central point. Because the participants in this study are English undergraduate students, they deal with English which incline to direct and linear writing style. Therefore, they tend to be more lenient to the inexperienced researcher who commits plagiarism because they think the perpetrator still in learning process of new material (statement 7).

## CONCLUSION

This particular study has found several factors that were correlated with plagiarism act among English undergraduate students in Malang. Some factors that were previously identified by some researchers also appear in this present study. Inadequate knowledge of the concept of plagiarism, the type, and anything related to plagiarism issue were proven by students' opinion to the questionnaire. Poor academic skill in constructing, delivering their critical arguments, and paraphrasing also become the trigger to commit plagiarism. Another variable that was emerged to this kind of academic dishonesty is that common thinking about plagiarism in students' academic society. Students might judge that academic community should not give more attentions to plagiarism issues, so that this social belief affects their personal belief.

The findings of this minor study have some implication for educators. Lectures require to provide more instructions and materials in Thesis Writing courses to cut down students ambiguity regarding pla-

giarism activity, to improve their understanding of paraphrasing, citation, and referencing, and to foster a sense of awarenes to this academic dinshonesty. Lectures should provide the assessessment which might recognize plagiarism in the students writing, such as using Turnitin or other provided technology which can detect plagiarism.

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