



## Plagiarism and Academic Literacies: The Case of Iranian Graduate Students of Agricultural Sciences

Mahmood Reza Atai<sup>1\*</sup>, Esmat Babaii<sup>2</sup>, Elahe Fazlollahi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran, [atai@khu.ac.ir](mailto:atai@khu.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran, [babaii@khu.ac.ir](mailto:babaii@khu.ac.ir)

<sup>3</sup>Ph.D Candidate, Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran, [ela.fazlollahi@gmail.com](mailto:ela.fazlollahi@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The problem of plagiarism has been a hot issue of concern to the academic community in recent years. In this study, we probed the factors which overtly or covertly lead to plagiarism growth among graduate students of agricultural sciences in Iran. To this end, we investigated the perceptions of 187 graduate students in the field of agricultural sciences towards the nature of plagiarism, different forms of plagiarism, and the underlying motives for plagiarism through a questionnaire. Academic literacies model was adopted as a reference point to uncover those injustices in the educational sector deterring literacy development. The results revealed that plagiarism grows hand in hand with deviation from scientific values and devaluation of science, marketization of science and violations of academic commitments, and politicization of science and alienation from the universal standards. The findings could provide useful implications for revisiting and reforming the educational policies in general and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs in particular.

**Keywords:** Academic Literacies, Agricultural Sciences, Academic Writing, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Plagiarism

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## 1. Introduction

Backed by its increasing expansion across the globe, English has established itself as the international language of transmitting science and technology; and as a result, "research articles in English have become one of the main channels for distributing and advancing scientific knowledge among scholars world-wide." (Kanoksilapatham, 2005, p. 270). Therefore, the ability to write an academic paper, particularly an English academic paper, has become an indispensable segment of academic life and, through the years, the main way for assessing academic literacies of higher education (HE) students in academic settings.

Gradually, a variety of reasons, including the policies of expansion at HE (Lillis & Scott, 2007) and the new research policies imposed on researchers and academic members across different contexts in the world (Tran et al., 2017), heat up the global competition for publication in academic journals. However, writing an academic paper is a demanding task and requires a great diversity of skills and literacies. Besides, through this process, the authority of the author as a critical thinker is constructed (Ivanič, 1998). Accordingly, the challenges of writing an academic paper may lead some of the members to bypass the deficiencies and take strategies incongruent with one of the main publication requirements: *the originality of the manuscript*. Of little wonder, such strategies have posed tough challenges to the novice members so that sometimes they find themselves labeled as plagiarists instead of authors. Unfortunately, plagiarism is a complex issue and a wide variety of reasons fuel the problem in academic settings. Hence, raising awareness of this growing problem is of great value.

## 2. Literature Review

As a tightly tied concept to the notions of authorship and originality, plagiarism was born in the Western tradition and in line with the emergence of Enlightenment in the modern era. In the preceding years and in the pre-modern (mimetic) era, mimesis was a common means through which authors established their authority (Howard, 1995; Pennycook, 1996).

However, by the emergence of Enlightenment in Europe, the mimetic, reproductive view of the world was replaced by the productive power of the mind (Pennycook, 1996). In this sense, the unique power of writing in constructing the identity of the author and equally in creating new knowledge (Abasi, 2008; Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998, 1999) was foregrounded. To elucidate, in the process of academic writing, individuals take part in a continuous intellectual challenge in appropriating both the content space and the rhetorical space (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987), through which the reflective side of the mind is activated; both knowledge and language are developed; and as a result, the individuality of the author as

the sole originator of the work is constructed. No doubt, the production of disciplinary knowledge requires such challenges and changes in the schema and language of the previous sources (Lea & Street, 1999); with this in mind, citizenship to academia is only granted to those who have participated in this challenge and made their own genuine identity. In the modern era and in line with the technological innovation of the printing press as well as mass education, copyright law was introduced (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Howard, 1995, 2007; Pennycook, 1996) to protect both moral and property rights of authors as originators of academic works. Accordingly, plagiarism, as a serious threat to the trust and honesty governing the academia, and as a theft stealing the opportunity for the construction of that genuine identity, has been seriously condemned in the academic world.

Nonetheless, unfortunately, a variety of reasons have fueled the rapid worldwide growth of plagiarism. As echoed in the related literature, plagiarism is not "a simple black-and-white issue" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 201), but a thorny issue manifested in different forms. Moreover, many factors creep into the cover term of plagiarism, and that is why the notion of plagiarism still suffers from the absence of an operational definition as well as a reliable criterion for its identification (Pecorari, 2001). In addition, the policies of expansion at HE and the subsequent overemphasis on research ideal have also confronted scholars across the world with the so-called postmodern challenges. Indeed, as a result of the recent advancement of technology and due to loads of information available in the literature, the borderlines of common knowledge are on the wane (Howard, 1995), and full acknowledgment of the real author and originator of a source has become nearly "a chimera" (Howard, 2000, p. 474). As another postmodernist issue, Pennycook (1996) argued that "We are not speaking subjects but spoken subjects, we do not create language but are created by it" (p. 209). Therefore, in addition to the "death of God" which was evidenced by the birth of the author in the modern era; the world is now witnessing the "death of subject" (Pennycook 1996, p. 209) for the sake of the reader as the creator of meaning (Howard, 2007). Nonetheless, the long-established publishing companies still insist on copyright laws to preserve the individuality and authority of authors and have, therefore, adopted a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism.

In the realm of academia, the responsibility to identify and satisfy the needs of individuals is on the shoulders of EAP programs. In this respect, the way literacy is defined in academic contexts guides the practices of EAP courses. Unfortunately, the persistence of these courses on a single way of conceptualizing literacy, transferable in the form of common discrete skills (Hyland & Shaw, 2016), has led to exploring the notion of plagiarism irrespective of the broader context which has fueled the problem.

Nonetheless, academic literacies model as a more recent approach to writing promises to provide a better understanding to the notion of plagiarism by emphasizing that learning in general and writing in particular are issues of identity construction and accordingly are not divorced from the situational context within which they are constructed (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007).

Having its roots broadly in the field of "New Literacy Studies" (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) and narrowly in educational Marxism and critical education (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), this approach targets the injustices in the social, cultural or more specifically educational contexts which could deter the literacy development among the members of academic society. In this sense, the academic literacies model is supported by both epistemology and ideology; and takes account of the issues of power, authority, meaning-making, and identity which were the missed issues in the previous models of writing (Lea & Street, 2006). From the angle of ideology, it adopts a transformative approach and emphasizes that students are heterogeneous individuals whose live experiences, their meaning-making processes and their perspectives on writing should be taken into account (Lillis & Scott, 2007).

In this sense, Lea and Street (1998) have suggested to explore the problems of writing through the broader lens of academic literacies in order to take account of the discrepancies that exist in the perspectives on the notion of plagiarism. However, of the long list of studies conducted in relation with plagiarism, only a few of them scrutinized the problem with respect to literacy issues. In this respect, Pennycook (1996) examined plagiarism from the cultural perspective and argued that what deterred students in Asian countries from critical analysis of sources is the heavy reliance of the educational systems of these countries on the technique of memorization, while this technique should be applied solely in the very early stages of learning, and there should be a gradual shift from memorization with the aim of superficial learning to a much deeper understanding of texts at higher levels of education. In this sense, the main task of universities at HE is to extend the abilities with which students enter the university into more critical thinking (Lea & Street, 1999); however, as Lea (2016) argued they have deviated from their original literacy missions and instead have been more valued for their "commercial and transfer value" rather than their "intellectual or critical value" (p. 88). In this sense, Flowerdew and Li (2007) also warned that plagiarism grows hand in hand with the "marketization of the academy" (p. 162). In another study, Ritter (2005) analyzed online paper mill websites and concluded that commodification of writing papers will "negate the academic value of authorship" and change the roles of novice writers "from an author to a plagiarist" and "from a student to a *consumer*" (italic in the original text) (p. 603).

Following the same literacy concerns, the researchers believe that mere detection of superficial reasons for plagiarism is insufficient. Instead, there is an urgent need to go beyond the observable phenomena to reveal the underlying causes which increase gravitation to plagiarism.

## **2.1. Academic Writing and Plagiarism in Iran**

Following the same worldwide concern to increase its publications, Iran's government has also imposed the same research policies implemented across different contexts. As a result, Iranian scholars could ultimately free themselves from the problems which hampered the scientists of the third world countries (Arani et al., 2018) and could make an upward trend in publication rates so that Iran won the fastest growth rate in a scientific publication (Science-Metrix, 2010 as cited in Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017). However, the very low H-index and the low number of citations per document unveiled new debates on the quality of the published papers (Ataie-Ashtiani, 2017). Subsequently, the hotly reflected reports on the retraction of research articles authored by Iranian scholars raised the red flags on the validity of these papers and provided further evidence to confirm that Iran's educational system has fallen into the same trap of plagiarism growth experienced across the world.

To identify the reasons behind the problem, several studies explored plagiarism in the academic context of Iran, and some of these findings revealed that: plagiarism has turned into quite a common problem in university settings (Ahmadi, 2014); the problem is the offshoot of the absence of a proper perception towards the concept of plagiarism, its nature, and its different meanings among the Iranian language students (Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013); and the absence of policy on plagiarism as well as a clear definition for the term in the content of syllabuses of TEFL university teachers (Nushi & Firoozkahi, 2017).

Though such studies offer useful information on plagiarism, the focus of almost all these studies have been on the field of applied linguistics. Needless to say that reports on plagiarism occurrence come from nearly all disciplines; and as EAP specialists, we are charged with exploring and identifying the writing needs of learners in all academic disciplines. Not only so, nearly none of the aforementioned studies have explored the topic with respect to literacy issues and the context of situation. Inspired by academic literacies model, and by focusing on the situational context of Iran, this study addresses the underlying barriers which may prevent the production of original works by Iranian scholars in the field of agricultural sciences as one of the rarely explored areas in need of more investigation. Accordingly, the present study was set out to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Iranian graduate students of agricultural sciences in relation to the nature of plagiarism?
2. What are the perceptions of Iranian graduate students of agricultural sciences in relation to different forms of plagiarism?
3. What are the likely reasons for doing plagiarism from the viewpoints of Iranian graduate students of agricultural sciences?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Context of the Study and Participants

This study was situated broadly in the EFL context of Iran and narrowly in the state university of LPU (Land Protection University, a pseudonym used for ethical purposes). At this university, a variety of sub-disciplines are taught at four faculties of Crop Sciences, Agricultural Engineering, Animal Sciences and Fisheries, and Natural Resources, under the broader major of Agricultural Sciences.

Accordingly, through a snowball sampling procedure, 187 graduate students took part in the present study of which 87 were MSc students and 100 were PhD students. Demographic details regarding the number of participants by gender, degree and their fields of study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

*Overview of Graduate Students Demographics*

Total number	Gender		Degree		Fields of Study			
	Male	Female	MSc	PhD	Crop Sciences	Agricultural Engineering	Animal Sciences & Fisheries	Natural Resources
Participants 187	85 (45.5%)	102 (54.5%)	87 (46.5%)	100 (53.5%)	84 (44.9%)	45 (24.1%)	33 (17.6%)	25 (13.4%)

#### 3.2. Materials and Instruments

The most important part in this study was to devise a questionnaire well-gearred to the purpose of the study. To this end, the existing literature on plagiarism and the related issues (e.g., Abasi et al. 2006; Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Howard, 1995, 2000, 2007; Ritter, 2005) were reviewed meticulously. Also, we studied the prior interview protocols and questionnaires on the agenda (e.g., Abasi, 2008; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017, Bradinova, 2006; Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013) and extracted the main themes.

Then, to decide on the main factors to be considered in developing the questionnaire, the third author of this study used the extracted themes as prompts and initiated individual unstructured interviews with two graduate students and one assistant professor in the field of agricultural sciences. The interviews were conducted individually and in participants' native language, to secure maximum clarity and comfort on the part of the participants, and were basically intended to elicit more specific information on plagiarism at both manifest and latent levels in the very early stages of the formulation of the research (Boyatzis, 1998). To mitigate the sensitivity to the topic, the researcher relied on memory and just noted the important themes in her notebook after the interviews. Then the early draft of the questionnaire was prepared taking into account the basic guidelines on questionnaire development (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Then two domain experts in education were consulted and some of the items were discarded, some were reworded, and some others remained intact. Again the items of the amended drafts were checked with respect to literature to see whether they serve the purpose of the present study. Subsequently, in order to secure the comprehensibility of the items, the researchers translated the final draft of the questionnaire into Persian (the native language of participants). The Persian version was also checked with regard to the technical guidelines on questionnaire development, and literature. Then the same disciplinary individuals (who participated in chats on the topic) read the items and expressed their ideas regarding the clarity of the items. After that the two domain experts in education were again consulted, so that the final Persian draft of the questionnaire was approved by them.

Then the draft was piloted with 71 graduate students similar to the original participants of the target community. The estimated Cronbach's Alpha for the internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.81 which showed a safe enough ground to collect data for the study.

The questionnaire comprised of four main sections (See Appendix 1). With the exception of the first section which elicited the demographic information, all the 48 items in sections B-D scrutinized the factors explicitly or implicitly contributing to plagiarism growth in academic settings through a five-point Likert scale. The responses to each section accordingly addressed one of the research questions.

### **3.3. Procedure**

To alleviate the sensitivity to the topic of *plagiarism* as an unpleasant topic for discussion, the researchers used the snowball sampling method for data collection (Cohen et al., 2007). The need for contact persons at the target university was, therefore, urgent. To this end, the researchers referred to the

research laboratories at each of the abovementioned faculties, and explained the overall purposes of the study to the laboratory experts and asked them to assist the researchers in finding the graduate students. Through the data collection procedure, the willingness of the participants was also important so that all the participants were given the choice of filling out the questionnaire or returning it as blank. Ultimately, of the 200 questionnaires which were distributed among the graduate students, 187 were returned.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

To provide answers to the research questions, the collected data were coded and fed in SPSS version 24. To verify the construct validity of the questionnaire, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. To this end, all the items were factor analyzed. The results revealed that with a minimum eigenvalue of 1 and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, rotation converged in five iterations and three factors were extracted by way of principal component analysis. Further analysis of the findings indicated that all 48 items of the questionnaire fell into right distinct clusters. Therefore, the results of CFA supported the overall construct of the questionnaire and the researchers safely went on to calculate the descriptive statistics for the responses.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results

Tables 2 to 4 below provide the descriptive statistics for the sections B to D of the questionnaire. The questions on sections B (*B1-B13*), and D (*D1-D21*) were made on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). For section C (*C1-C14*), the respondents were required to rate their responses to each item based on 5 (*definitely plagiarism*) to 1 (*definitely not plagiarism*). Each section of the questionnaire explored a different scenario on plagiarism and addressed one of the research questions. However, on the whole, all the items scrutinized the factors contributing to plagiarism growth in Iran.

#### 4.1.1. The Perceptions towards the Nature of Plagiarism

The first research question in this study investigated the perceptions of graduate students of agricultural sciences regarding the nature of plagiarism. As illustrated in Table 2, a quite high percentage of participants (n=187, 96.2%) agreed that *plagiarism is wrong because plagiarists ignore the rights of the first author of the original text*. Their perceptions towards plagiarism in order of priority were: *plagiarism is a type of cheating* (94.7%); *I have a good knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism* (88.8%); *plagiarism is considered as a serious problem in our higher education system* (83.9%);



*plagiarism is wrong because it prevents one from learning (80.2%); plagiarism is always wrong and those who plagiarize should be punished severely (74.9%); if I do plagiarism, I feel guilty (71.7%) ; and plagiarism occurs due to ignoring the ethical values (69.5%).*

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Perceptions of Graduate Students towards the Nature of Plagiarism*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
B1. Plagiarism is a type of cheating	141 (75.4)	36 (19.3)	8 (4.3)	2 (1.1)	0 (0)
B2. I have a good knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism.	77 (41.2)	89 (47.6)	16 (8.6)	4 (2.1)	1 (0.5)
B3. Plagiarism is always wrong and those who plagiarize should be punished severely.	74 (39.6)	66 (35.3)	35 (18.7)	11 (5.9)	1 (0.5)
B4. Plagiarism is wrong because it prevents one from learning	86 (46.0)	64 (34.2)	26 (13.9)	11 (5.9)	0 (0)
B5. Plagiarism is wrong because plagiarists ignore the rights of the first author of the original text.	122 (65.2)	58 (31.0)	0 (0)	7 (3.7)	0 (0)
B6. Plagiarism occurs due to ignoring the ethical values	63 (33.7)	67 (35.8)	38 (20.3)	15 (8.0)	4 (2.1)
B7. It's OK to plagiarize because so many other students are currently doing it.	2 (1.1)	6 (3.2)	18 (9.6)	79 (42.2)	82 (43.9)
B8. If I do plagiarism, I feel guilty.	71 (38.0)	63 (33.7)	35 (18.7)	6 (3.2)	12 (6.4)
B9. Plagiarism is a kind of mistake which occurs as a result of unfamiliarity with the conventions of citation.	44 (23.5)	56 (29.9)	60 (32.1)	21 (11.2)	6 (3.2)
B10. Plagiarism is Ok, because it is a common act done by many students.	2 (1.1)	5 (2.7)	30 (16.0)	55 (29.4)	95 (50.8)
B11. Plagiarism is considered as a serious problem in our higher education system.	90 (48.1)	67 (35.8)	20 (10.7)	8 (4.3)	2 (1.1)
B12. I don't really understand what plagiarism exactly is.	5 (2.7)	21 (11.2)	39 (20.9)	68 (36.4)	54 (28.9)
B13. If students are found plagiarizing, they should be punished severely.	23 (12.3)	58 (31.0)	69 (36.9)	28 (15.0)	9 (4.8)

While most participants considered plagiarism as an unethical, immoral and at the same time serious problem in academic settings, which should be severely punished, fewer number of participants also agreed that plagiarism could be "*a kind of mistake which occurs as a result of unfamiliarity with the conventions of citation*" (53.4%), and even fewer number agreed on "*severe punishing of students if they are found plagiarizing*" (43.3%). As Table 3 shows, only about 13.9 % of participants agreed that "*they have no good understanding of what plagiarism exactly is*".

In addition, only a small proportion considered plagiarism acceptable solely due to the fact that "it occurs frequently by so many students" ( $B7= 4.3\%$  and  $B10= 3.8\%$ ).

#### **4.1.2. Perceptions towards Different Forms of Plagiarism**

In order to find the perceptions towards different forms of plagiarism, the participants of the study were asked to rate the extent to which they believed each item was a case of plagiarism on a Likert scale.

As Table 3 shows, a quite high percentage of participants (97.8%) considered "*submitting a paper written entirely by another person as your own*" as a well-known form of plagiarism. Below you will see the perceptions of the respondents of this study towards different forms of plagiarism in order of priority: *copying a proportion of text from another source in your paper without providing a citation* (94.1%); *submission of a paper written partly by another person as your own* (92%); *to purchase a paper from a term paper mill or paper writing companies and submitting it as if it is your own* (89.8%); *using someone else's idea or theory as if it is your own without citation* (89.3%); *using someone else's words as if they were your own without citation* (86.1%); *deleting someone's name from the list of authors' name in the article while he/she had some contribution to the work* (78.6%); *copying a few sentences word for word from written sources without using quotation marks* (66.3%); *to reuse substantial parts of one's own previously published work without using citation* (50.8%); *listing books and papers which you have never read in your reference section* (46.5%); *to cite secondary sources (the sources which you found in your primary sources) as primary sources* (41.1%); *listing someone's name as co-author in the article while he/she had no contribution to the work* (40.6%); *hiring someone to write a paper based on the data and results which you have provided* (17.1%); and *writing the paper in Persian and then hiring someone to translate the Persian version of your paper into English* (7%).

#### **4.1.3. The likely reasons for the occurrence of plagiarism in Iran**

The third research question in this study investigated the likely reasons for the occurrence of plagiarism from the perspectives of graduate students of agricultural sciences. As Table 4 shows, most graduate students of agricultural sciences (84.5%) believed that *low language proficiency* was the most important reason for the occurrence of plagiarism. With little difference, 84% believed that *marketization of science* was the other main reason for plagiarism growth.

**Table 3***Perceptions of Agricultural Graduate Students towards Different Forms of Plagiarism*

	Definitely plagiarism	Possibly plagiarism	Not sure	Probably not plagiarism	Definitely not plagiarism
C1. Submission of a paper written entirely by another person as your own.	174 (93.0)	9 (4.8)	2 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	0 (0)
C2. Submission of a paper written partly by another person as your own.	120 (64.2)	52 (27.8)	10 (5.3)	4 (2.1)	1 (0.5)
C3. Copying a proportion of text from another source in your paper without providing a citation.	125 (66.8)	51 (27.3)	7 (3.7)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
C4. Copying a few sentences word for word from written sources without using quotation marks.	51 (27.3)	73 (39.0)	42 (22.5)	17 (9.1)	4 (2.1)
C5. To purchase a paper from a term paper mill or paper writing companies and submitting it as if it is your own	138 (73.8)	30 (16.0)	17 (9.1)	2 (1.1)	0 (0)
C6. To reuse substantial parts of one's own previously published work without using citation.	39 (20.9)	56 (29.9)	44 (23.5)	30 (16.0)	18 (9.6)
C7. To cite secondary sources (the sources which you found in your primary sources) as primary sources.	21 (11.2)	56 (29.9)	65 (34.8)	35 (18.7)	10 (5.3)
C8. Using someone else's words as if they were your own without citation.	86 (46.0)	75 (40.1)	17 (9.1)	8 (4.3)	1 (0.5)
C9. Using someone else's idea or theory as if it is your own without citation.	100 (53.5)	67 (35.8)	11 (5.9)	4 (2.1)	5 (2.7)
C10. Listing books and papers which you have never read in your reference section.	38 (20.3)	49 (26.2)	58 (31.0)	31 (16.6)	11 (5.9)
C11. Hiring someone to write a paper based on the data and results which you have provided.	18 (9.6)	14 (7.5)	49 (26.2)	58 (31.0)	48 (25.7)
C12. Writing the paper in Persian and then hiring someone to translate the Persian version of your paper into English.	8 (4.3)	5 (2.7)	33 (17.6)	42 (22.5)	99 (52.9)
C13. List someone's name as co-author in the article while he/she had no contribution to the work.	44 (23.5)	32 (17.1)	49 (26.2)	41 (21.9)	21 (11.2)
C14. Deleting someone's name from the list of authors' name in the article while he/she had some contribution to the work.	99 (52.9)	48 (25.7)	28 (15.0)	5 (2.7)	7 (3.7)

**Table 4***The Likely Reasons for the Occurrence of Plagiarism from the Perspectives of Graduate Students in the Field of Agricultural Sciences*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
D1. Limited time to write and publish an academic paper	45 (24.1)	70 (37.4)	40 (21.4)	24 (12.8)	8 (4.3)
D2. Academic writing is a difficult task	31 (16.6)	80 (42.8)	39 (20.9)	26 (13.9)	11 (5.9)
D3. No penalties or trivial penalties if students' plagiarism is discovered	28 (15.0)	79 (42.2)	67 (35.8)	10 (5.3)	3 (1.6)
D4. Conventions of citation in writing an academic paper are unimportant	15 (8.0)	32 (17.1)	46 (24.6)	59 (31.6)	35 (18.7)
D5. Plagiarism is a common act done by many students	26 (13.9)	61 (32.6)	60 (32.1)	24 (12.8)	16 (8.6)
D6. No personal interest in the topic	34 (18.2)	62 (33.2)	55 (29.4)	27 (14.4)	9 (4.8)
D7. No support from the instructors throughout the process of writing a paper.	73 (39.0)	76 (40.6)	24 (12.8)	14 (7.5)	0 (0)
D8. Unfamiliarity with what plagiarism exactly is	41 (21.9)	94 (50.3)	25 (13.4)	21 (11.2)	6 (3.2)
D9. Being too busy	29 (15.5)	65 (34.8)	51 (27.3)	34 (18.2)	8 (4.3)
D10. It's easy to copy and paste material from the Internet.	33 (17.6)	90 (48.1)	40 (21.4)	16 (8.6)	8 (4.3)
D11. Idleness	54 (28.9)	81 (43.3)	30 (16.0)	10 (5.3)	12 (6.4)
D12. I receive no feedback from the instructor	48 (25.7)	73 (39.0)	42 (22.5)	16 (8.6)	8 (4.3)
D13. I'm not familiar with the processes of writing an academic paper.	46 (24.6)	85 (45.5)	35 (18.7)	18 (9.6)	3 (1.6)
D14. Low language proficiency	92 (49.2)	66 (35.3)	13 (7.0)	14 (7.5)	2 (1.1)
D15. Unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic writing	62 (33.2)	89 (47.6)	17 (9.1)	13 (7.0)	6 (3.2)
D16. No training on academic writing	69 (36.9)	84 (44.9)	20 (10.7)	9 (4.8)	5 (2.7)
D17. Turning science into a market for obtaining money	83 (44.4)	74 (39.6)	22 (11.8)	4 (2.1)	4 (2.1)
D18. No serious university regulations to prevent plagiarism	69 (36.9)	78 (41.7)	33 (17.6)	5 (2.7)	2 (1.1)
D19. The increase in the number of journals which rarely check papers for plagiarism.	53 (28.3)	78 (41.7)	43 (23.0)	9 (4.8)	4 (2.1)
D20. The benefits of plagiarism are more than the risks it brings	30 (16.0)	60 (32.1)	70 (37.4)	12 (6.4)	15 (8.0)
D21. Discovering the plagiarized parts of a work is impossible.	7 (3.7)	36 (19.3)	63 (33.7)	59 (31.6)	22 (11.8)

A notable proportion of participants also believed that *no training on academic writing* (81.8%), *unfamiliarity with its conventions* (80.8%), *no support from the instructors throughout the process of writing* (79.6%), *no serious university regulations for preventing plagiarism* (78.6%), *unfamiliarity with what plagiarism exactly is* (72.2%), *idleness* (72.2%),

*unfamiliarity with the processes of writing an academic paper* (70.1%), and *the increase in the number of journals which rarely check for plagiarism* (70%) are the other most likely reasons for the occurrence of plagiarism.

The other reasons in order of priority were *easiness of copying and pasting materials from the internet* (65.7%), *receiving no feedback from the instructor* (64.7%), *limited time to write and publish an academic paper* (61.5%), *difficulty of academic writing* (59.4%), *the absence of penalties or the presence of trivial penalties even if students' plagiarism being discovered* (57.2%), *having no personal interest in the topic* (51.4%), *being too busy* (50.3%), *the benefits which plagiarism brings for the plagiarist is more than its risks* (48.1%), *plagiarism has become a common act done by many students* (46.5%). Not surprisingly, only a small proportion, 25.1% and 23% of participants, respectively, believed that plagiarism occurs as a result of *considering the conventions of citation unimportant*, or as a result of *impossibility of discovering the plagiarized parts of a work*.

## 4.2. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the factors which lead to plagiarism growth among graduate students of agricultural sciences in Iran. To this end, we investigated the perceptions of 187 graduate students in the field of agricultural sciences towards: the nature of plagiarism, different forms of plagiarism, and the underlying motives for plagiarism. In what follows the factors for students' plagiarism will be discussed.

To start with, in line with Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017) most respondents of this study (96.2%) also considered plagiarism wrong due to ignoring the rights of the first author. So, it seems that they were to some extent aware of the prime philosophy based upon which the concept of plagiarism was coined, the protection of the authority of the first author as the originator of the work (Pennycook, 1996). In addition, they themselves also believed in having "a good command of *what constitutes plagiarism*" (88.8%). However, further investigation into their conceptions towards different forms of plagiarism unfolded inconsistencies in their claims.

The results indicated that a very high percentage of participants (97.8%) considered "*submitting a paper written entirely by another person as your own*" as a blatant form of plagiarism; however, surprisingly a lower percentage (89.8%) considered "*purchasing a paper from paper mill or paper writing companies*" as a form of plagiarism. Of even more surprising were two other items, "*hiring someone to write a paper based on the data and results which you have provided*" and "*writing the paper in Persian and then hiring someone to translate the Persian version of your paper into English*",

which were considered as plagiarism by merely 17.1% and 7% of the respondents, respectively. Such results could be partly explained by the way academic writing is presented by these companies as "a commodity for sale" (p. 601) exchangeable with money. The presumption is that as far as you pay money to buy the paper, it will no longer be considered theft; instead, it is now part of your property (Ritter, 2005).

In addition, overemphasis on publication as the primary means for assessing the literacy practices of HE students has shifted the function of writing from the primary task of transmitting knowledge to the older task of demonstrating knowledge; and as a result, has put the status of writing in ambiguity; and raised doubts on its disciplinary status (Goggin, 2000). Even worse is the narrow-minded look at EAP programs. Unfortunately, the inclination of EAP towards practical aspects has turned EAP to a "low-status service activity" (p. 2) and as a result has lowered the roles of EAP specialists to "work *for* rather than *with* subject specialists" (Hyland & Shaw, 2016, p. 4). The offshoot has been therefore mushrooming of fee-based companies as well as translation centers across the country to provide service to those volunteers for academic membership; neglecting that entering the world of academic society needs, as its prerequisite, the most basic form of literacy: being able to read and write in English. In addition, the process of writing a paper is not knowledge telling but a knowledge transforming process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Both spirit and body of the paper are developed in the process of reworking and transforming knowledge. Therefore, even the proper translation of a paper requires the Resurrection of a dead body, and this is not possible just by retelling the knowledge in another language. Instead, the author is now facing a new challenge in the rhetorical space, finding a solution to which may cause a challenge in the content problem space, and such challenges will continue so that spirit be reunited with body again.

Nevertheless, it seems that due to the governance of a "shady market for papers" which allows the paper-writing companies to legitimately and vastly advertise scientific papers across the country (Iran) (Stone, 2016, p. 1197), such strategies which were basically formed to bypass the deficiencies have become so common through the years that they have turned into routine practices among the HE students, and are not marked as plagiarism anymore.

A high percentage of participants (78.6%) considered *deleting someone's name from the list of authors' name in the article while he/she had some contribution to the work* as plagiarism; however, *listing someone's name as co-author in the article while he/she had no contribution to the work* was considered as plagiarism by only 40.6% of the participants. It seems that while the participants know that they should convey their reverence for the

author, there are still ambiguities on who is deserved to be awarded the authorship.

In the next step, the researchers tried to spotlight the items which overtly lead to plagiarism. In this sense, 84.5% of the students believed that *low language proficiency* was the leading reason for the occurrence of plagiarism. This finding is in line with Perkins, Gezgin and Roe (2018), who found a negative relationship between plagiarism and English language abilities of those who plagiarize. Undoubtedly, language is the most central component for expressing oneself, without which all voices will remain silenced. Similarly, there is no escaping the fact that those volunteering for academic membership at the international level should have a good command of English. Though, it seems that such expectations have not been met from the point of view of the respondents of this study.

Such results could be partly explained by taking a look at the status of English in the current context of Iran. After the Islamic revolution of 1979, English which not so long ago and in Pahlavi dynasty had been considered as a key to modernization (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009; Kiany et al., 2011), was considered as a threat which could be exploited to inject western ideas and cultures into the nation. Though the privileges which it could bring for the society couldn't have been ignored so that Iran has chosen a "conservative" approach to English language teaching, and has considered it as both a blessing crucial to lift the country into economic and technological prominence and a curse threatening the Islamic identity of the country (Kiany et al., 2011). Accordingly, the negative visions towards English have been masked in favor of reform in foreign language education policy, though it seems that there are still inconsistencies between what is really practiced in the society and the policies behind (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015).

To the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored plagiarism with respect to the macro-level language policies, though Pennycook (1996) referred to a number of 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, p. 2 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.

A quite high percentage of the respondents (84%) believed that *marketization of science* was the other main reason for plagiarism growth. Of interest, the least disagreement (4.2%) was also observed in this item. In the

wake of marketization, marketing principles have been followed in all aspects of social life within which science, in general, and education, in particular, have not been exempted. No doubt, the intrusion of private ends in the educational sector has sparked the old constant opposition between science and wealth, and has reshaped the policies in this sector by putting priority on the latter. The upshot was, therefore, devaluation and commodification of science as well as a decline in morality.

In this sense, the presence of a strong link between marketization of science and plagiarism in this study, could also mirror the same global concerns on the drastic changes that have occurred in the literacy practices of universities at HE level (Lea, 2016) and the subsequent dramatic shifts that have occurred in the roles of learners from critical thinkers to paying customers.

Some other frequent reasons for plagiarism from the viewpoints of graduate students of agricultural sciences were *no training on academic writing (81.8%)*, *unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic writing (80.8%)*, *no support from the instructors throughout the process of writing a paper (79.6%)*, *unfamiliarity with the processes of writing an academic paper (70.1%)*, *receiving no feedback from the instructor (64.7%)*, and the fact that *academic writing is a difficult task (59.4%)*. Such results are consistent with the findings of Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017) who have found that low academic writing skills and teachers' leniency are among the leading reasons for plagiarism. To elucidate, writing the first paper for publication is frequently mentioned as a task with profound difficulty. The burden of writing a paper in general and the difficulty of constructing identity in particular have provided good enough grounds for many universities around the world, to make writing more central to their programs and to put well-trained and qualified teachers in charge of teaching writing in order to socialize novice members to the dominant literacy practices. Nonetheless, the prime focus of EAP courses in Iran has been merely on reading ability (Atai, 2002), and generally no instruction in writing has been offered in these programs. Not only so, these courses have even failed to keep their promises and in practice no systematic and coherent programs have been followed in these courses (Atai, 2002). Unfortunately, excessive reliance of these courses on translation as the dominant reading comprehension instruction technique (Atai & Shoja, 2011) has robbed students of the potential learning opportunities which reading could have brought to them in getting familiar with the conventions of academic writing. Such shortcomings in EAP programs draw the attention towards teachers as the ones who have the mission to socialize students with the literacy practices of target community. However, in Iran, EAP courses are usually presented by subject experts (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014), and against all the expectations, subject specialists may not be qualified and competent enough to teach disciplinary literacy



skills due to the fact that "they generally have neither the expertise nor the desire to do so" (Hyland, 2006, p. 11).

A notable proportion of participants also accepted their own fault and attributed the occurrence of plagiarism to *idleness* (72.2%). This problem could be partly justified by the characteristics of the era of speed and technology and the easy access to loads of information via the internet (Sohrabi et al., 2011). However, to seek for the other part of the problem, we should go back to the active roles of universities in the commodification of HE and its impact on shifting the roles of learners from active critical thinkers to passive paying customers.

A large number of participants (70%) considered *the increase in the number of journals which rarely check papers for plagiarism* as the other leading reason for plagiarism. This is undoubtedly one of the challenges which the policies of expansion, and the following research policies have brought. Indeed, with drastic growth in the number of academic journals, the threshold levels of assessing the academic papers have been lowered so that some of these journals (of course the ones with lower impact factors) rarely check the submitted papers for plagiarism. In the long term, this could have serious consequences on blurring or even changing the conventions. In this sense, Jones and Freeman (2003) have also warned not only of the appropriate sources which are used inappropriately but also of the inappropriate sources though be used even appropriately.

More than half of the respondents also attributed plagiarism to *easiness of copying and pasting materials from the internet* (65.7%), *limited time to write and publish an academic paper* (61.5%), and *being too busy* (50.3%). A notable proportion of academic writing is dedicated to writing from sources. Through writing, graduate students are required to respond to sources and to integrate sources with their own ideas in order to construct knowledge (Ivanič, 1998). This is not a linear process and demands much time and energy from the part of the author. Indeed, in the initial arrival to a discipline, students find themselves deluged with the plethora of information available in the literature. The soft sands of their identities face the strong winds blown from robust sources. The more they read, the more deeply they sunk in the words of others and the more they find themselves voiceless. Therefore, they should be given enough time to reflect on their readings in order to critically analyze the sources and to find their own position in the loads of information which they have received. Only then could they build up a "line of argument" and show a "strong presence" in supporting their own argument (Abasi, 2008, p. 150). Albeit, sometimes the challenges of social life and the strict deadlines yield little space for reflection and direct the

novice members towards internet as a compensatory tool to expedite the process and to survive.

About 51.4% of the respondents also considered *no personal interest in the topic* as one of the important reasons for plagiarism. This could be due to the ever-broadening gap between research ideal and utility ideal in the country. Normally, these goals follow a cyclical pattern of development (Goggin, 2000), and both seek to graft solutions to the present problems for the benefits of society. In this sense, there is a balance between the two in the developed countries, and both goals are followed equally; so that, not only are these countries pioneers in the research topics but the current problems of the academic world also are their problems in the authentic world. On the other side, however, scientists from the developing countries usually suffer from the imbalance between the two research goals. Undoubtedly, the implementation of new research policies has brought further injustice to the scholars in these countries. To improve publishing success, they are forced to negate their own voice and to look for solving the problems which have not been that much tangible to them. It is worth noting that, this problem was implicitly referred to by Arani et al. (2018) as "university-society gap" (p. 321).

In addition, although a rather small percentage of participants, 25.1% and 23%, respectively, believed that plagiarism occurs as a result of *considering the conventions of citation unimportant*, or even the *impossibility of discovering the plagiarized parts of a work*; most of them attributed plagiarism more to *the absence of serious university regulations for preventing plagiarism* (78.6%), *unfamiliarity with what plagiarism exactly is* (72.2%), *the absence of penalties or the presence of trivial penalties even if students' plagiarism being discovered* (57.2%), *the benefits which plagiarism brings for the plagiarist is more than its risks* (48.1%), and to the fact that *plagiarism has become a common act done by many students* (46.5%). This finding is consistent with Ghanem and Mozahem's (2019) argument that students' perceptions of their peers' behavior have a significant impact on their cheating behavior. Likewise, Makarova (2019) also referred to the social and cultural environment and the roles of teachers and the integrity system as the most important factors affecting plagiarism practices of students. In the same vein, the results of the present study also confirm the immediate need for serious regulations and their even more serious implementation in university settings.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

Prompted by increase in the prevalence of plagiarism, this study was an attempt to provide insights into this hotly debated problem in the context of Iran. To this end, the present study implemented the established academic

literacies approach as a reference point, and viewed plagiarism not solely as a threat but instead as merit in order to shed light on the blind spots which have fortified the problem in Iran. The results revealed that most graduate students of agricultural sciences had a rather good understanding of the nature of plagiarism and considered it as an unacceptable serious problem which should be avoided. Nonetheless, in marked contrast, their perceptions towards different forms of plagiarism unfolded further doubts on their understanding of who should be known as author and who is deserved to be awarded authorship. The results revealed that recursive practices of a long list of violations, seemingly, have made the academics blind towards their faulty nature, pushed back the borders of literacy and made them common academic norms.

In addition, through investigating the potential motives for the occurrence of plagiarism, different scenarios emerged all of which directed the researchers to the conclusion that plagiarism is the domino effect of a series of educational policies which were blindly adopted in order to apparently standardize the practices of HE students to the universal norms. Though, surprisingly, no serious effort was made on the part of the educational system to align the local EAP programs with the international norms. Therefore, in addition to crisis in literacy issues which is threatening the academic world in general, the absence of systematic and coherent EAP programs in the context of Iran have made Iranian graduate students more vulnerable to plagiarism. In this sense, the findings could provide valuable information to design research writing courses featured by consciousness raising in order to lessen the risk of plagiarism and to promote the quality of papers.

However, there were also some limitations regarding the study. First of all was the impossibility of finding a completely true equivalent to the term plagiarism which could convey all the possible cultural connotations of the term in the first language of the participants. Such a shortcoming might, to some extent, affect the obtained results. Moreover, this study was delimited to one field of study and also one State University. These could, to some extent, affect the generalizability of the findings. Further studies could target other fields of study, and other types of universities. Moreover, additional focused group interviews could also provide insightful information to the topic.

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## Appendix 1: Graduate Student Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. We have included questions about your perceptions towards plagiarism, and the main reasons for doing plagiarism. Completing this questionnaire is voluntary and all possible measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your personal information. Your faithful responses are appreciated.

### A. Demographic Information: Please tick the appropriate answer.

<p>1. gender: male <input type="radio"/> female <input type="radio"/></p> <p>2. Towards which degree are you currently working?</p> <p>MSc <input type="radio"/> PhD <input type="radio"/></p> <p>3. Year of Study: .....</p> <p>4. Field of Study: .....</p>
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### B: Please evaluate the following items based on the 5-point Likert scale:

<b>Your perceptions of the nature of plagiarism</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b> 5	<b>Agree</b> 4	<b>Neither agree, nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b> 2	<b>Strongly disagree</b> 1
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			3		
1. Plagiarism is a type of cheating					
2. I have a good knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism.					
3. Plagiarism is always wrong and those who plagiarize should be punished severely.					
4. Plagiarism is wrong because it prevents one from learning					
5. Plagiarism is wrong because plagiarists ignore the rights of the first author of the original text.					
6. Plagiarism occurs due to ignoring the ethical values					
7. It's OK to plagiarize because so many other students are currently doing it.					
8. If I do plagiarism, I feel guilty.					
9. Plagiarism is a kind of mistake which occurs as a result of unfamiliarity with the conventions of citation.					
10. Plagiarism is Ok, because it is a common act done by many students.					
11. Plagiarism is considered as a serious problem in our higher education system.					
12. I don't really understand what plagiarism exactly is.					
13. If students are found plagiarizing, they should be punished severely.					

### C: Perception towards the forms of Plagiarism.

Which of the following do you consider as instances of plagiarism? Please evaluate the following items based on the 5-point Likert scale:

<b>Perception towards the forms of plagiarism</b>	<b>Definitely plagiarism 5</b>	<b>Possibly plagiarism 4</b>	<b>Not sure 3</b>	<b>Probably not 2</b>	<b>Definitely not 1</b>
1. submission of a paper written entirely by another person as your own					
2. submission of a paper written partly by another person as your own					
3. Copying a proportion of text from another source in your paper without providing a citation					
4. Copying a few sentences word for word from written sources without using quotation marks					



5.To purchase a paper from a term paper mill or paper writing companies and submitting it as if it is your ow					
6. To reuse substantial parts of one's own previously published work without using citation.					
7.To cite secondary sources (the sources which you found in your primary sources) as primary sources.					
8.Using someone else's words as if they were your own without citation.					
9.Using someone else's idea or theory as if it is your own without citation.					
10. Listing books and papers which you have never read in your reference section.					
11. Hiring someone to write a paper based on the data and results which you have provided.					
12. Writing the paper in Persian and then hiring someone to translate the Persian version of your paper into English.					
13. List someone's name as co-author in the article while he/she had no contribution to the work					
14. Deleting someone's name from the list of authors' name in the article while he/she had some contribution to the work.					

**D: What do you think about the likely reasons for doing plagiarism in writing an academic paper? Please evaluate the following items based on the 5-point Likert scale**

	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Neither agree, nor disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1. Limited time to write and publish an academic paper					
2. Academic writing is a difficult task					
3. No penalties or trivial penalties if students' plagiarism is discovered					
4. Conventions of citation in writing an academic paper are unimportant					
5. Plagiarism is a common act done by many students					
6. No personal interest in the topic					

7. No support from the instructors throughout the process of writing a paper.					
8. Unfamiliarity with what plagiarism exactly is					
9. Being too busy					
10. It's easy to copy and paste material from the Internet.					
11. Idleness					
12. I receive no feedback from the instructor					
13. I 'm not familiar with the processes of writing an academic paper.					
14. Low language proficiency					
15. Unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic writing					
16. No training on academic writing					
17. Turning science into a market for obtaining money					
18. No serious university regulations to prevent plagiarism					
19. The increase in the number of journals which rarely check papers for plagiarism.					
20. The benefits of plagiarism are more than the risks it brings					
21. Discovering the plagiarized parts of a work is impossible.					

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