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# *Exploring the English language teachers' perceptions of plagiarism: The case of Algerian Universities*

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**Abstract:** *Academic dishonesty is an alarming issue in higher education which spreads increasingly into the academic discourse community. As such, the present study is concerned with the exploration of university English language teachers' perceptions towards what might most bring about plagiarism among their students. The study attempted to figure out, through the teachers' academic experiences regarding plagiarism, the main reasons behind students' inclination to approach this issue at Algerian Universities. This piece of research helps to awake both the teachers and students' vigilance in response to plagiarism as one of the most alarming acts of academic dishonesty, and, consequently, to diminish this academic corruption. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher used an English language teachers' questionnaire adapted from a study conducted by Rezanejad & Rezaei (2013). A sample of eighty university English language teachers from Saida University and other Algerian universities were selected to respond to the questionnaire. However, only 36 copies of the questionnaire were filled out and returned. The results of the present research indicated that Algerian university English teachers believe that their students had different reasons for plagiarism but they mostly plagiarize because of their bad command of the language and easiness of plagiarism.*
**Keywords:** *Academic dishonesty, Plagiarism, Teachers' perceptions.*
**ملخص**: لقد صار هاجس الغش الأكاديمي أمرا غاية في الخطورة نظرا لانتشاره المتزايد في مجال البحث العلمي والتعليم العالي بالجامعات، وعليه فان هذه الدراسة تطمح إلى تقصي الأسباب الحقيقية وراء هذا السلوك عند الطلاب من وجهة نظر أساتذة التعليم العالي بالجامعات الجزائرية. حاولت هذه الدراسة عن طريق الأخذ بعين الاعتبار، خبرات الأساتذة في هذا المجال، البحث عن الأسباب الرئيسية وراء انتشار هذه الظاهرة. وعلى هذا الأساس يهتم هذا البحث بمحاولة استشعار ضمير الأساتذة والطلاب على حد سواء بمدى خطورة الغش الأكاديمي ومن ثمة كيفية التقليل منه. ولتحقيق هدف هذه الدراسة استخدم الباحثين استبيان مقتبس من دراسة أجراها الباحثين "رازنجاد ورزاي"(2013). وقد تم اختيار عينة مقدرة بثمانين أستاذا جامعيا للغة الإنجليزية من جامعة سعيدة وجامعات جزائرية أخرى، إلا أنه لم يتم الرد على الاستبيان إلا من طرف ستة

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وثلاثين أستاذا. كما أظهرت نتائج هذا البحث أنه وبالرغم من تعدد أسباب الغش الأكاديمي إلا أن السببين الأكثر أهمية هما أولا الإمكانيات اللغوية المحدودة للطلبة، وثانيا سهولة الغش الأكاديمي.

**الكلمات ا لمفتاحية:** الغش الأكاديمي وجهة نظر أساتذة التعليم السلوك الغش.

## 1. Introduction

Plagiarism recently has become among the urgent topics in the academic researches. As such, with the wide spread of this phenomenon, academic institutions have conducted plenty of researches in an attempt to terminate this malady. Accordingly, the main objective of the present study is to determine the major reasons that lead English language students in the Algerian universities to plagiarise. For so doing, the researchers believe firmly that teachers according to their academic experiences can best help attain the objective of the present study. Therefore, the present study attempts to answer the following questions: what are the main reasons that push students to plagiarise according to teachers' opinions? What is the most prevalent ones?

## 2. Review of Literature

Some researchers state that plagiarism must be viewed as part of the problem of cheating whereas some of them claim that plagiarism is not synonymous with cheating (e.g. Leming 1980; Raffetto 1985; Haines et al. 1986; Roberts 1986 cited in REZANEJAD, A & REZAEI, S., 2013). In a more tragic way, plagiarism in Latin denotes the act of 'kidnaping' which is regarded as a criminal activity- parallel to stealing other people's offspring!" (REZANEJAD, A & REZAEI, S, 2013: 276).

Plagiarism is widely used as a result of the remarkable developments in technology and especially the Internet (QUAH, C. H. et al. 2012). Students find it easy to use the internet in their assignments, for it "*is a vast, rapidly growing network of over a billion electronic pages that are fully accessible to our students"* (ATKINS, T., & NELSON, G, 2001). In this sense, Kitalong (1998) argues that "many new electronic technologies of writing are quickly becoming part of everyday practice". In fact, the widespread of the internet on college campuses, "has become a way of life for some students*"* (Mc Lafferty& Foust, 2004). The role of the internet in facilitating plagiarism is a fact that cannot be denied. In this light, Bennett (2005) states that "*there now exist numerous Internet sites (some of which are free of charge) that provide complete essay or term papers*" (BENNETT. R, 2005: 139).

However, these new technologies made teachers complaining about the easiness they brought for students to gather the ideas of others and present them as their own (MCKENZIE. J, 1998). In a more tragic view, a research conducted by Szabo, & Underwood (2004) revealed that *"more than 50 percent of the students indicated an acceptance of using the Internet for academically dishonest activities*" (SZABO. A & UNDERWOOD. J, 2004: 180).

From other perspectives, many research studies have been conducted in an attempt to figure out the reasons behind plagiarism and why students engage in academic dishonesty. In this light, McCabe (2003) stated that around 36 % of the students, part of the study he conducted, in doing their assignments and term projects, they copy some parts from other sources without acknowledging the main source. Bamford and Sergiou (2005)

pointed out through a questionnaire with some close-ended and open-ended questions designed for international students from 17 different countries that the main reasons for plagiarism were external pressures to succeed or time pressure (cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI. S, 2013: 277).

Delvin and Gray (2007) argued for other reasons that incite students to plagiarise including mainly poor academic skills and pride in plagiarizing. They further subdivided the poor academic skills into skills related to time management and those related to scholarly work. In the same study, Delvin and Gray point out that students even though they understand what they have read, yet they don't have that good command of the English language, so they just change a couple of words. In the same perspectives, Roig (n.d) States that inexperienced writers plagiarise when they do not give credit to other's works while attempting to summarize and paraphrase ideas contained in the original version.

In another study, Jones (2011) stated that 92 % of the students' subject of his investigation engaged in acts of academic dishonesty because of a need to make better grades. Besides, other reasons for doing plagiarism are due mainly to the fact that students are too busy, do not have enough time to complete assignments or study for tests, and because they consider academic dishonesty as no big deal since everyone else is doing it (JONES, D. L. R, 2011: 143-144).

Another research conducted by Jordan (2001) in an attempt to explore the students' attitudes about cheating, and on knowledge of institutional policy regarding cheating behavior, revealed that cheaters differed from non cheaters on perceived social norms regarding cheating, on their knowledge of institutional policy regarding cheating, and on their attitudes toward cheating. As a result of his study, Jordan (2001), disclosed that students who displayed a considerable understanding of institutional policies were mainly regarded as non-cheaters rather than cheaters.

## 3. Method

### *3.1. Participants and Instrument*

A sample of eighty university English language teachers from Saida University and other Algerian universities were selected to respond to the questionnaire. However, only 36 English teachers filled out and returned the questionnaire.

They filled out a plagiarism questionnaire adapted from a study conducted by REZANEJAD, A & REZAEI, S. (2013:285). The questionnaire includes 11 main reasons for plagiarism.

A six-point Likert scale was used for the subjects' responses on the statements. Each statement gave six options: (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = slightly disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree).

The researchers asked the participants to fill out the questionnaire by sending it to their emails. The participants are mainly the researchers' colleagues from Saida University (Algeria) as well from an international conference held in Ouergla (Algeria) on February 2016. Besides, some participants were requested to send the questionnaire to their friends too. The researchers informed the respondents not to display their names on the questionnaire for the sake of anonymity. The level of agreement of students' answers was

determined by the following equation: Interval Width = maximum point – minimum point\ number of levels (6-1\6= 0.83)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **• strongly disagree from** | **1 to 1.83** |
| **2** | • disagree from | **1.83 to 2.66** |
| **3** | • slightly disagree from | **2.67 to 3.49** |
| **4** | • slightly agree from | **3.50 to 4.32** |
| **5** | • agree from | **4.33 to 5.15** |
| **6** | • strongly agree from | **5.16to 6** |

## 4. Results

The results concerning the reasons for plagiarism are presented in Table 1 in the form of mean and percentage by chronological order. Eleven different major reasons for plagiarism are the subject of the questionnaire. It has been disclosed that 87.03%% of the teachers declared that the bad command of the language was the first major reason behind the students conduct of plagiarism. With a less percentage (83. 33%), teachers believed that easiness of plagiarism was the second major reason behind the students conduct of plagiarism. Besides, (79.62%) of the teachers believe that Lack of clarity of university regulations lead students to plagiarize.

Additionally, (77.77%) of the teachers believe that students are 'not aware of the severity of plagiarism and its subsequences'. Other reasons which were put in a lower position with the same percentage included 'lack of time to meet the deadline'(70.37%), 'because everyone else is doing it' (70.37%), and (70.37%) of the participants also declared that students plagiarize because universities did not provide any training on plagiarism. Teachers believe also that students plagiarise due to 'the same treatment to those who plagiarized and those who don't' (66.66%), and because there are 'no difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects' (64.81%). Besides, teachers believe that students plagiarized due to the 'lack of attention from teachers to detect plagiarism' (55.55%), finally, a minority of the teachers believe that students plagiarise just for the fun of it (24.07%).

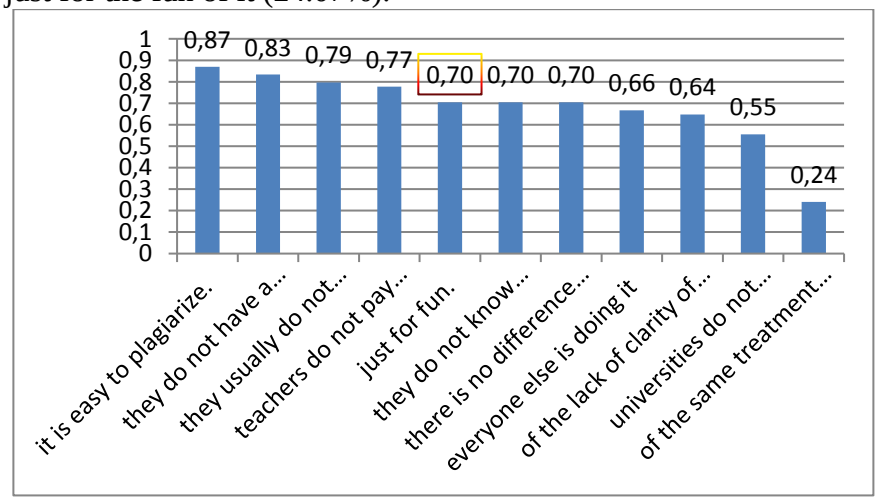



**Figure 3.1. Illustration of the Questionnaire Items Order According to the percentage**

Percentages by Chronological Order

1. Not having a good command of the language 87. 03%.
2. Easiness of plagiarizing 83. 33%.
3. Lack of clarity of university regulations 79. 62 %.
4. Not being aware of the severity of plagiarism and its subsequences. 77.77%.
5. Lack of time to meet the deadlines 70.37%.
6. Because everyone else is doing it 70.37%.
7. No training in universities on the issue of plagiarism 70.37%.
8. The same treatment to those who plagiarise and those who don't 66.66%.
9. No difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects 64.81%.
10. Lack of attention from professors to detection of plagiarism 55.55%.
11. Just for fun 24.07%.

**Table 3.1.** The statistical description of the reasons for plagiarism through mean and standard deviation

| Descriptive statistics | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **mean** | **Std. deviation** | **percentages** |
| **1 They do not have a good command of English.** | 36 | 5,22 | 1,045 | 0,8703 |
| **2 it is easy to plagiarise.** | 36 | 5,00 | 1,586 | 0,8333 |
| **3 of the lack of clarity of university regulations.** | 36 | 4,78 | 1,045 | 0,7962 |
| **4 they do not know much about the severity of plagiarism and its consequences.** | 36 | 4,67 | 2,028 | 0,7777 |
| **5 they usually do not have enough time to meet the deadlines.** | 36 | 4,22 | 1,495 | 0,7037 |
| **6 everyone else is doing it** | 36 | 4,22 | 1,570 | 0,7037 |
| **7 universities do not take responsibilities for teaching students what is considered as plagiarism.** | 36 | 4,22 | 2,126 | 0,7037 |
| **8 of the same treatment to those who plagiarise and those who don't.** | 36 | 4,00 | 2,138 | 0,6666 |
| **9 there is no difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects.** | 36 | 3,89 | 2,214 | 0,6481 |
| **10 teachers do not pay much attention to detect plagiarism.** | 36 | 3,33 | 2,028 | 0,5555 |
| **11 Just for fun.** | 36 | 1,44 | ,695 | 0,2407 |
| **N valide (listwise)** | 36 | | | |

**Reference:** Established by the researcher applying the SPSS outputs

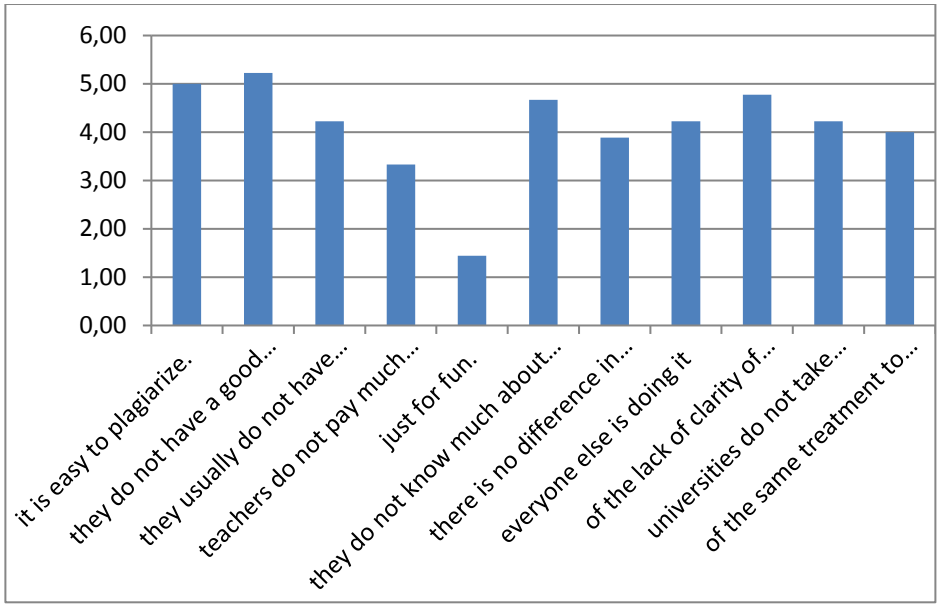



**Figure 3.2.** Illustration of the Questionnaire Items Order According to the mean

## 5. Discussion

This study has shed the light on the perception of Algerian university English teachers towards the main reasons that lead their students to plagiarise.

The findings of this study showed that among the 11 different reasons for plagiarism, the most frequent one was the bad command of the language (87. 03%).This result can be sustained by Delvin and Gray (2007) research while pointing out that students just change a couple of words because they do not have that good command of the English language although they understand what they read.

The other major reason for plagiarism among the Algerian language students is the easiness of plagiarism (83.33%). The researches demonstrate that the Internet is an easy and accessible tool for plagiarism. This is not assured by most of the researchers (McCabe 2003), although some state that the Internet is the first reason for the rise in the students' plagiarism (Atkins and Nelson, 2001; Kitalong, 1998; McKenzie, 1998; Mc Lafferty and Foust, 2004; Szabo and Underwood, 2004 cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI. S, 2013: 288). Besides, there are plenty of web sites which help students to reach an easy access with a complete essay or term paper (Bennett, 2005 cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI. S, 2013:289).

Furthermore, 79.62% of participants stated that students plagiarise because they do not have enough clear university regulations. This finding is supported by Jordan (2001 as cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI, S, 2013: 289) who found that students who displayed a considerable understanding of institutional policies were mainly regarded as non-cheaters rather than cheaters.

The results of this survey also indicated that 70.37% of the students plagiarize because everyone else is doing it, and 55.55% plagiarize because their teachers do not pay enough attention to the detection of plagiarism. In the same line, Burnett points out that there is higher probability for plagiarism when students recognize that their teachers do

not bother to read their papers or review their work meticulously (BURNETT, 2002 as cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI. S, 2013: 289). These findings are supported also by Jones as he stated in his study that 25 % of the students' subject of his study plagiarized because everyone did so and got away with it and 17 % of the students claimed that plagiarism was no big deal and it did not matter to professors. (Jones, 2011 cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI. S, 2013: 289).

In a review by Synder and Cannoy (2010) students cited very similar reasons for plagiarism. Stevens and Stevens (1987), Love and Simmons (1998) and Straw (2002) also reported some analogous reasons such as time management, students' attitudes towards teachers and class, temptation and opportunity (i.e. it is easy to plagiarize) for plagiarism (cited in REZANEJAD. A & REZAEI, S, 2013:289). Finally, 75.93 % of the teachers believed that students don't plagiarize just for fun. However, this is not supported by Devlin and Gray (2007) who revealed that some students plagiarize because they enjoy plagiarizing and they feel proud of doing it with the notoriety of being *"the guy with the answers*" (DEVLIN. M, & GRAY. K, 2007: 190).

## 6. Conclusion

The present study has revealed the Algerian University English teachers' attitudes towards the main reasons that lead their students to plagiarize. Overall, the results showed that teachers had different views regarding this issue. In a more particular vision, the study indicated that Algerian university English teachers believe that their students had different reasons for plagiarism but they mostly plagiarize because of their bad command of the language and easiness of plagiarism.

### *6.1.Limitations of the Study*

Results of the study cannot be representative of all EFL teachers in Algeria, and Saida University in particular. However, findings should be more reliable and valid on a larger extent. Furthermore, many teachers were reluctant to respond to the questionnaire. In addition, the researchers' first intention was to administrate a questionnaire to the students as they are supposed to reveal their attitudes directly; however, due to the luck of time the questionnaire was then designed to reveal the teachers' perceptions towards the issue of plagiarism.

### *6.2.Recommendations*

On the basis of the results of this study, the following recommendations may contribute to decrease the amount of plagiarism among students in the Algerian universities:

- Guide students to the good scientific writing that is ultimately based on accuracy, conciseness and most importantly, honesty as a tool of academic integrity and a promising means to strengthen their command of language and decrease all forms of writing that might be counted as plagiarism.
- Although internet is an easy and accessible tool for plagiarism, yet students can be rationally taught how to use it in a more adequate way that serves to increase the good strategies of scientific researches and practices.

- Universities should articulate clear regulations that help students understand the institutional policies regarding the severity of plagiarism as a serious offense against the good academic practice.
- Universities should be equipped with plagiarism detection software for checking research projects. Besides, students need to be informed with the penalties that must be explicitly stated within the university regulations.

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**Appendix (1):**

| PUT NUMBER 1 INTHE SUITABLE BOX | Strongly agree | Agree | Slightly agree | Slightly disagree | disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students plagiarise** because | | | | | | |
| **1. it is easy to plagiarise.** | | | | | | |
| **2. they do not have a good command of English.** | | | | | | |
| **3. they usually do not have enough time to meet the deadlines.** | | | | | | |
| **4. teachers do not pay much attention to detect plagiarism.** | | | | | | |
| **5. just for fun.** | | | | | | |
| **6. they do not know much about the severity of plagiarism and its consequences.** | | | | | | |
| **7. there is no difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarised and non-plagiarised projects.** | | | | | | |
| **8. everyone else is doing it** | | | | | | |
| **9. of the lack of clarity of university regulations.** | | | | | | |
| **10. universities do not take responsibilities for** | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **teaching students what is considered as plagiarism.** | |
| **11. of the same treatment to those who plagiarise and those who don't.** | |