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## Plagiarism in Thai EFL Academic Writing: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions การคัดลอกงานของผู้อื่นโดยไม่อ้างอิง ในงานเขียนเชิงวิชาการของนักศึกษาไทย ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ: สาเหตุ ผลกระทบ และแนวทางแก้ไข

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### บทคัดย่อ

อินเทอร์เน็ตมีประโยชน์ต่อการเรียนและการสอน แต่ก็สร้างปัญหาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการคัดลอกงานของผู้อื่นโดยไม่อ้างอิงให้ถูกต้อง ปัญหานี้ส่วนหนึ่งเกิดจากความสะดวกรวดเร็วในการเข้าถึงข้อมูลทางเวปไซต์ไวต์เว็บ รวมทั้งปัจจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับนักศึกษาและสถาบันการศึกษา บทความนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะนำเสนอปัญหาที่เกิดจากการโจรกรรมเชิงวิชาการ วิเคราะห์สาเหตุและผลกระทบของการกระทำผิดดังกล่าว พร้อมทั้งเสนอแนวทางการแก้ปัญหาให้แก่ผู้บริหารสถาบันการศึกษาและอาจารย์ผู้สอน

**คำสำคัญ:** การคัดลอกงานผู้อื่นโดยไม่อ้างอิง การโจรกรรมเชิงวิชาการ สื่ออินเทอร์เน็ต แนวทางแก้ไข การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการ

## Abstract

Although the Internet has brought extensive learning and teaching opportunities to the academic world, it has also created great challenges, especially regarding plagiarism. The convenient access to information on the World Wide Web is partly responsible for widespread plagiarism by students. Other factors that influence such academic dishonesty include students' personal and institutional issues. This article explains what constitutes plagiarism, discusses factors that cause student plagiarism and its consequences, and offers recommendations to administrators and teachers for minimizing such offences.

**Keywords:** Plagiarism, Academic Dishonesty, the Internet, EFL Academic Writing, Solutions

## Introduction

Although the Internet has brought extensive learning and teaching opportunities to the academic world, it has also created great challenges, especially regarding plagiarism. According to the American Historical Association (2002:1), “the word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: *plagiarus*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal.” The term plagiarism is defined as “using the ideas and words of another without giving proper credit to the author” (Smithee, Greenblatt and Eland, 2004: 23). Currently, plagiarism is an on-going problem, which has become more widespread in many contexts (high schools, universities and in both undergraduate and graduate schools) and in many countries, such as the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Canada, China and Thailand (Auer and Krupar, 2001: 1; Born, 2003: 223; Ma, Wan and Lu, 2008: 197; Pracht, 2003:1). The universal access to information

on the Internet is partly responsible for increased student plagiarism. In the US, for example, the Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics (2010) surveyed 43,000 high school students in public and private schools and found that one out of three high school students admitted to using the Internet to plagiarize an assignment. In higher education, McCabe (2005) conducted a survey with over 63,700 US undergraduate and 9,250 graduate students in the U.S. and Canada. The researcher reported that 36% of undergraduates and 24% of graduate students admit to “paraphrasing/copying a few sentences from an Internet source without footnoting it,” 38% of undergraduates and 25% of graduate students admit to “paraphrasing/copying a few sentences from written sources without footnoting it,” in addition 7% of undergraduate students and 4% of graduate students reported copying materials “almost word for word from

a written source without citation”, while 7% of undergraduates and 3% of graduate students reported “turning in work done by another,” and 3% of undergraduates and 2% of graduate students admit “obtaining a paper from a term paper mill.”

In the Thai academic context where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL), plagiarism is not uncommon, especially when the Internet is used as a major source of information (Boonpattanaporn, 2008: 86). According to Thep-Ackrapong (2005: 57), plagiarism is one of the problems faced by English teachers in Thailand. Dujsik (2002: 22) reported that 50% of 120 Thai students in her academic writing course admitted to using the words of another without citations despite being educated about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Dealing with plagiarism is time consuming and demoralizing for teachers. Why do students plagiarize? What can we do as teachers to deter our students from committing such a serious offense? How can we help them learn instead of cheating, many of us often wonder? This paper explains what constitutes plagiarism, discusses its various forms, and presents the consequences and causes of this kind of academic dishonesty, as well as offering recommendations for all of the stakeholders in Thai academia.

## **Forms of Student Plagiarism**

In a recent worldwide survey of 879 higher and secondary instructors, Turnitin (2012: 4) listed the ten most common types of student plagiarism. The top five types, which were ordered in terms of prevalence from most to least, included: “clone” (word-for-word copying), “CTL+C” (substantially verbatim copying from a single source without modifications), “find-replace” (changing some key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source), “remix” (paraphrasing the content from sources and making it fit together seamlessly), and “recycle” (borrowing generously from one’s own previous work or self-plagiarism) (p.4). The complete list of these ten types of plagiarism can be found in the article “White Paper: The Plagiarism Spectrum”.

Within Thai EFL academic writing classrooms, Dujsik (2002: 19) found that four common forms of student plagiarism usually take place. These forms comprise 1) paraphrasing, summarizing, and/or copying some phrases or sentences from the Internet or a written source without providing citations; 2) copying almost word for word from the internet or a written source without giving due credit; 3) submitting work done by another (e.g., borrowing friends’ papers or hiring someone to write for them); and 4) recycling their own work or submitting previous work to different

teachers. Out of these four practices, the first form may fall into the category of unintentional plagiarism while the rest are intentional plagiarism. Shei (2005: 3) categorizes plagiarism into blatant stealing, close imitation, and integrated borrowing. In blatant stealing, students may lift the entire text or several paragraphs and submit it as their own work; in close imitation, students use an entire original text with very few changes in terms of ideas, words, and language use; in integrated borrowing, students incorporate others' words and/or ideas into their writing without acknowledging the original source. Based on my professional experience teaching EFL academic writing for over 15 years, close imitation and integrated borrowing occur more frequently than blatant stealing in Thai EFL classrooms.

### **Factors Associated with Thai Student Plagiarism**

For the past two decades, plagiarism has been a major problem and concern among English language teachers in Thailand (Dujsik, 2002; Kuldeep, 2012; Thep-Ackrapong, 2005). To gain a better understanding of this problem, it is important to discuss factors that influence Thai students to plagiarize in EFL academic writing. Such influences involve personal, technological and institutional factors.

### **Personal Factors**

Plagiarism is a western concept that values highly individuals' originality and creativity (Kearney, 1988: 101). It is, however, viewed differently in many cultures. For example, in some Asian countries such as China and Thailand, textual borrowing without giving credit to the original author or rote learning is acceptable as a way of learning. According to Thep-Ackrapong (2005: 57), "copying is the first step of learning... the author's words are highly regarded. Changing the original words may insult the author!". Moreover, in the oriental literary convention, certain styles of writing like collage, allusion, and quotation allow authors not to cite their original sources and leave the burden of identification of the original authors and literary works to the readers. Those unable to identify the original sources will be considered ignorant (Vespada, Interview, 2012). As a result, many Asian students may adopt exact copying or integrated borrowing in their efforts to learn the English language due to their culturally different views on plagiarism. Bamford and Sergiou (2005: 20) found that cultural issues play an important role for unintentional plagiarism among international students.

Additionally, lack of proper citation practice is also responsible for plagiarism among Thai students. Most of them do not

know how to properly give credit to authors of original work because they have not been educated early on to do so, until maybe in university. In an interview with University World News, Associate Professor Soraj Hongladarom (Lamubol, 2012), a philosophy professor at Chulalongkorn University and president of the university's academic committee, stated that "The way students do their papers in primary and secondary schools [in Thailand] is really pathetic. Teachers don't teach their students that cutting and pasting is wrong." As a result, most students, if not all, think that providing a reference page at the end of a term paper is sufficient. The requirement of proper citations may be largely due to different standards practiced by different teachers.

Poor time management is also cited as an important factor contributing to student plagiarism. Bamford and Sergiou (2005: 18) reported that time pressure was one of the main reasons leading to plagiarism committed by international students. In Thailand, undergraduate students usually register for six or seven courses per semester, generally three contact hours per course. If these students do not manage their time well or have a tendency to procrastinate towards the end of a semester, most of them may feel overwhelmed trying to finish term papers, prepare for presentations, study for final exams, etc. Students with limited English language skills will feel even more

pressured by this academic demand and may choose to blatantly plagiarize.

### **Technological Factors**

Today's students are digital natives (Prensky, 2001) who have grown up with technologies including computers, the Internet, videogames, cell phones, digital cameras, etc. Technology is an important part of their lives, and they feel comfortable using it both at home and school. According to Ma, Wan, and Lu, 2008: 198), more high school and college students in the U.S. are using the Internet for research, homework, and assignments. They prefer to consult Professor Google when it comes to searching for information instead of going to school libraries. This easy access, therefore, poses great danger to students who lack time or the necessary English language skills to complete their assignments; they are thus prone to inappropriately borrowing others' words, ideas, or papers from the Internet. Another reason is that there is a myriad of digital paper mills on the Internet that sell term papers. Stevenson (2001) found a few online paper mills that offer term papers for free (e.g., EssaysFree.com, BigNerds.com, OPPapers.com), but the quality of the papers was low. The websites that sell pre-written term papers (e.g., AcademicTermPapers.com, PaperStore.net, A1Termpaper.com) usually charged \$7-10 per page, and Stevenson

(2001) bought a few papers from these sites and asked his judges to grade them. The highest grade received was a B+ and the lowest grade was a D, depending on the quality of the purchased papers. Made-to-order papers are also available on websites such as PaperMasters.com, Buyapapers.com, and Term Papers & Term Papers. Purchased papers can be delivered within 24 hours based on the ads posted on these websites.

### **Institutional Factors**

Students who were caught plagiarizing often claimed that they did not know that such practice was unacceptable. They also stated that they were allowed to do the same in other classes (e.g., Thai language courses). The absence of a university policy on plagiarism makes this form of academic misconduct seem abstract to many students despite teachers' repeated explanations, warnings, or threats.

### **Consequences of Plagiarism in the Thai Context**

It is important to discuss the consequences of student plagiarism for universities, teachers, and students. Plagiarism violations ultimately undermine academic standards, students' reputations, the trust between teacher and students and peers as well as the loss of real learning opportunities for the students.

As far as punishment is concerned, most Thai universities, if not all, do not have a clear policy on plagiarism. This problem is left for individual teachers, departments, and faculties to deal with and determine the penalties (Todd, Interview, 2012). The penalties often vary but generally include 1) receiving no marks (a zero) on a plagiarized paper; 2) receiving an F on the course; 3) being suspended from school; and 4) the most severe penalty, being expelled from school or having his/her degree revoked (in a case where the student has already graduated).

When students plagiarize, their reputation among peers and teachers will become tarnished. They will be labeled as cheaters, and their family's reputation is also at stake. Doubts will be raised regarding the students' true learning ability. This will destroy trust not only between teachers and the student in question but also between that student and his/her peers. Additionally, student plagiarists will cheat themselves out of learning opportunities which means they will never have a chance to learn these necessary skills for subsequent courses and future jobs. Consequently, they may suffer and fail those courses or will not be able to find a decent job that requires strong writing skills.

## **What We Can Learn from the U.S. Experience**

Since the issue of plagiarism in academia has been continuously investigated in the U.S. since early 1960's, it will be beneficial to discuss strategies that administrators and teachers in U.S. schools have implemented to combat student plagiarism. Renard (1999: 41-42), for example, suggested teachers come up with interesting writing topics that tap into students' higher level thinking skills, embrace the writing process and teach students about source documentation to prevent plagiarism. More strategies were recommended by Born (2003: 223-224) to minimize cheating: "1) Treat a paper as a process not a product, 2) Assign group activities, 3) Design questions that require discussion rather than rote memorization, 4) Assign different questions to different individuals, 5) Give tests, quizzes, or assignments more frequently, 6) Assign more in-class activities, 7) Don't allow make up tests, 8) Rotate curriculum, 9) Build trust, and 10) Educate students. Initially, the author had reviewed various strategies informed by past research (Renard, 1999; Born, 2003) and selected eight strategies based on consideration of their suitability for the Thai educational context. The following three strategies require administrators' support, and the rest entail that of instructors.

### **1. Establish Institutional Policy on Plagiarism**

Having an institutional policy on plagiarism in place will help administrators and teachers cope with this academic misconduct more effectively. According to McCabe (2005), having regulations regarding plagiarism is one of the most effective deterrents against student plagiarism. Having been a graduate student in the U.S. for seven years, I became familiar with the notion of plagiarism from student orientations and read about it in student handbooks and course syllabi. Such information regarding plagiarism is shown below:

**Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism is defined as "literary theft" and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text, or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. Punishment for Academic Dishonesty will depend on the seriousness of the offense and may include receipt of an "F" with a numerical value of zero on the item submitted, and the "F" shall be used to determine the final course grade. It is the option of the instructor to assign the student a grade of F or FF (the latter

indicating dishonesty) in the course.

*The University of South Florida has an account with an automated plagiarism detection service which allows instructors to submit student assignments to be checked for plagiarism. I reserve the right to 1) request that assignments be submitted to me as electronic files and 2) electronically submit assignments to Turnitin.com. Assignments are compared automatically with a huge database of journal articles, web articles, and previously submitted papers.*

(University of South Florida, 2011-2012).

The above information informs students of plagiarism, its consequences, and instructors' right to check their written assignments for plagiarism. This is an effective deterrence. Throughout those seven years, I was aware of only two plagiarism incidences. One student was given a chance to rewrite, and the other one was expelled from the program. The punishment was different based on the degree of plagiarism involved.

It is safe to say that all Thai universities have clear policies on cheating, but very few have addressed plagiarism issues. Since clear rules on student cheating are in place, it makes sense to also incorporate plagiarism into the

existing rules. Having such guidelines will make it possible for administrators and teachers to refer to them and deal with plagiarism systematically and effectively.

## **2. Promote Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity or academic honesty is an important quality of any school, college, and university. To foster student honesty, McCabe and Pavela (2004: 12-15) advise faculty to do the following: 1) discuss and affirm academic integrity with students, 2) foster a lifelong commitment to learning, 3) guide and mentor students, 4) help students understand the potential of the Internet for human development, 5) encourage student responsibility for academic integrity, 6) clarify expectations for students, 7) develop fair and creative forms of assessment, 8) reduce opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty, 9) respond to academic dishonesty when it occurs, and 10) help define and support campus-wide academic integrity standards. The authors of these ten principles believe that fostering academic integrity can help to minimize students' cheating, including plagiarism.

## **3. Provide Teacher Training on Plagiarism**

Being a western concept, plagiarism is a new practice to many Thais, including teachers, therefore, it is necessary to educate teachers ranging from primary to tertiary levels about



plagiarism. This particular teacher training should include, but is not limited to, topics such as what plagiarism is, why it has become an important issue, and how to prevent it. As such, teachers will be able to develop students' awareness of plagiarism and help them avoid plagiarizing when they do their written assignments.

#### **4. Develop Students' Awareness of Plagiarism**

Like Thai teachers, many Thai EFL students are not aware of the notion of plagiarism. Thus, students from primary schools onward can and should be taught that cutting and pasting information from the Internet is an unacceptable act, and doing such things shows disrespect to the authors of the sources. Born (2003: 224) suggests that teachers explain to students what plagiarism is, "why it will not be tolerated," and "take prompt action" when such a violation occurs. In like manner, Badge and Scott (2009) urge teachers to educate students early on about plagiarism and discuss penalties and consequences.

#### **5. Use Paraphrase, Summary, and Citations**

Students should be taught how to paraphrase, summarize, and use citations appropriately when using other's ideas and words. Teachers should encourage students

not to be afraid to use their own words even though they might not be as eloquent or stylish as the original. They should understand that writing is a skill achieved through regular practice. If they diligently practice these necessary writing skills, they will improve their language skills and be able to use them effectively. When in doubt regarding common knowledge and intellectual property, encourage students to include citations. It is always better to over-cite than under-cite original sources.

#### **5. Do Lots of In-class Writing**

Many writing teachers are constrained by class time, so they often assign out-of-class writing to students. Students benefit more, however, from in-class writing as teachers can monitor their writing and provide them with the assistance that they need. They can also ask for help from their classmates. According to Born (2003: 224), completing assignments in class can prevent students from procrastination and resorting to plagiarism. Teachers should also have students work more in depth on fewer papers over the course of a semester to develop their writing skills and teach them how to avoid plagiarizing. Insufficient writing opportunities and lack of teacher monitor may lead to student plagiarism.

#### **7. Assign Plagiarism-Unfriendly Writing Topics or Assignments**

Teachers should carefully select writing

topics and assignments that can develop students' English writing skills and content knowledge. They should avoid assigning general and popular topics, which are usually available in online paper mills and ready to be purchased or cut and pasted. To prevent plagiarism, Pracht (2003) advises teachers to assign writing topics that extend classroom or textbook activities instead of allowing students to choose their own topics. Similarly, Todd of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand (Todd, Interview, 2012) suggests including students' own experiences in their assignments to make it more specific and difficult for students to plagiarize. Todd further recommends that students of an advanced English course can write an article for Wikipedia and upload it. If an article contains plagiarized material, the editors of the website will reject it. In addition, teachers should also avoid assigning the same topics every semester and thus prevent students from borrowing their friends' papers and resubmitting them as their own.

### **8. Emphasize the Writing Process**

Teach students to employ the writing process approach to complete their written work. This process can be divided into three main stages: pre-writing, writing, and revising tasks (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 19) in which teachers can set up deadlines and monitor students' work progress periodically as well as

require them to submit evidence of pre-writing (e.g., brainstorming sheets, outlines, concept mapping, etc.), supporting sources, and multiple drafts. Incorporate peer and teacher feedback into the process whenever possible. Regularly monitoring students' progress will eliminate their chances of copying, borrowing or buying papers and submitting them as their own. If plagiarism is noticed at an earlier stage, teachers can comment on it and give students a chance to rework that section. It is important to note that most Thai students who were caught plagiarizing and given a chance to rewrite never resubmitted plagiarized papers (Todd, Interview, 2012).

### **9. Use Online Plagiarism Detectors**

There are several search engines that teachers can rely on to check student plagiarism for free. These websites include, but are not limited to, Google (<http://www.google.com>), Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>), Plagiarism Checker (<http://www.plagiarismchecker.com>), Alta Vista (<http://altavista.digital.com>), Metacrawler (<http://www.metacrawler.com>), or Findsame (<http://findsame.com>) to compare sentences, paragraphs, or an entire essay. Based on my own experience, Google.com and Yahoo.com can be sufficient to check suspected plagiarized work, though it can be time consuming as users can only check one or two sentences at a time. Auer and Krupar (2001: 426) note that Findsame is

effective at detecting cut-and-paste plagiarism from Internet sites. There are also fee-based plagiarism-detection services such as turnitin.com, plagiarism.org, and WordCHECK. Turnitin.com, for instance, allows users to upload an entire paper, highlights plagiarized portions and provides a percentage match between the paper submitted for plagiarism check and those in its database as well as websites from which students may have plagiarized. The use of Turnitin service has been found to decrease student plagiarism (Batane, 2010; Cheah and Bretag, 2008) and can be used as an instructional tool (Cheah and Bretag, 2008; O'Hara, Carter and Manassee, 2007). In particular, teachers can inform students early on in a semester that their papers will be checked for plagiarism using the available tool at their school or college. They can also teach students to use the plagiarism-detection tool to self-monitor plagiarism that may exist in their papers and suggest strategies that will help them steer clear from committing such an offence.

## **Conclusion**

Plagiarism, the act of using others' words and ideas without proper citations (Smithee, Greenblatt and Eland, 2004: 23), is a fast growing problem among EFL learners in academic writing courses in this digital age. Intentional and unintentional violations occur

in many forms including borrowing friends' papers or hiring someone to write a paper and pass it off as one's own work, recycling one's previous work, copying from sources almost word-for-word without attribution, and paraphrasing, summarizing or copying some sentences without citations. Plagiarism deprives students from real learning opportunities and affects their reputations among peers and teachers. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away, but worsen it. Hence, it is time for administrators to institute a policy and clear guidelines on plagiarism, uphold academic integrity, and provide training on plagiarism for teachers. Similarly, teachers should educate students on this type of academic misconduct, encourage them to paraphrase, summarize, and cite sources, incorporate writing activities in class, choose plagiarism unfriendly writing topics and assignments, make use of the writing process and use online plagiarism detectors as an instructional tool and a preventive measure to solve the problem systematically. The author hopes that this article will provide a better understanding of the plagiarism taking place in the Thai academic context, and her recommendations will be useful for school and university stakeholders to effectively respond to plagiarism occurring in Thailand and in other places with similar contexts.

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