



## Hidden Reasons behind the Plagiarism of Iranian TEFL University Students in Their Written Studies: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

*In recent years, the issue of plagiarism has received a lot of attention from the academic world. However, few studies have been conducted in the area of detecting why students will be drawn into such a hateful action. The factors that overtly or covertly contribute to the growth of plagiarism among graduate TEFL students in Iran were investigated in this study. In order to accomplish this, the researchers employed a qualitative approach by conducting a semi-structured interview with 20 graduate students studying English language teaching (ELT) to ascertain their perceptions of the underlying causes of plagiarism. The participants were selected through convenience sampling strategy and they varied in age from 26 to 55. Based on the data collected from the content analysis procedure of the transcribed interviews, the main causes of plagiarism among TEFL students were decoded which included 'low English proficiency', 'lack of time', 'lack of support from the instructor', 'lack of interest in the topic, 'laziness or a lack of motivation', and 'the use of science as a market for money making. The current study is of high significance since it has vital implications for academics teaching in higher education, TEFL university students, curriculum developers, and EAP/ESP specialists.*

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education; Plagiarism; TEFL Students; Writing Proficiency

### INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as the primary language used to transmit science and technology on a global scale, and as a result, "research articles in English have emerged as one of the primary means for disseminating and advancing scientific knowledge among scholars worldwide as pointed by Kanoksilapatham (2005). Because of this, the capacity to write an academic paper—especially an English-language one—has grown to be a crucial component of academic life and, over time, the primary method for assessing the academic literacies of higher education students in academic settings.



Gradually, several factors, such as higher education expansion policies (Lillis & Scott, 2007) and new research policies imposed on academics and researchers around the world in various contexts (Tran, Burns, & Ollerhead, 2017), intensify the international rivalry for academic journal publication. However, composing an academic paper is a difficult task that calls for a wide range of abilities and literacy levels. As a result of this process, the author's credibility as a critical thinker is also built (Ivani, 1998). As a result, some members may use methods that are inconsistent with one of the primary publication requirements: the originality of the article, to circumvent flaws. It should come as no surprise that these tactics have presented the newer members with difficult challenges, leading to situations where they are sometimes referred to as plagiarists rather than authors. Unfortunately, plagiarism is a complicated problem, and it occurs in academic settings for a variety of reasons. So, it is important to spread knowledge about this growing issue.

Plagiarism among students has long been a problem for institutions of higher learning. According to Park (2003), it has been around since the invention of writing. Even though there is not a single definition of plagiarism that is universally agreed upon, most definitions concur that plagiarism is defined as the improper use of another person's words or ideas.

Intentional or unintentional plagiarism can be classified. Unintentional plagiarism occurs accidentally due to a lack of awareness and ability to prevent it. In contrast, intentional plagiarism involves committing plagiarism while fully aware of what it is and how to prevent it (Mahmood, et al., 2011). Plagiarism can appear in a variety of ways, such as "copying and pasting" without citing the source, patchwriting, providing incorrect or insufficient citations or references, presenting or citing a secondary source as a primary source, ghost-writing, purloining, and contracting to cheat. (De Jager & Brown 2010; Ellery 2008; Ellis, et al., 2018; Park 2003; Trost 2009; Mahmood et al., 2011; Zafarghandi, et al., 2012). Both intentional and unintentional acts can be committed under the aforementioned categories.

Plagiarism in academic settings has been documented in many studies for a considerable amount of time in Anglophone nations like the UK, USA, and Australia. A growing number of non-native English-speaking nations, including those in South America and Asia, are also reporting an increase in plagiarism. Studies on the prevalence of plagiarism in higher education institutions in Africa have also been conducted. For instance, in South Africa (De Jager & Brown 2010; Ellery 2008), Nigeria (Nordling, 2018; Agu & Olibie, 2009), and Botswana (Batane, 2010).

The results of research studies also point to some common causes of plagiarism among students, such as their laziness, inability to write well for academic purposes, ignorance of the offense, flaws in the way education systems assess students, and inconsistent enforcement of the law by academic staff (Batane, 2010; De Jager & Brown, 2010). It is evident from the reasons given that some students intentionally plagiarize, while others do not. As a result, care must be taken when developing strategies to prevent plagiarism among university students. Raising awareness of the risks of plagiarism, enforcing sanctions against plagiarists, and conducting or instructing students in the principles of integrity and ethical academic writing are some of the strategies that institutions of higher learning use to combat plagiarism. (Ellis, Zucker, & Randall, 2018; Leask 2006; Macdonald & Carroll 2006; Ryan, Bonanno, & Krass, 2009; Ryesky, 2007).

## **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

### **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF PLAGIARISM IN THE WORLD**

Plagiarism was created in the Western tradition and coincided with the advent of the Enlightenment in the modern era as an idea closely associated with the ideas of authorship and originality. Mimesis was a popular strategy used by authors to establish their authority in the years before and during the pre-modern (mimetic) era (Howard, 1995;



Pennycook, 1996). The mimetic, reproductive view of the world was, however, superseded by the productive power of the mind with the advent of the Enlightenment in Europe (Pennycook, 1996). In this way, writing's singular ability to both shape the author's identity and contribute to the development of new knowledge (Abasi, 2008; Ivani, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998, 1999) was highlighted. To clarify, academic writing requires participants to engage in a continuous intellectual challenge in appropriating both the content space and the rhetorical space (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Through this process, the reflective side of the mind is activated, knowledge and language are developed, and ultimately the author's individuality as the sole creator of the work is constructed with this in mind, citizenship to academia is only granted to those who have participated in this challenge and created their own genuine identity. It is undeniable that the production of disciplinary knowledge necessitates such challenges and changes in the schema and language of the prior sources (Lea & Street, 1999). Copyright law was established in the modern era to safeguard authors' moral and property rights as the creators of academic works, in keeping with the technological advancement of the printing press and the expansion of mass education (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Howard, 1995, 2007; Pennycook, 1996). As a result, plagiarism has received strong condemnation in the academic community for being a serious threat to the trust and honesty that govern academia as well as theft that takes away the chance to create a true identity.

Sadly, some factors have contributed to plagiarism's rapid rise in popularity around the world. As stated in the related literature, plagiarism is not "a simple black-and-white issue" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 201), but a complicated problem showed up in various ways. The concept of plagiarism still suffers from the lack of an operational definition as well as a trustworthy criterion for its identification because many factors creep into the cover term of plagiarism (Pecorari, 2001). Aside from that, the policies of expansion in higher education and the resulting overemphasis on the research ideal have presented scholars with what is known as the "postmodern challenges" around the world. The boundaries of common knowledge are eroding as a result of recent technological developments and the abundance of information available in the literature (Howard, 1995), and full acknowledgment of the real author and originator of a source has all but vanished into "a fantasy" (Howard, 2000, p. 474). A zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism has been adopted by long-standing publishing companies because they continue to demand copyright laws in order to protect the autonomy and authority of authors.

English for academic purposes (EAP) programs are in charge of identifying and meeting individual needs in the academic setting. In this regard, the practices of EAP courses are guided by how literacy is defined in academic contexts. Unfortunately, these courses continue to focus on a single conception of literacy that is transferable in the form of common discrete skills (Hyland & Shaw, 2016), which has led to the exploration of the concept of plagiarism without consideration of the larger context that has exacerbated the issue. The academic literacies model, a more recent approach to writing, promises to offer a better understanding of the concept of plagiarism by highlighting the fact that learning in general, and writing, in particular, are issues of identity construction and as a result are not divorced from the situational context in which they are constructed (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007).

In order to account for the variations in viewpoints on the concept of plagiarism, Lea and Street (1998) have suggested viewing the issues with writing through the larger lens of academic literacies. However, only a small number of the numerous plagiarism studies that were conducted looked into the issue in terms of literacy problems. In this regard, Pennycook (1996) looks at plagiarism from a cultural perspective and argues that the reason why students in Asian countries do not want to critically analyze sources is that the educational systems in these countries rely heavily on memorization methods, which should only be at an early stage. In the learning process, a gradual transition from self-learning to mastering superficial learning to deeper understanding must be made. In this regard, the primary goal of higher education institutions is to develop students' critical thinking abilities before they enroll (Lea & Street, 1999). However, Lea (2016) contends that these institutions have strayed from their original literacy mission more for their "commercial and transfer value" than for their "intellectual or critical value" (p. 88). In this respect, Flowerdew and Li (2007) also warn that plagiarism is closely related to the "marketing of academics" (p. 162). Ritter (2005) examined



online paper mill websites in a different study and concluded that the commodification of writing papers will undermine the academic worth of authorship and change the roles of beginning writers from writer to plagiarist and from student to customer.

The researchers hold that simply identifying the obvious causes of plagiarism is insufficient, in keeping with the same literacy concerns. Instead, it is urgent to look beyond the obvious phenomena in order to understand the underlying factors that make plagiarism more likely.

### **THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF PLAGIARISM IN IRAN**

The Iranian government has imposed the same research policies that have been used in various contexts, responding to the same global concern to increase its publications. As a result, Iranian scholars were eventually able to overcome the challenges that the scientists in developing nations faced (Arani, Kakia, & Malek, 2018) and could create an upward trend in publication rates, earning Iran the title of the country with the fastest rate of growth in a scientific publication (Science-Metrix, 2010, as cited in Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017). But the small number of citations per document sparked fresh discussions about the calibre of the papers that were published (Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017). The widely reported stories about the retraction of research articles written by Iranian scholars later raised questions about the veracity of these papers and offered more proof that Iran's educational system had fallen into the same trap of growing plagiarism that had been observed around the world.

In order to determine the causes of the issue, several studies examined plagiarism in the academic environment of Iran. Some of these findings revealed that: plagiarism has become quite a common issue in university settings the issue is a result of Iranian language students' lack of a proper understanding of the concept of plagiarism, its nature, and its various meanings (Ahmadi, 2014; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Rezaejad & Rezaei, 2013; Nushi & Firoozkahi, 2017). In their investigation into the causes of plagiarism in the field of agriculture, Atai et al. (2021) discovered that these factors all go hand in hand: plagiarism increases when scientific values are violated and science is devalued when science is commodified and academic obligations are broken when science is politicized and people become disenchanted with the universal standards.

It should go without saying that allegations of plagiarism are made in almost every academic discipline and at every level. It is our responsibility to investigate and ascertain what writing assistance students in all academic fields require. Almost none of the aforementioned studies have also examined the subject concerning situational context and literacy issues. This study explores the underlying obstacles that might stop Iranian TEFL students from creating original works in the field of English language teaching (ELT), one of the understudied areas in need of additional research. It does this by drawing inspiration from the academic literacies model and concentrating on the situational context of Iran. In light of this, the following research question was targeted for the present study:

**RQ:** What are the most likely reasons for plagiarism in the eyes of Iranian TEFL students?

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

This study occurred in an EFL context of Iran located precisely in the Islamic Azad University of Gonbad Kavooos, Golestan province, Iran. 20 TEFL students (10 males and 10 females) majoring in ELT for their master's degree were chosen for the sake of the objective of the study. The students were aged between 26 to 55.

#### **INSTRUMENTS**

A semi-structured interview with each of these 20 students was held in order to clearly understand the fundamental and in-depth causes of plagiarism in this area of study. To ensure maximum clarity and comfort on the part of the



participants, the interviews were conducted one-to-one and in their native tongues. They were primarily designed to elicit more specific information on plagiarism at both the manifest and latent levels in the very early stages of the formulation of the research (Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher relied on memory and simply jotted down the key themes in her notebook after the interviews to lessen the sensitivity of the subject. It should be mentioned that the researchers used member checking and peer debriefing to check the validity and reliability of the interview questions.

### **DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The English language and literature department was first informed of the study's overall goals and asked to help the researchers find graduate students. The participants' willingness to participate in the data collection process was crucial because it allowed each participant to opt out of the study whenever they wanted. Ultimately, 20 students agreed to participate in this investigation. Students were interviewed in a semi-structured interview to gather information for the research question, and their opinions were then written down and organized thematically. Their ideas were recorded and transcribed carefully for further analysis. A meticulous content analysis of the data collected from the respondents was conducted to put the received data into thematic shapes.

### **RESULTS**

The researchers made an effort to ask 20 Iranian TEFL students for their thoughts on this section. Five questions (listed in appendix A) were posed to these students to better understand their perspectives on the topic. All of their comments were meticulously recorded and typed out for analysis later. The interviewees also had the impression that their information would be kept confidential. The interview was conducted entirely in the participants' native tongue (i. e. Persian) to avoid any difficulties brought about by a lack of proficiency. All of the participants' names were changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy and maintain anonymity. The ideas were shaped into themes were thoroughly explained below:

#### **“LOW LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH”**

Almost all these students mentioned their top one reason for plagiarism to be the lack of proficiency in general English, especially in their writing ability. As Morteza mentioned:

*“Plagiarism is the only option when you don't have a strong command of English. General English is, in my opinion, even more, crucial than knowledge of ELT theories, so what I'm trying to say is that if you don't have a strong command of English, your knowledge of specific language theories is useless. Similar to a requirement for theoretical knowledge, general proficiency is it.” It (General proficiency) is like a prerequisite of the theoretical knowledge.”*

Or Kimia in line with the previous one stated:

*“The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about learning English is oral competency and speaking abilities... Many have so far asked me to speak in English for them to make sure that I know the language. Speaking is important, but it's not everything, I agree. Language has other skills as well, but regrettably, both in pre-university and in higher education levels, everyone focuses on oral proficiency when this is the writing ability that is most required for academic purposes, like when you want to publish an article.”*

#### **“TIME LIMITATION”**

Some of the participants mentioned the idea of lack of time as their reason behind the act of plagiarism. These participants generally believed that due to time constraints, there is no other choice but to plagiarise. Afsaneh said:



*“Particularly at this level and degree, I mean master's degree, everyone is preoccupied with work, family responsibilities, and other things other than academic goals. For instance, I am married, have two kids, and allocate 30 hours per week to going to school. There is no time available to devote to writing an original paper. As a result, I would typically try to choose the simpler but the wrong route by copying and pasting other people's original works.”*

#### **“NO SUPPORT FROM THE INSTRUCTOR”**

If I would say that almost everyone mentioned a lack of support on behalf of the instructor, that would not be a hyperbole. Hesam a very good student in the class believed:

*“Let's not play games. I'm not saying that the instructor is responsible for everything or that he should teach us everything, but they should at least teach us the fundamentals of article writing and introduce us to some high-quality books for honing our writing skills. The very least they (instructors) can do is show us how to download, read, and begin writing each section of a scientific paper...as far as I'm concerned paraphrasing and citation should be worked on because these are the two most important tools to prevent plagiarism.”*

Another student, Shadi, said that students do not know the very nature of plagiarism. She continued:

*“I'm not sure what plagiarism exactly is. These are the questions that someone should respond to: Is it a complete copy of the original works of others? Is it still plagiarism if you use their general idea? How can it be plagiarism if you cite the sources of your sentences and ideas?”*

#### **“NO PENALTY FOR PLAGIARISM”**

Abdullah stated:

*“If you are found to have plagiarized work, there is no punishment. I can still picture myself majoring in my B. A. Our professor discovered that almost everyone had plagiarized their work, but he was powerless to stop it. It's not like you'll go to jail or anything; all they might do is give you a low grade in that course. Funny to say, I got an 18 in my research course at the time even though I plagiarized my entire paper.”*

It should be mentioned that plagiarism is a hateful act in the world of academic research and if you be found guilty of plagiarism you might be even banned to publish any scientific paper for the rest of your life.

#### **“NO INTEREST IN THE TOPIC”**

When the topic the students are supposed to work on is not interesting enough, the result would be obvious. Zahra thought:

*“The key is interest. You will figure out a way to do something if you are interested in it. Unfortunately, when it comes to the task of writing an article, this issue is overlooked. Many professors assign students to research pre-selected topics that are within their areas of knowledge and proficiency. This is true even though many students might not be enthusiastic about that subject. Of course, I must also point out that everything will be all right even if a student is interested in and curious about a subject but lacks expertise in it. Interest is everything, as I previously stated.”*



### **“LAZINESS OR LACK OF MOTIVATION”**

One of the reasons frequently mentioned by the participants was laziness and lack of motivation for publishing an original manuscript. As Fatemeh declared:

*“Sadly, youth these days struggle with a lot of laziness. Naturally, I must also clarify that I mean laziness in the sense of lacking the sufficient drive to complete research tasks. Just try to estimate the total number of hours required to complete a research project. At least 100 hours, in my opinion. Well, maybe he can't if he wants to work on an article for 100 hours. He could undoubtedly make more money in the interim if he used those 100 hours on a different job. It is not always a case of laziness, in my opinion; occasionally, people are compelled to plagiarize, even though it is wrong and unethical because they lack the motivation to create an original piece of writing.”*

Also, another respondent, Soheyla, referred to the fact that most of the time students write an article so that they can get their marks. It is as if they just want to finish the job no matter what the results might be. Nafiseh stated:

*“For me and most of my classmates, it was just a matter of getting the job done. We didn't care about writing a scientific paper. Our professor would make us write an article and we had no choice but to copy from others so that we could get our marks.”*

### **“SCIENCE OR A MARKET FOR MONEY MAKING”**

Sadly, as mentioned by some of the interviewees, writing a research article has turned into a market for some. Better to quote Babak for more clarification:

*“Unfortunately, science no longer has the status it once did in our culture. Science and research are uninteresting to most people. for the reason that these jobs do not pay well. However, writing and publishing articles have developed into a business. As a result, there are countless businesses and institutions ready to write books, articles, and even theses for you in exchange for a fee. Therefore, if someone has money, they can pay these organizations to write books and articles for them. Even more, I've heard that some of these organizations award university degrees. If you pay them 30 million tomans, for instance, they will grant you a bachelor's degree. It is entirely true. It's a very bad situation.”*

## **DISCUSSION**

The main goal of the current study was to look into the factors that contribute to an increase in plagiarism among TEFL graduate students in Iran. To this end, we looked into the perceptions of 20 graduate students studying English language teaching regarding the driving forces behind plagiarism. What follows will discuss the contributing factors to student plagiarism. First of all, most respondents to this study (like Fatemeh and Afsaneh) agreed with Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017) that plagiarism is wrong because it disregards the rights of the first author. Therefore, it appears that they were at least somewhat aware of the fundamental tenet of plagiarism, which is the preservation of the original author's authority as the work's creator (Pennycook, 1996).

Some students held the opinion that the most common cause of plagiarism was poor language abilities. This result is consistent with Perkins, Gezgin, and Roe's (2018) finding that there is a link between plagiarism and a person's proficiency in the English language. Language is without a doubt the most essential aspect of self-expression; without it, all voices will remain silent. In a similar vein, anyone volunteering for academic membership at the international level should have a solid command of English. However, based on the responses to this study, it appears that such expectations have not been met.



Examining the position of English in the current Iranian context may help to partially explain these findings. English, which had previously and during the Pahlavi regime been regarded as a key to modernization (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009; Kiany, et al., 2011), was seen as a threat that could be used to introduce western cultures and ideas into the country. Despite the benefits it could have brought to society, Iran has chosen a "moderate" approach to teaching English and views it as both a blessing and a curse, endangering both the nation's Islamic identity and its ability to advance economically and technologically (Kiany et al., 2011). As a result, the misconceptions about English have been concealed in favor of reforming the laws governing the teaching of foreign languages, though it appears that there are still discrepancies between what is done in society and what the mandate of the law (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015).

To the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored plagiarism concerning the macro-level language policies, though Pennycook (1996) referred to many issues raised throughout the interview sessions, which confirmed that China has a conservative approach to English and sees the language as a cultural intrusion and a political weapon (Ma Wai Yin, 1993, as cited in Pennycook, 1996). Plausibly, the achievement of the first and second ranks in publication misconduct by China and Iran, respectively (Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017), as the countries with conservative attitudes to English, could foreground the effects of such viewpoints on the social, cultural, and educational activities of the society.

Quite a few respondents thought that the marketization of science was the primary cause of the rise in plagiarism. After marketization, all facets of social life have adopted marketing principles, science in general, and education, in particular, has not been exempt. Without a doubt, the encroachment of private interests into the educational sector has rekindled the age-old conflict between science and wealth and has reshaped this sector's policies by giving the former priority. The result was a decline in morality as well as the devaluation and commodification of science. In this regard, the finding that there is a strong correlation between the commercialization of science and plagiarism in this study may also reflect widespread concerns about the radical changes in higher education institutions' literacy practices (Lea, 2016) and the ensuing radical transformation of students from critical thinkers to paying customers. Time constraints, lack of support and feedback from instructors during the writing process, the lack of consequences for plagiarism, lack of interest in the subjects, and the fact that academic writing is a challenging task requiring strong motivations are some additional frequent causes of plagiarism, according to graduate TEFL students.

These findings are in line with those of Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017), who discovered that poor academic writing abilities and lenient teachers are among the main causes of plagiarism. To further explain, it's common knowledge that writing the first paper for publication is a monumentally difficult task. Many universities around the world have made writing more central to their programs and assigned well-trained and qualified teachers to teach writing to socialize new members to the predominant literacy practices. This is due to the burden of writing a paper in general and the challenge of constructing identity in particular. However, the primary emphasis of EAP courses in Iran has only been on reading proficiency (Atai, 2002), and generally, no writing instruction has been provided in these programs. In addition, these courses haven't delivered on their promises, and they haven't followed any organized, well-coordinated plans (Atai, 2002). Unfortunately, the excessive reliance on translation in these courses' reading comprehension instruction has prevented students from learning from reading and familiarizing themselves with academic writing conventions (Atai & Shoja, 2011). These flaws in EAP programs call attention to teachers, who have the responsibility of introducing students to the target community's literacy practices. Contrary to expectations, subject specialists may not be qualified and competent enough to teach disciplinary literacy skills in Iran because they typically lack the knowledge and motivation to do so (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014). This is because EAP courses in Iran are typically taught by subject experts. Additionally accepting responsibility for their actions, one participant attributed the plagiarism that took place to laziness. A portion of this problem may be explained by the traits of the technologically advanced, fast-paced age and the easy accessibility of a wealth of information via the internet (Sohrabi,





Gholipour, & Mohammadesmaeili, 2011). Returning to the active roles that universities played in the commodification of higher education will help us see the other side of the argument and how it contributed to the transition of students from active, critical thinkers to passive, paying customers.

Afsaneh, one of the interviewees, added that it is simple to copy and paste content from the internet, there isn't enough time to write and publish an academic paper, and people are just too busy. Writing from sources makes up a sizable portion of academic writing. In order to construct knowledge, graduate students must respond to sources through writing and incorporate sources with their ideas (Ivani, 1998). It takes a lot of time and effort on the author's part to complete this process because it is not linear. Students are inundated with the wealth of knowledge that is available in the literature when they first enter a discipline. The strong winds coming from powerful sources are blowing on the soft sands of their identities. As they read more, they become increasingly submerged in other people's words and realize they have no voice of their own. To critically evaluate the sources and establish their positions in the sea of information they have received, they should therefore be given enough time to think about what they have read. Only after that could they develop an argument and demonstrate a powerful existence in defence of it (Abasi, 2008). Even so, there are times when the pressures of social life and tight deadlines leave little time for reflection, leading the new members to turn to the internet as a means of making up lost time and ensuring their survival.

No personal interest in the subject was another key factor in plagiarism, according to one respondent (Zahra). This might be brought on by the widening gap between the research ideal and the utility ideal in the nation. Both of these objectives typically develop in a cyclic paradigm for the benefit of society (Goggin, 2000). In this sense, both objectives are equally pursued in developed nations, and as a result, these nations are not only forerunners in terms of research topics, but also in terms of the problems that are currently plaguing the academic community as well as those that are plaguing their real-world counterparts. The imbalance between the two research objectives, on the other hand, typically harms scientists from developing nations. Undoubtedly, the use of creative investigative techniques has hurt these countries' academic communities even more. They are compelled to suppress their own opinions and search for solutions to issues that haven't felt all that real to them to increase their publishing success. It's important to note that Arani et al. (2018) alluded to this issue subtly as a gap between academia and society. One of the many other excuses for plagiarism cited by a respondent (Abdullah) was the lack of punishments or the existence of insignificant punishments even if students' plagiarism was found. The most important factors influencing students' plagiarism habits were mentioned by Makarova (2019): the societal and ethnic context, the teachers' roles, and the morality system. Similarly to this, the results of this survey confirm the crucial requirement for strict legislation and their even stricter application in scholarly setup.

## CONCLUSION

This study was an effort to shed light on this hotly contested issue in the context of Iran after a rise in the frequency of plagiarism prompted it. To illuminate the blind spots that have strengthened the issue in Iran, the current study used the well-established academic literacies method as a point of reference and viewed plagiarism not only as a danger but also as a merit. The findings showed that most graduate TEFL students had a reasonable comprehension of plagiarism's essence and thought it was a significant matter that should be shunned.

The researchers concluded that plagiarism is the outcome of several academic procedures that were carelessly applied in an exertion to appear to normalize the behaviors of higher education students to the approved patterns.

In addition, as a result of looking into the potential causes of plagiarism, several scenarios came to light. Surprisingly, the educational system made little to no effort to bring regional EAP programs up to par with international standards. As a result of the lack of well-organized and effective EAP programs in Iran, graduate students there are now more vulnerable to plagiarism in addition to the literacy crisis that is endangering the academic



community as a whole. The research findings may help develop research writing programs that incorporate awareness-raising elements to reduce the risk of plagiarism and enhance paper quality in this manner.

The study did have some restrictions, though. First of all, it was impossible to find a term that perfectly captured plagiarism's cultural connotations in the participants' first languages. Such a flaw could, in some cases have an impact on the outcomes. Additionally, this study was restricted to one field of study (ELT) and one Islamic Azad University (Gonbad Kavoods branch). These might have an impact on how broadly applicable the results are. Additional research may focus on different university types and academic disciplines. In addition, more targeted group interviews might offer useful data on the subject and a mixed approach might be desirable in further studies.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- \* What do you know about the nature of plagiarism in general?
- \* What causes plagiarism in TEFL, in your opinion, and why?
- \* Have you ever plagiarized before? If so, when and why?
- \* How can plagiarism be avoided, in your opinion?