

Exploring Undergraduate Students' Understanding and Perceptions of Plagiarism in Academic Writing

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Abstract: This study explores undergraduate students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism in academic writing, focusing on its meaning, source-use practices, perceived seriousness, contributing factors, and perceived impacts. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. Seventeen undergraduate students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at an Islamic private university in Jakarta participated. They were in their sixth, eighth, or later semesters and had experience in academic writing, such as papers, essays, research proposals, theses, or scientific articles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews after participants completed a demographic survey and provided informed consent. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Miles et al.'s interactive model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation across different participant groups and investigator triangulation. Students generally understood plagiarism as copying or using others' work without proper acknowledgment. However, their understanding remained basic and partial, mainly limited to visible forms such as direct copying. Students also had limited understanding of subtle forms of plagiarism and source-use practices. Paraphrasing was often understood mechanically as synonym substitution or sentence restructuring, while summarizing and citation conventions were not fully understood. Although students perceived plagiarism as a serious moral, academic, legal, and religious violation, some tolerated it pragmatically because of time pressure, weak enforcement, and inconsistent lecturer guidance. Plagiarism was perceived as being influenced by individual, peer-related, pedagogical, and institutional factors. Students also associated plagiarism with consequences for academic development, lecturers' responsibilities and professional reputation, institutional credibility, and original authors' intellectual ownership. Student plagiarism is a multidimensional issue requiring academic integrity education, scaffolded writing instruction, consistent lecturer support, and clear institutional policies. A faculty-level citation and plagiarism prevention guideline integrated into research methodology or academic writing courses is recommended.

Keywords: academic integrity, academic writing, higher education, plagiarism, undergraduate students.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism remains a persistent issue in higher education institutions worldwide. (Ehrich et al., 2014; Fajt & Schiller, 2025; Shen & Hu, 2021). With rapid technological development, students have easier access to a wider range of scholarly resources (Chen & Chou, 2017; Phyto

et al., 2022). Although this access supports learning and academic productivity, it also increases the risk of unethical academic practices, particularly the inappropriate use of others' texts, ideas, and intellectual products (Eret & Ok, 2014). On the other hand, text-matching software has strengthened institutions' ability to identify such

misconduct (Levine & Pazdernik, 2018). However, preventing plagiarism involves more than using detection software. It requires careful judgment, clear guidance on plagiarism types and consequences, thoughtful assignment design, incident tracking, and widely communicated policies to promote ethical, high-quality academic writing (Drisko, 2023).

The concept of plagiarism is complex, with many interpretations among both students and academic staff (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014). This includes forms of academic misconduct in higher education, such as deliberately using others' work or unintentionally misusing sources due to poor academic writing skills (Stuhmcke et al., 2016). To clarify this complex issue, scholars have sought to categorize these types of violations. For example, Walker (1998) categorized students' plagiarism into seven types: sham paraphrasing, illicit paraphrasing, other plagiarism, verbatim copying, recycling, ghostwriting, and purloining. Pecorari (2008), cited by Pecorari and Petri   (2014), differentiates between prototypical plagiarism and patchwriting. The former involves intention to deceive, while the latter reflects the students' lack of academic literacy and source-based writing practices.

No single factor fully explains why a student plagiarizes, as plagiarism is a multifaceted issue (Ehrich et al., 2014). To better understand this phenomenon, P  mies et al. (2020) developed a process-oriented model. According to this model, three stages of plagiarism are connected: occurrence, detection, and sanction. Factors at the student, instructional, and institutional levels affect these stages. The model also includes cultural, legal, and technological factors as contextual factors.

Previous studies indicate that students' understanding of plagiarism is an essential determinant of their ability to avoid it (Fitria, 2020; Tremayne & Curtis, 2021). Students with a better understanding of the different types of plagiarism are less likely to commit such behaviors (Babalola,

2012; Vieyra & Weaver, 2023). However, studies indicated that students' understanding of different types of plagiarism remains limited (Khathayut et al., 2020; Shen & Hu, 2021).

Another important factor is students' perceptions of the seriousness of plagiarism (Ashworth et al., 2006; Tremayne & Curtis, 2021) that seem closely connected to academic integrity policies and cultural academic practices (Fatemi & Saito, 2020; Palmer et al., 2019). For example, Palmer et al. (2019) found that transnational students in Singapore tend not to view plagiarism as a serious issue because of a lack of regulations in their home countries.

Attitudes toward plagiarism also affect students' decision to plagiarize (Farooq & Sultana, 2021; Phyo et al., 2022; Teeter, 2015). Students with a higher tolerance for plagiarism tend to view it more positively. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that these students will plagiarize (Farooq & Sultana, 2021).

Besides knowledge, perception, and attitude, other variables are also associated with plagiarism-related behaviors. Tremayne and Curtis (2021) have found that age and cultural background are significant predictors of plagiarism. Peer influence, by contrast, is considered less significant. Other factors that contribute to plagiarism are weak reading literacy and academic writing skills (Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Stander, 2020), insufficient understanding of plagiarism regulation (Phyo et al., 2022), insufficient understanding of the task (Ahmadi, 2014; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017); time constraints (Ahmadi, 2014; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Eret & Ok, 2014; Kayao  lu et al., 2016), laziness (Kampa et al., 2025), and busy class schedules (Eret & Ok, 2014; Kayao  lu et al., 2016). In addition, students who perform better academically were less likely to plagiarize (Do Ba et al., 2017).

Pedagogical and institutional factors can also contribute to students' likelihood of plagiarizing (Ahmadi, 2014; Eret & Ok, 2014),

including lecturers' negligence, a lack of strict punishments for plagiarism, and treating students the same regardless of whether they plagiarize. Continuous efforts to develop ethical judgment can significantly lessen students' likelihood of plagiarizing (Prashar et al., 2024). Effective plagiarism prevention requires targeted pedagogical interventions that integrate skill development with ethical reasoning (Miranda-Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Research on plagiarism has also been conducted in Indonesia, including studies on university policies (Akbar & Picard, 2019), students' understanding (Clarence et al., 2023; Putri & Faridawaty, 2022), students' perceptions (Annisa, 2023; Fitria, 2020), lecturers' perceptions (Patak et al., 2021), pedagogical interventions (Suryani & Apriani, 2021), and plagiarism detection (Resta et al., 2021). Qualitative research is still needed to examine not only students' understanding and perceptions, but also the individual, instructional, and institutional factors influencing plagiarism-related behavior, as well as its perceived consequences.

An analysis of students' academic writing in one of the faculties at the university where this study was conducted indicates that many students have not fully applied the conventions of academic writing, which may increase their risk of committing plagiarism. A similar pattern was identified through preliminary interviews with 12 students at the research site. The preliminary interview results showed that 42% of students could explain how to cite the prepared direct-quotation excerpts correctly. In comparison, 33% still demonstrated various errors, such as failing to mention the need for quotation marks or page numbers. The remaining 25% did not know how to format direct quotations properly. Therefore, further research is needed to explore this issue in greater depth.

This study aims to explore undergraduate students' understanding and perceptions of

plagiarism in academic writing, contributing factors, and views of its consequences within the Indonesian higher education context. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do undergraduate students understand plagiarism in academic writing?
2. How do undergraduate students understand source-use practices for avoiding plagiarism?
3. How do undergraduate students perceive the seriousness of plagiarism in academic writing?
4. What factors do undergraduate students perceive as contributing to plagiarism?
5. What impacts of plagiarism do undergraduate students perceive within the academic environment?

■ METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism in academic writing. The participants were students in their sixth, eighth, or later semesters at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at an Islamic private university in Jakarta. The selection of participants was based on the assumption that students in the sixth semester, eighth semester, or later semesters have sufficient experience in academic writing activities. This experience enables them to provide more reflective perspectives based on their direct involvement in academic writing practices and university learning processes.

Participants

Twenty-three students completed the demographic survey. However, not all met the interview inclusion criteria. Seventeen participants were selected as interviewees because they had adequate academic writing experience and were able to respond appropriately to questions

related to academic writing. A total of 17 participants were involved in this study. By gender, most participants were female (14; 82.4%), while 3 (17.6%) were male. This distribution indicates that female students were more strongly represented in the sample than male students. Regarding age, participants ranged from 20 to 24 years old. The largest age group was 22-year-old students, comprising 6 participants (35.3%). The participants were distributed as follows: 1 student (5.9%) from Guidance and Counseling, 2 students (11.8%) from Biology Education, 2 students (11.8%) from Elementary School Teacher Education, 4 students (23.5%) from Indonesian Language and Literature Education, and 8 students (47.1%) from English

Education. Regarding participants' exposure to information on academic writing, 13 participants (76.5%) had previously received information through orientation sessions or academic writing courses. In comparison, the remaining 4 participants (23.5%) had not received such information or taken an academic writing course.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of academic writing experiences across three academic levels: Semester 6 ($n=6$), Semester 8 ($n=7$), and Semester >8 ($n=4$). Overall, the findings indicate that students in higher semesters tend to have more diverse and advanced academic writing experiences than those in lower semesters.

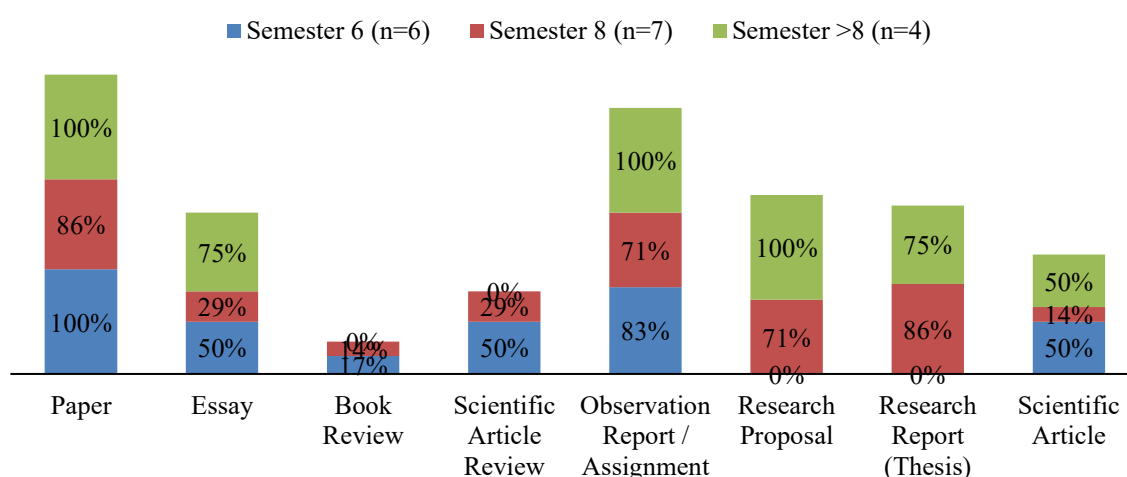


Figure 1. Demographic survey results of participants

Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism. Before the interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire via Google Forms. This questionnaire collected background information and confirmed that participants met the selection criteria. The criteria were as follows: students in at least their sixth semester with adequate experience in academic

writing, such as writing research proposals or theses. Operationally, sufficient experience was defined as participants who had direct experience related to academic writing and plagiarism, including (1) preparing or publishing scholarly work, (2) using plagiarism detection software (e.g., Turnitin or similar tools), and/or (3) demonstrating familiarity with institutional policies or guidelines on academic integrity. Participants who did not meet at least one of these criteria were excluded from the analysis because they

were considered unable to provide sufficiently informed responses relevant to the study objectives.

A hybrid interview method was employed to accommodate participants' availability and the institution's blended learning system during the pandemic recovery period. The first four interviews were conducted virtually via Google Meet. In comparison, the remaining thirteen interviews were conducted face-to-face on campus in a private setting to ensure participants' comfort and confidentiality. Although the two interview modes differed in setting, no substantial differences were observed in the depth and richness of the data obtained. Both virtual and face-to-face interviews followed the same semi-structured interview protocol, with identical core questions and opportunities for participants to elaborate and clarify. To minimize potential bias from differences in the interview environment, the researchers used consistent procedures across both modes, including building rapport with participants, maintaining a supportive interview atmosphere, allowing sufficient time for responses, and asking follow-up questions when needed. These measures helped ensure that variations in the interview setting did not significantly influence the quality and comparability of the collected data. Each interview lasted around 30 to 60 minutes. Throughout the interview process, the researchers used a flexible yet focused approach. The participants were encouraged to elaborate in detail on their views and experiences regarding plagiarism, citation practices, paraphrasing, and their interactions with text-matching software such as Turnitin. Each session was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. All interview excerpts presented in this article were translated from Indonesian into English by the authors. To protect their identities, each participant was assigned the code name

"Student" followed by a number.

This study utilized two primary instruments. The first instrument was a demographic survey designed to collect basic participant information. Before data collection, all participants received an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the procedures for data collection and use. Participants indicated their consent before completing the survey and participating in the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, all personal and academic information was anonymized using pseudonyms or identification codes, and any data that could reveal participants' identities or academic records were removed from the research reports. The collected data were stored securely and were accessible only to the researchers. This included questions about the participant's gender, age, current semester, academic writing experience, and previous exposure to academic writing courses and plagiarism awareness programs. This survey served as both a participant-screening tool and contextual background for interpreting students' responses during the interview.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed from a review of previous research on student plagiarism. This guide included questions on various dimensions of plagiarism, including its definition, types, approaches to paraphrasing and citation, and causes and consequences. The interview guide was reviewed by two university lecturers with expertise in educational measurement and evaluation. The instrument was evaluated based on clarity, relevance, alignment with the research objectives, coverage of the aspects being investigated, and appropriateness of the interview questions. The reviewers' feedback was used to refine the interview guide's wording, structure, and content before data collection.

Table 1. Interview guide

No.	Research Questions	Main Interview Questions
1.	How do undergraduate students understand plagiarism in academic writing?	What do you understand about plagiarism? How did you first learn about it? What types of plagiarism are you familiar with?
2.	How do undergraduate students understand source-use practices for avoiding plagiarism?	What do you understand about citation, quotation, paraphrasing, and source acknowledgment? How can students use other people's ideas without committing plagiarism?
3.	How serious do undergraduate students consider plagiarism in academic writing?	How serious is plagiarism in academic writing? What is your view of students who commit plagiarism? Why should plagiarism be avoided?
4.	What factors do undergraduate students perceive as contributing to plagiarism?	What factors cause students to commit plagiarism? What individual, peer-related, pedagogical, and institutional factors may contribute to plagiarism?
5.	What impacts of plagiarism do undergraduate students perceive within the academic environment?	What impacts may plagiarism have on students, lecturers, institutions, and original authors?

Data Analysis

To enhance the study's credibility, the researchers triangulated data from students across different study programs and semesters (Denzin, 2017). Credibility was further strengthened through investigator triangulation (Denzin, 2017), in which the first and second authors independently reviewed and analyzed the interview data. Their coding and interpretations were subsequently compared to identify similarities and differences. When discrepancies in code assignment or interpretation occurred, the two authors discussed the relevant transcript segments by referring to the participants' original statements and the meaning of the codes. Where necessary, code definitions were clarified or refined to ensure consistency in the interpretation of the data. The discussion continued until consensus was reached between the two authors, and the agreed interpretation was used in the subsequent categorization and development of themes.

Using an interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), the interview data were

analyzed. The model consisted of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researchers began by analyzing the transcripts to identify the initial codes and patterns. For example, codes reflecting laziness, low effort, reluctance to think, and procrastination were grouped under weak self-regulation. Codes indicating infrequent academic reading, reluctance to read extensively, limited source exploration, and insufficient source analysis were grouped as limited engagement with academic sources. Other codes, such as limited understanding of plagiarism and uncertainty about how to avoid it, formed the category of limited plagiarism knowledge. Because these categories represented student-level constraints that participants perceived as increasing vulnerability to plagiarism, they were integrated into the subtheme "individual constraints in self-regulation, engagement with academic sources, and understanding of plagiarism." This subtheme was subsequently organized under the broader theme "Multilevel Factors Contributing to Student Plagiarism."

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis produced five major themes as presented in Table 2.

Conceptual relationship among themes in students' understanding and perceptions of Plagiarism is presented in Figure 2.

Table 2. Themes and subthemes of students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism

Theme	Subtheme
Basic but Partial Conceptions of Plagiarism	Plagiarism as textual copying and imitation of others' work
	Plagiarism as using sources without proper attribution
	Limited recognition of subtle and less visible forms of plagiarism
Procedural and Incomplete Understanding of Source- Based Writing	Partial understanding of quoting and paraphrasing as source-use techniques
	Paraphrasing as a dominant but mechanical strategy
	Marginal awareness of summarizing
	Partial understanding and misconceptions of citation conventions
Ethical Rejection and Pragmatic Tolerance of Plagiarism	Plagiarism as a moral, legal, and religious violation
	Plagiarism as a threat to academic integrity and intellectual development
	Pragmatic tolerance of plagiarism under academic pressure and weak enforcement
Multilevel Factors Contributing to Student Plagiarism	Individual constraints in self-regulation, engagement with academic sources, and understanding of plagiarism
	Peer normalization of plagiarism as a low-risk strategy for task completion
	Fragmented pedagogical guidance on plagiarism and source use
	Institutional gaps in plagiarism prevention and academic integrity support
Multidimensional Consequences of Plagiarism	Academic and developmental consequences for students
	Psychological and habitual consequences for students
	Professional and reputational consequences for lecturers and institutions
	Violation of original authors' intellectual ownership and rights

The diagram shows that multilevel academic conditions provide the broader context for students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism. These conditions help explain students' partial understanding of plagiarism, incomplete understanding of source-based writing, and ambivalent perceptions of plagiarism as both ethically wrong and pragmatically tolerated. Together, these interconnected themes explain student plagiarism in academic writing and its perceived consequences for students, lecturers, institutions, and original authors.

Basic but Partial Conceptions of Plagiarism

The findings reveal that students had a basic but still partial understanding of plagiarism. Most participants were able to define plagiarism in general terms, particularly as copying, taking, or imitating someone else's work. However, their understanding was mostly limited to visible, explicit forms of plagiarism, such as copy-pasting text. For example, Student 11 defined plagiarism as "the act of copying material that has been published by someone else", which represents purloining (Walker, 1998). Another important

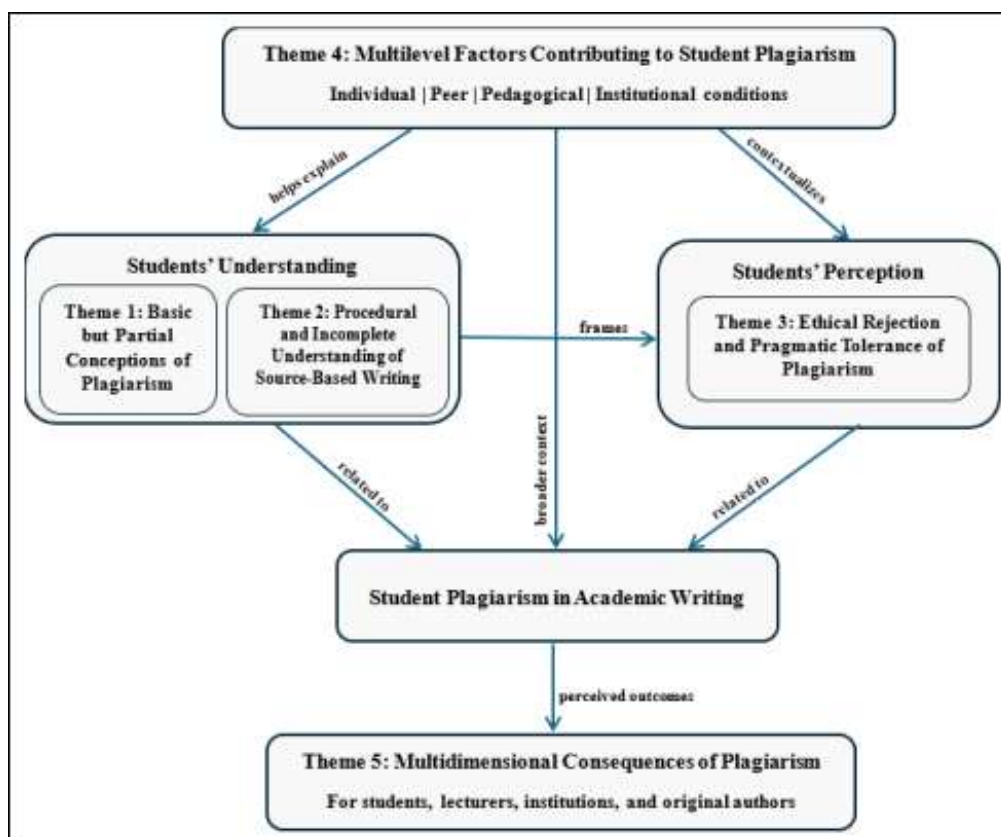


Figure 2. Thematic map of students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism

pattern was that students understood plagiarism as using others' work without proper attribution. Student 8 defined plagiarism as "taking words from someone else's article and copy-pasting them without writing the source." These statements show that students commonly viewed plagiarism as direct copying or using material word-for-word without citation, which is categorized as verbatim copying (Walker, 1998).

The two students associated plagiarism with taking or copying others' work, but their emphasis varied. Student 11 defined plagiarism broadly as copying published material, which reflects purloining. Student 8 added the issue of missing attribution, explaining that plagiarism occurs when someone uses others' words, sentences, opinions, or arguments without citing the source and presents them as their own, which fits verbatim copying. Students' definitions indicate a basic but narrow understanding of

plagiarism. These findings align with previous studies that students' understanding remained limited regarding more subtle forms of plagiarism (Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Shen & Hu, 2021).

Despite their general awareness of plagiarism, students still struggled to differentiate among its various forms. Several participants explicitly acknowledged that they did not know the types of plagiarism, suggesting that their understanding was largely confined to the general idea of copying or using others' work without appropriate acknowledgment. Only one student expressed a basic understanding of plagiarism types but admitted uncertainty. Student 4 stated: "Types of plagiarism start from the sentence, the language, to word formation. Beyond that, I am not sure." This limited understanding of plagiarism types can become a serious issue in higher education, where students must interact

critically and ethically with sources. Previous research showed that increasing students' knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism, especially the subtler forms outside of blatant copying, along with teaching them how to properly paraphrase and cite sources, could significantly decrease the likelihood of plagiarism (Do Ba et al., 2017; Levine & Pazdernik, 2018).

Procedural and Incomplete Understanding of Source-Based Writing

The interviews show that students' understanding of how to use academic sources varies. Most students knew that quoting and paraphrasing are accepted strategies for integrating external sources into academic writing. For example, Student 3 explained:

A quotation is when you quote something directly without paraphrasing. We can use quotation marks for the quote. If we paraphrase, we don't need quotation marks, but we do need to include a footnote citing the source at the end.

This statement indicates that some students understand the basic distinction between quotation and paraphrasing. They also understand that even when the wording is changed, they still need to acknowledge the source. This awareness matters because ethical use of sources requires text transformation and proper attribution.

However, not all students demonstrated this level of understanding. Paraphrasing was often presented as the only source-use technique. Some students even thought that quotation was a form of plagiarism. Student 9, for instance, described plagiarism as "taking the same quotation," suggesting uncertainty about the legitimate use of verbatim quotations when they are appropriately marked and attributed. A study by Sariffudin et al. (2017) at a public university in Indonesia found that some students believed copying other people's writing without citing the source in a literature review did not constitute

plagiarism because, in their view, literature reviews written by different individuals would produce relatively similar results. Although students' understanding of writing from sources appears contradictory across these findings, both indicate that some students still lack a comprehensive understanding of appropriate source-use techniques in academic writing. Various countries have also reported limited understanding of the rules governing source use in academic writing. It is not confined to contexts where English is not the first language. International students in the United Kingdom outperformed domestic students in declarative knowledge of citation practice (Tan & Carnegie, 2022). However, this advantage did not mean that international students had a deeper procedural understanding. Qualitative analysis showed that both international and domestic students still struggled to explain why certain citation practices were problematic and how to correct them.

Some participants viewed paraphrasing as replacing words or changing sentence structure. This suggests their grasp of deeper cognitive engagement with the source material is limited. For example, Student 12 said, "*Basically, the meaning is still the same, but the sentences are rearranged.*" Student 13 then added, "*We can use other people's opinions, but we have to rewrite it in different words, like using synonyms, changing the structure of the sentence a little, so it is not completely copying.*" Other participants described using digital tools like thesauruses, which risk mechanical rewriting rather than a true understanding of meaning. This process suggests that students often focus on lexical substitution without fully reconstructing meaning at a conceptual level. As a result, the produced texts tend to retain the original structure, with changes occurring mainly at the surface level of vocabulary. Thus, this surface transformation occurs without deeper meaning reconstruction and can be categorized as patchwriting. Rogerson and

McCarthy (2017) argue that patchwriting commonly occurs among novice writers who have not yet fully developed the ability to independently reconstruct ideas, and that using digital thesauruses may further reinforce this tendency.

Another important finding is that students rarely mentioned summarizing as a strategy for integrating sources. Only one of the 17 students mentioned summarizing as a strategy for incorporating information from other sources, whereas paraphrasing was identified much more frequently. This limited reference to summarizing does not appear to result simply from its absence from instruction. Supplementary clarification obtained from lecturers in the faculty indicated that paraphrasing and summarizing are both introduced in academic or scientific writing instruction. The discrepancy between lecturers' reports and students' responses therefore suggests a possible gap between instructional exposure and students' retained or operational understanding of source-use strategies. Although students may have encountered summarizing during instruction, they may not readily recognize it as a strategy for integrating sources and avoiding plagiarism. This may also explain why paraphrasing was considerably more salient in their accounts. Previous research shows that EFL learners often struggle with writing summaries because synthesizing and generalizing information requires higher cognitive demands (Alaofi, 2020). Without explicit instruction, students tend to rely on paraphrasing, which is often mechanical and superficial, to integrate sources.

Students also only partially understood citation and quotation practices. Some students correctly referred to the use of quotation marks, footnotes, and references, but several misconceptions remained. Students 3, 12, and 15 explained that quotations should be enclosed in quotation marks, whereas Students 14 and 17 stated that quotation marks were not necessary. Student 17 further stated that paraphrased text should be enclosed in quotation marks. These

differing views indicate inconsistencies in the students' understanding of quotation and paraphrasing practices. Student 17's understanding of quotation marks also suggests difficulty applying established citation conventions. Because the faculty provides official academic writing guidelines that include citation rules, this confusion cannot be attributed simply to the absence of a citation standard at the faculty level. A more plausible explanation may lie in students' incomplete understanding of the existing guidelines. In addition, none of the students distinguished between short and long quotations, although many citation styles require different formatting for each. This limited understanding may also help explain why students differed in their interpretations of how to present quotations in academic writing.

Overall, the study shows that students understand the importance of using sources, but their practical skills in quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing sources remain underdeveloped. The findings confirm that college students in Indonesia tend to understand academic integrity norms, but their strategies for using sources remain superficial (Fitria, 2020). Therefore, plagiarism prevention should be integrated with explicit instruction in academic writing that trains students to read, interpret, synthesize, and cite sources correctly.

Ethical Rejection and Pragmatic Tolerance of Plagiarism=

Participants expressed different perceptions regarding the seriousness of plagiarism. Some perceived plagiarism as a serious moral and legal violation. Student 1 explained: *"In my opinion, plagiarism is a criminal act. It could even be subject to legal sanctions because it negatively affects other people and involves stealing ideas, words, sources, and authorship."* Directly related to this, Student 13 even stated that plagiarism is akin to a religious transgression and used the term

haram (forbidden) from Islamic law. “It is like stealing other people’s work, right? Especially when they do not acknowledge the original author. So it is basically cheating and stealing. That is *haram*.” These perceptions are consistent with the common view that plagiarism is a negative act that violates academic integrity principles (Pecorari & Petriæ, 2014). Plagiarism often enters moral and legal discourse because it involves claims about ownership of intellectual work (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014).

In a higher education institution with a religious background, students’ perceptions of the moral sanctions of plagiarism are shaped by religious values integrated into the university’s academic culture. Principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, and the prohibition of taking others’ rights strengthen the view that plagiarism is not only an academic violation but also an unethical act from moral and religious perspectives. These values and principles are further reinforced by the university’s vision and mission, which are rooted in prophetic teaching, and by the integration of Islamic values throughout the curriculum at the university where the study was conducted. Therefore, plagiarism is understood not only as a violation of institutional rules but also as a moral and religious transgression. A previous study showed that religiously oriented institutional contexts tend to strengthen the moral dimension of plagiarism perception, where students associate it not only with academic misconduct but also with ethical values and spiritual beliefs (Zejno, 2018).

Some participants viewed plagiarism as potentially weakening students’ intellectual development, as Student 6 said: “*If plagiarism continues to happen, students become lazy to think, and this will be one of the reasons for low-quality graduates.*” Students viewed plagiarism not simply as a breach of rules but also as a threat to learning quality. Plagiarism can additionally obstruct the development of independent thinking, creativity, and academic

competence. According to Mahabeer and Pirtheepal (2019), academic dishonesty compromises the teaching and learning process and, in turn, negatively impacts the quality of graduates.

The interviews also showed more pragmatic and ambivalent perceptions. Students acknowledged that plagiarism is wrong and even *haram*, but still described it as a common practice due to academic pressure, time constraints, and weak enforcement of rules. Student 15 said:

As students, we usually just want everything done quickly, whether because there are other tasks to do. So, we work on it quickly. As long as our essay is not checked by Turnitin, we copy and paste without reading it. Actually, students do not really want to copy and paste and intentionally plagiarize. They are often just confused about how to cite properly, so in the end they quote everything.

Drawing on the process framework proposed by Pàmies et al. (2020), student plagiarism can be understood as the result of interrelated student-, lecturer-, and institution-level factors, shaped by broader contextual influences such as culture, regulations, and technology. In this study, students’ copy-and-paste practices were partly driven by pressure to complete assignments quickly amid competing academic demands. Previous experiences also appeared to shape the belief that lecturers would not thoroughly check assignments for plagiarism. These perceptions may be reinforced by structural constraints, including high student–lecturer ratios and heavy academic workloads, which reduce opportunities for in-depth, individualized, and developmental feedback on student writing. When originality is not closely monitored, and institutional enforcement remains weak, plagiarism may come to be perceived as a low-risk behavior.

Nevertheless, the moral rejection and pragmatic tolerance show that students’ attitudes

toward plagiarism are not always consistent. They may condemn plagiarism in principle but still tolerate it in practice because of high academic pressure, weak plagiarism detection, and inadequate guidance. Therefore, consistent instructional support and firm institutional enforcement are important for strengthening students' ethical awareness.

Multilevel Factors Contributing to Student Plagiarism

The findings show that plagiarism by undergraduate students is rarely caused by a single factor. It results from complex interactions among individual, peer, pedagogical, and institutional factors.

Individual constraints in self-regulation, engagement with academic sources, and understanding of plagiarism

At the individual level, laziness emerged as a recurring factor contributing to plagiarism. Participants described reluctance to invest sufficient effort in reading, thinking, and paraphrasing academic sources. Student 9, for example, identified "laziness" alongside "lack of time" as conditions that could encourage plagiarism. This finding suggests that reduced effort may make copying seem like an easier alternative to engaging more fully with academic writing tasks. Previous studies have similarly identified laziness as a factor associated with plagiarism (Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Khathayut et al., 2020). Importantly, laziness should not always be understood as a fixed personal trait. Student 2 described a situation in which students become stuck in their thinking or writing and lose motivation, eventually turning to other people's research as an easier alternative. This suggests that reduced effort may also be linked to difficulty sustaining motivation during academic writing.

Time constraints and difficulties in managing academic tasks also appeared to reinforce this

tendency. Student 13 explained that students may resort to inappropriate shortcuts when they feel pressured by approaching deadlines. Student 12 described deadlines as creating pressure, fatigue, and difficulty thinking clearly. Taken together, these accounts suggest that time constraints may reduce students' opportunities to read sources carefully, develop their own ideas, paraphrase appropriately, and revise their writing. Under such conditions, copying may become a more expedient way to complete academic tasks. This finding aligns with previous studies that identify time pressure as a contributing factor in plagiarism in higher education (Ahmadi, 2014; Eret & Ok, 2014; Kayaoğlu et al., 2016).

Limited engagement with academic sources also contributed to plagiarism. Participants described insufficient academic reading habits, reluctance to explore multiple sources, and limited engagement with source materials. Student 16 explained, "Students usually do not read enough books. So they just think, 'just copy it, just take it from there,' without acknowledging the author." This finding aligns with research showing that effective source-based writing requires students to read, understand, select, and appropriately integrate information from sources (Hirvela & Du, 2013). This tendency may be intensified by time constraints. Student 10, who acknowledged having plagiarized parts of an essay, attributed this to "lack of time" and "laziness." Thus, limited academic reading habits combined with insufficient time may reduce opportunities for careful source processing and increase reliance on copying as a quicker way to complete academic tasks.

Students also pointed to a limited understanding of plagiarism itself. Student 7 stated: "Lots of plagiarism cases happen because people do not actually understand what plagiarism is or how to avoid it." Studies across different contexts also show that students often misunderstand subtle forms of plagiarism, especially paraphrasing and citation (Do Ba et al., 2017; Khathayut et al.,

2020; Shen & Hu, 2021). Explicit instructions can strengthen students' understanding of textual plagiarism and their ability to reference (Du, 2020). Meanwhile, lack of awareness of how to use a source correctly leads to accidental plagiarism (Pecorari & Petri , 2014).

Peer normalization of plagiarism as a low-risk academic shortcut

The peer culture appears to encourage plagiarism through normalization and a lack of awareness of its risks. Some participants described copying as a socially learned practice, where students "go along with their friends," especially when peers do the same thing and "nothing happens." Thus, "there are no consequences," and they feel that copying is acceptable (Student 11). Other participants described how their peers encouraged them to take shortcuts by sharing unreliable sources and saying, "just use it... what is important is that the assignment is done" (Student 16).

These findings suggest that plagiarism is not merely an individual act of misconduct but can also be socially learned and normalized within peer groups. The participants' accounts show that students may perceive copying as acceptable when they see their friends doing the same thing and when no visible consequences follow. Khathayut et al. (2020) found that social norms, peer behavior, and the learning community influenced Thai undergraduate students' plagiaristic behavior. Their study reported that many students believed they "follow others" and assumed others would do the same. More importantly, the study showed that when society or the university does not take plagiarism seriously, and when "nothing happens" to those who plagiarize, students may come to regard plagiarism as acceptable.

Fragmented pedagogical guidance on plagiarism and source use

At the pedagogical level, lecturers played an important role in shaping students' awareness

and practices regarding plagiarism. However, students reported different levels of exposure to such guidance. Student 8 recalled receiving some explanation of plagiarism in an Indonesian language course. In contrast, Student 4 described more explicit guidance in research methodology and academic writing courses, including plagiarism checking, Turnitin, and paraphrasing. In contrast, Student 7 reported receiving no formal instruction and described learning about plagiarism independently. These contrasting experiences indicate that guidance on plagiarism and source use was present but unevenly distributed across courses.

Explicit learning like this is critical because students need concrete guidance on how to avoid plagiarism, and not just warnings that plagiarism is not allowed. Effective plagiarism prevention requires sustained, hands-on academic integrity instruction that teaches students how to use, cite, paraphrase, summarize, and integrate sources meaningfully in academic writing (Fatemi & Saito, 2020). Ashworth et al. (1997) also found that students' understanding of plagiarism varies according to the institutional guidance they have received, or the lack thereof. When instruction on plagiarism is unclear or not integrated into the curriculum, students may not receive the same level of preparation.

Another factor shaping students' behavior was lecturers' use of text-matching software, such as Turnitin. Some students reported that they were required to submit a screenshot of their Turnitin similarity report before receiving their grades. Student 3 stated, "During exams, we have to include a screenshot of the plagiarism report at the top of our papers." Student 14 similarly explained that lecturers checked similarity more strictly in theses than in regular course papers. However, this practice tended to become more rigorous toward the end of the semester. The more frequent use of Turnitin near the end of the semester may also be related to students' limited access to the service. For example, plagiarism checking was available through the university

library, where students had to submit their documents through a designated link. Library staff then processed the files, and students received the similarity report several days later. This procedure may limit students' opportunities to use Turnitin regularly during the writing and revision process.

Turnitin has helped students and lecturers avoid plagiarism. However, relying heavily on similarity scores has its disadvantages. Students could become too focused on lowering their scores rather than improving the quality of their writing. Student 2 stated that they were asked to "change the pattern so that it will not be detected as a complete copy". Orlando et al. (2018) cautioned that students might focus on reducing the similarity index by superficially altering the text. An approach that focuses too much on detection could lead students to avoid risk rather than practice well (Goddiksen et al., 2024).

Institutional gaps in plagiarism prevention and academic integrity support

Most participants said their study programs or the university had previously held information sessions on academic writing, plagiarism, and text-similarity checking using text-matching software available through the university library. For example, Student 3 stated that the head of the study program led a session on plagiarism and academic writing. However, some participants reported never having participated in such activities. Student 10, for instance, said, "*There has been no information session from the study program about plagiarism.*" Other students were unaware of plagiarism-related activities, even when they had reportedly occurred. When plagiarism policies are communicated inconsistently or remain disconnected from learning activities, students often do not read, remember, or fully understand them (Chen & Chou, 2017; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010).

Students also mentioned that the faculty had provided academic writing guidelines. The

guidelines also explain what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Nevertheless, some students stated that they had not read the guidelines. This does not necessarily mean students are unwilling to read the guidelines; rather, it suggests the information has not been effectively shared or integrated into the learning process. Consequently, the issue reflects a disconnect between providing information and students' access to and awareness of it. As a result, the available guidelines have not fully functioned as a practical reference for students in their everyday academic activities. A study at a university in Australia found that only 52% of students had read the university's plagiarism policy (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014). However, in that study, students' understanding of plagiarism did not depend on whether they had read the university's plagiarism policy.

Students also reported an institutional similarity threshold, such as a maximum of 20%. However, they said implementation and explanation were still lacking. At times, regulations were given without proper guidance on how to interpret similarity reports and revise writing ethically. Some students said they could access Turnitin only when working on their thesis. These show the tool was still used administratively rather than pedagogically. Student 5 explained that Turnitin was used "when nearing the thesis defense." This limited access deprives students of the opportunity to learn from similarity reports throughout their academic journey. If students engage with plagiarism checking only at the final stage of their thesis, they may see it as an administrative requirement rather than a learning tool.

These findings reflect the multilevel nature of plagiarism behavior as described by Pàmies et al. (2020), who conceptualize plagiarism as the result of interactions among student-related, instructional, and institutional factors. At the student level, low reading literacy, limited understanding of plagiarism, time pressure, and peer influence increase the likelihood of plagiarism occurrence. At the instructional level, excessive

academic workload, insufficient integration of citation and paraphrasing instruction into coursework, and limited feedback on academic writing further reinforce this tendency. At the institutional level, gaps in policy dissemination, limited use of Turnitin as a learning tool, and the suboptimal implementation of academic guidelines affect the effectiveness of plagiarism detection and prevention.

Plagiarism cannot be explained solely by individual student characteristics; instead, it should be understood as the outcome of interactions among multiple factors within the academic ecosystem (Ellery, 2008; Nabee et al., 2020; Prashar et al., 2024). Consequently, efforts to address plagiarism should focus on enhancing students' academic competencies, strengthening lecturers' instructional practices, and developing institutional policies and systems that promote academic integrity sustainably.

Multidimensional Consequences of Plagiarism

Students have shown a broad understanding of the consequences of plagiarism. Their responses went beyond individual academic sanctions, covering consequences for lecturers, institutions, and the original author. This indicates their emerging awareness of plagiarism as a systemic and ethical issue.

Academic and developmental consequences for students

Students perceived plagiarism as having direct academic consequences. Student 2 expressed their concern that plagiarized works "could be rejected by the supervisor" or "might not be approved" when submitted to a journal. Student 10 similarly reported that detected plagiarism could result in lower grades, failure to pass, or cancellation of a seminar proposal. These accounts show that students associated plagiarism with consequences ranging from revision and grade penalties to rejection of academic work.

However, the most frequently mentioned consequence of plagiarism was becoming reluctant to think independently. According to Students 8 and 12, this tendency may prevent students from developing their thinking abilities. Students also linked plagiarism to weakened creativity. Student 14 explained: "*Because we don't want to think. We only copy. So, there are no innovative and creative thoughts or ideas.*" In this study, students viewed plagiarism as more than just a disciplinary violation. They also perceived it as a learning problem. When students copied instead of forming their own ideas, they missed the opportunity to develop analytical, synthetic, and argumentative thinking skills. Khathayut et al. (2020) connect plagiarism with weak self-regulation and academic disengagement.

Psychological and habitual consequences for students

The students also mentioned psychological consequences. They associated plagiarism with low confidence, discomfort, panic, and dissatisfaction with their own writing. This emotional dimension complements previous studies that have associated plagiarism with low self-efficacy, avoidance, and a cycle of disengagement, especially when students do not receive continuous support in academic writing (Fatemi & Saito, 2020; Khathayut et al., 2020).

Additionally, plagiarism is also thought to weaken a person's writing competence and make them dependent on other people's material. Repeated engagement in plagiarism may gradually undermine students' ability to write independently. Student 15 describes a pattern of prolonged dependency, saying that "*we end up becoming too dependent on other people's works. Our knowledge of writing will weaken.*" These perceptions support the argument that preventing plagiarism depends on the continuous development of writing skills. Students may depend on copying when they do not receive

adequate feedback and instruction in academic writing (Hirvela & Du, 2013).

Students also cautioned that plagiarism could become a habit, especially when it goes undetected and not corrected. When repeated, it becomes normalized and continues. Student 11 said, "*We know that it is plagiarism. However, when it becomes a habit... it will just keep happening.*" Student 13 emphasized that when plagiarism goes unnoticed, it can persist and hinder a person's independent development. One participant even linked plagiarism to a broader decline in morals, saying that "*corruption can start from plagiarism*" (Student 5). Although this statement is moral rather than empirical, it reflects students' perceptions that academic dishonesty could lead to broader ethical behavior. These findings further indicate that plagiarism should be viewed as more than just a matter of detection and consequences. It is part of long-term academic integrity education that develops ethical judgment and writing competency (Pàmies et al., 2020; Prashar et al., 2024).

Professional and reputational consequences for lecturers and institutions

Plagiarism was also perceived to affect lecturers by increasing their corrective and supervisory responsibilities. When plagiarism was identified, lecturers were expected to review students' work more closely, require revisions or resubmission, reduce grades, and provide further guidance on appropriate academic writing practices. Student 8, for example, explained that lecturers usually asked students to replace or redo plagiarized work. In contrast, Student 10 reported that plagiarism could result in reduced grades or even cancellation of a seminar proposal. Student 16 similarly noted that students might be required to repeat their work or receive lower grades. These accounts suggest that plagiarism may increase the monitoring, feedback, and corrective intervention lecturers must provide.

Student 4 explained, "*If we plagiarize in our thesis, it is not just us that looks bad. Our thesis supervisor could also get the blame.*" Vehviläinen et al. (2018) described the emotional reactions lecturers experienced in response to student plagiarism, such as disappointment that they had failed to guide and support students in meeting academic standards.

At the institutional level, plagiarism was perceived as a potential threat to academic credibility and educational quality. Student 13 stated that persistent plagiarism could reduce the university's credibility and quality and might even affect its accreditation, particularly if plagiarism cases became publicly known. Student 6 also linked ongoing plagiarism to the institution's failure to produce high-quality graduates, while Student 15 suggested that repeated copying could produce academic work that lacks originality and development. These perceptions indicate that students viewed plagiarism not only as an individual academic violation but also as a practice that may undermine the institution's reputation, the quality of its graduates, and the originality of its scholarly output. Student 5 stated, "If plagiarism happens often, people will say that this university is not serious about academic quality." Sutherland-Smith (2014) argued that plagiarism management is closely tied to quality assurance and risk management because institutions must ensure that assessment decisions are authentic, valid, transparent, and consistently applied.

Violation of original authors' intellectual ownership and rights

An important dimension of students' perceptions was their empathy toward the original author whose work was plagiarized. Some participants perceived plagiarism as a violation of the author's efforts and authorship. Student 1 described plagiarism as a copyright violation that may harm the original author. Student 6 similarly viewed plagiarism as unfair to original authors

because others took their writing. These views frame plagiarism as a violation of intellectual ownership and scholarly respect rather than merely a technical citation error (Fitria, 2020; Gotterbarn et al., 2006).

Plagiarizing others' work may also constitute copyright infringement, depending on the jurisdiction and institutional policies. Some participants showed an awareness of this legal dimension. Student 17 said, "*Plagiarism is not just unethical. It also violates the law. It could be taken to court if it is serious.*" This shows that students can develop a legal and ethical appreciation for authorship and intellectual property with more appropriate instruction.

■ CONCLUSION

Undergraduate students' understanding and perceptions of plagiarism are shaped not only by their knowledge of academic rules but also by their academic literacy, writing experience, moral reasoning, and institutional learning environment. Although students generally recognize plagiarism as unethical, their understanding of source use remains partial and procedural. This indicates that plagiarism prevention cannot rely solely on students' individual awareness or on similarity-checking tools. Rather, it requires a more integrated approach that connects academic writing instruction, ethical formation, lecturer guidance, and institutional policy.

The findings suggest that plagiarism should be understood as a multidimensional academic problem rather than merely as individual misconduct. Students' limited ability to interpret, transform, synthesize, and acknowledge sources shows that plagiarism is closely linked to developing source-based writing competence. At the same time, inconsistent pedagogical guidance and uneven institutional communication may weaken students' ability to internalize academic integrity as a sustained academic practice.

Given these findings, the study highlights the need for a systemic, integrated approach to

academic integrity education. Universities should provide scaffolded academic writing instruction across all levels of study, equip lecturers with the tools and training to guide ethical writing practices, and enforce plagiarism policies consistently across programs. One operational step is to develop a faculty-level citation and plagiarism prevention guideline integrated into research methodology or academic writing courses. The guideline can be introduced at the beginning of the course and supported by examples and practical exercises on quotations, paraphrasing, and source attribution. Lecturers can then apply the guideline to students' assignments and provide feedback on citation errors. The effectiveness of the guideline can be evaluated through assignment reviews and feedback from both students and lecturers at the end of the semester. In this way, the citation guideline can become an integral part of the learning process rather than relying solely on students' initiative to read and understand it.

Such a guideline should also be accompanied by structured practice in citation, paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesis, and interpretation of similarity reports. By embedding plagiarism prevention into regular academic writing instruction, institutions can promote a more consistent, ethical, and sustainable culture of academic integrity. Ultimately, fostering academic honesty requires not only technical training in writing conventions but also a deeper ethical commitment to the values of original thought, scholarly respect, and intellectual responsibility.

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■ DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USAGE IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the drafting of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to help translate the authors' Indonesian drafts into English and refine the English version for clarity and academic style. Grammarly was also used to check grammatical accuracy and improve language clarity. The authors reviewed, verified, and revised all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the final manuscript's accuracy, originality, and integrity.

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