



Piracy, playing the system, or poor policies? Perspectives on plagiarism in Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a complex issue, torn between theory and practice, expectation and reality, and developmental and ethical concerns. However, in terms of student/teacher perceptions and practices, most plagiarism research has focused on English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) settings, with little to no research into English medium instruction (EMI) in non-Western locales. Therefore, using a combination of Likert scale items, agree/disagree statements, and open-ended questions, we sampled 395 Thai undergraduates and 46 lecturers on their attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and exposure to plagiarism in EMI programs. We also examined the institutional policies of their universities for definitions and punishments related to plagiarism. Results showed that both groups framed plagiarism as ethically wrong and broadly understood what constituted plagiarism. However, there was a clear disconnect between institutional policies on plagiarism and actual practices. We argue there is more at stake than just misunderstandings, a lack of knowledge, and/or ability on the part of students. As intermediary gatekeepers, teachers play a crucial role in contextualising rigid, broad policies so as to encompass both academic integrity and academic literacy. We conclude by making a number of recommendations with regard to teaching practices, student volition, and institutional mandates.

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1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty has been, and continues to be, a problem worldwide (see Marques et al., 2019). In the context of our study (Thailand), it remains an ongoing issue as reflected in the focus of popular press (Gershon, 2013; Thepbamrung, 2014) and academic research (Young, 2013), with some researchers focusing on the narrower issue of plagiarism but in a small-scale or anecdotal manner (e.g., Charubusp, 2015; Songsriwittaya et al., 2010).

In the broader field of plagiarism research, there are confounding issues as to how deal with plagiarism, with some seeing it as not being fully understood by teachers or students (Stapleton, 2012), where differences in teacher perceptions can lead to students “playing the system” based on one teacher’s relaxed/misinformation views; i.e., students plead ignorance when in reality they often know better (Sutherland-Smith, 2005). Conversely, plagiarism can sometimes be the result of students not having a clear idea of what plagiarism is (Adam et al., 2017). Thus, when pushed for time or under pressure to produce

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accurate language, students may resort to using sources with just one or two substitutions made to vocabulary or syntax—commonly referred to as *patchwriting* (Howard, 1992).

These issues are even more important if we consider the growing interest in promoting second language (L2) competence through subject-matter learning, such as in English medium instruction (EMI), which is “the use of English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English” (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37).

In Thailand, EMI programs are labelled “international programs”, emphasizing the country’s drive toward internationalisation through “Englishisation” (see Rose & Galloway, 2019). In these programs, content courses are taught in English—mainly to local Thai students—by a heterogeneous mix of Thai and non-Thai (“foreign”) instructors, with varying levels of qualifications, experience, and language ability, who work together under a dominant ideology of seniority and patronage that can be challenging to some “foreign” teachers (Thomas et al., forthcoming). Moreover, both sets of teachers are frequently confronted with difficulties and roles that they may not be accustomed to or trained for, such as being asked to teach complicated subject matter when they are primarily teachers of English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL), or not having sufficient levels of English to deal with complex topics.

As Cenoz et al. (2014) state, “there are many aspects of the integration of language and content instruction that require careful theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical attention” (pp. 258–259), yet such attention seems to be lacking when it comes to EMI as it “appears to be top-down policy driven, rather than bottom-up” (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 64). And although it is an increasing area of interest for researchers, there is little research into how practices and concepts, which are often transferred over from established contexts in a decontextualised way, are taken up and used by EMI stakeholders. We feel that this is particularly important in relation to plagiarism because it is a high stakes phenomenon with fuzzy boundaries (Pecorari, 2019). This fuzziness can lead to problems in the efficacy of plagiarism policies, particularly if those involved have varying backgrounds, goals, understandings, and roles in relation to teaching/learning language/content.

Therefore, with the increasing drive for internationalisation via EMI programs, and the widespread introduction of text-matching software across Thai universities since 2014—a decidedly punitive approach to plagiarism (see Hu & Sun, 2017)—it is perhaps time for a better and more thorough appreciation of plagiarism in this context. Moreover, as Pecorari (2015) argues, a pressing issue for L2 plagiarism research is the extent to which variation exists “in the views of academic gatekeepers as to what should be allowed or prohibited, encouraged or discouraged” (p. 96), and we would argue that higher-education EMI settings such as ours are a prime site for such discussions. Accordingly, we set out to explore the following questions:

1. How is plagiarism conceptualised, navigated, and managed by stakeholders involved with EMI programs in two South East Asian universities?
2. What are the structural constraints surrounding plagiarism in this context and how do they influence the practices of students and teachers?

1.1. Transgressive, developmental, and contextual views of plagiarism

In defining plagiarism, one broad, yet typically used definition views plagiarism as the appropriation of others’ work without acknowledgement (Pecorari, 2019). In this view, plagiarism crosses the boundaries of intellectual property and assumes ownership of another’s “voice”. That is, plagiarism extends beyond the (inter)textual, and becomes part of a meaning-making practice that encapsulates both the political and rhetorical (Robillard, 2008). Others—mainly educators working in L2 settings—view plagiarism as a necessary developmental stage and classify it as a form of “textual borrowing” or “non-transgressive intertextuality” (Borg, 2009). In this view, students are attempting to learn a new form of social practice that will allow them entry into a specialised discourse community.

1.1.1. Research into factors associated with plagiarism

Regardless of the view one takes, as Pecorari (2019) argues, dissenting opinions and understandings persist, which is reflected in a large body of research examining the complicated nature of plagiarism. In their review of mainly Applied Linguistic research, Flowerdew and Li (2007) discuss several main factors surrounding plagiarism, including cultural explanations, developmental issues, varying perceptions across disciplines, and possible pedagogical solutions. In a state of the art review of L2 writing research, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) outline several additional factors, namely conceptual issues surrounding acts of plagiarism, the role of textual borrowings in writing development, and how plagiarism has evolved alongside electronic media.

Other research has examined university policies, and highlighted a primarily punitive approach to plagiarism. Hu and Sun (2017), for instance, explored eight Chinese universities that run international programs. They found moralistic and regulatory discourse dominated the official policy documents and noted a conspicuous lack of educational guidance. Similar findings are seen in other contexts, and have led many scholars to advocate a switch from punitive policies to educative ones (Adam et al., 2017; Merkel, 2021). Mahmud et al. (2019), for instance, illustrate how plagiarism policies and procedures need to respond to the characteristics of each cultural context. Of note in this respect is the work of Abasi and Akbari (2008), who

convincingly argue that unrealistic demands made by institutions, and the way in which many assignments set up an authoritative teacher–student relationship, can inadvertently encourage *patchwriting*.

Howard (1992) defines patchwriting as “a composing phenomenon that may signal neither a willing violation of academic ethics nor ignorance of them, but rather a healthy effort to gain membership in a new [academic] culture” (p. 236). As Pecorari and Petrić (2014) state, “[t]here is now ample evidence that students may plagiarise unintentionally, as a result of uncertainty about citing conventions, what constitutes common knowledge, or limited referencing skills and/or L2 resources” (p. 276). Effectively, student writers who have not yet obtained sufficient mastery of academic literacy sometimes rely on source texts not only for subject matter knowledge, but also as a way to bootstrap themselves into the conventions and structures of a new discourse community. Charubusp (2015), for instance, despite defining plagiarism as “a form of cheating” (p. 61), highlights the difficulties in this respect when she then links plagiarism to “direct quotation, paraphrasing, and summarizing” (p. 61). This view of plagiarism as a developmental stage is further reinforced in her results, where almost half the surveyed Thai students cited poor language skills as the main hindrance to avoiding plagiarism (p. 71).

Similar studies show that many forms of unintentional plagiarism can be attributed to underdeveloped skills. Chien (2014), for example, shows how a lack of experience in citation practices can lead to unintentional plagiarism, whilst Löfström and Kupila (2013), found that 70% of students they surveyed believed that it was not a case of serious plagiarism if they copied material without quotation marks as long as they gave a reference.

Another key area for plagiarism research has been to investigate the role of culture and context. As Pecorari (2015, p. 96) states, “[t]he cultural explanation has been at the heart of interest in plagiarism from the beginning”, and is reflected in a vast body of work exploring cultural links to plagiarism. However, Pecorari and Petrić (2014), who reviewed 33 studies, concluded that “it may not be possible, or worthwhile, to unpick [sic] cultural values from the web of language skills, discursual adjustments and individual perceptions and practices in which they are embedded. (p. 287). Furthermore, debate on how (and if) cultural differences play a role in issues surrounding plagiarism is often steeped in underlying assumptions and conceptual solipsism.

For example, in the immediate context of our study (Thailand), Young (2013) attributes part of the problem with plagiarism to character traits that imbue Thai students with a carefree, non-critical/questioning attitude, and to wider issues, such as societal corruption, no fail policies, and short-term orientation. However, many of Young’s conclusions may be anecdotal or a little presumptive. First, his reference to a “carefree” attitude to education is at odds with a large-scale survey of Thai students (OECD/UNESCO, 2016), where 97.2% of 15-year-old students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “I want to be the best in whatever I do” (OECD average = 65.3%). Moreover, 91.6% of the students surveyed strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “I want top grades in most or all of my courses” (OECD average = 83.4%), and 79.7% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “I want to be one of the best students in my class” (OECD average = 59%).¹ Furthermore, Thai parental concern with education is amongst the highest in the world, ranking 1/55 in terms of engaging with children after school, and 2/55 in terms of students who strongly agree that their parents support them with schooling.² Second, although corruption has become a widespread motif in discussions of life in Thailand, it is difficult to prove to what extent it occurs in Thai universities, let alone if it has an impact on widespread academic dishonesty. However, there is some implicit evidence behind the notion of a hidden “no-fail policy”: Charubusp (2015) found that 55% of the teachers she surveyed allowed students to redo “plagiarised” assignments, whereas the rest gave reduced grades—none of the teachers sampled gave F grades for plagiarised work.

1.1.2. Research into perspectives and beliefs

Much plagiarism research uses surveys or questionnaires that consist of Likert scale responses to carefully crafted statements related to plagiarism beliefs, attitudes, and self-reported practices. However, such an approach has been criticised in light of L2 research (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014, pp. 293–294). Specifically, some authors believe that it can lead to under/over-reporting of practices, decontextualised statements being used, and too rigid a focus on plagiarism to the detriment of other, affective, variables, such as motivation and how students write in general. Consequently, with a growing awareness that plagiarism is highly dependent on context, semi-structured interviews in combination with surveys have become a popular data collection method.

Studies using such techniques have gone beyond a focus on textual features, and have helped understandings of students’ hidden anxieties and misconceptions about (mis)using sources (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014, p. 292). Interview based studies have also investigated the meaning of plagiarism amongst students (Deckert, 1993) and teachers (Borg, 2009), and have shown, perhaps unsurprisingly, a discord between how students and teachers conceptualise and experience plagiarism. Such research has also shown that differences exist among teachers within the same institutions as to what constitutes plagiarism (Pecorari & Shaw, 2014), and whether the intent to plagiarise should be a deciding factor for punishment or not (Charubusp, 2015; Sutherland-Smith, 2005). Other studies have taken a more qualitative standpoint and examined L2 student writers in detailed case studies or ethnographic research (e.g., Li & Casanave, 2012). These studies also show how instances of plagiarism are influenced by language proficiency, unfamiliar disciplinary needs, cultural beliefs, task demands, and even fear of inadvertently plagiarising.

¹ STATLINK: dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933470890.

² Education GPS, OECD, 8/3/2019, 10:42:58 AM <http://gpseducation.oecd.org>.

Overall, research has shown how perspectives and practices related to plagiarism are complex, multi-faceted and vary widely depending on the individual and the context. However, most research has focused on Anglo-American or ESL settings, particularly with regard to plagiarism concerning international students. Research in EFL settings (China, South Korea, Thailand, etc.)—where many international students study before going abroad—remains relatively under-researched (see Cumming et al., 2016; Sun & Hu, 2020), with little attention paid to official policies of institutions (cf. Charubusp & Sivell, 2016; Hu & Sun, 2017). Most importantly, though, there is an overall lack of empirical research into plagiarism in EMI settings (Macaro et al., 2018; cf.; Charubusp, 2015), and only a handful of studies into EMI practices, policies, and understandings in Thailand (Thomas et al., forthcoming).

Therefore, given that plagiarism has long been a contentious and important issue in many educational contexts, we wonder how the rapid implementation of EMI, which is top-down policy driven, has affected the perspectives, practices, and policies surrounding plagiarism in this relatively new context. Moreover, many of the students admitted onto EMI programs may have low proficiency levels. As Pecorari (2016) notes, “exceptions may be made, less reliable tests may be used to measure proficiency, or alternative experiences (such as prior university study) may be used as a token of English proficiency” (p. 545). Added to these problems is the fact that teachers in such programs may also be unprepared for such challenges (Thomas et al., forthcoming). Accordingly, we bring together the views and beliefs of a relatively large number of students and teachers, all enrolled/working on EMI programs in two major universities in Bangkok, Thailand. We also examine the plagiarism policies and regulations of these institutions and compare these to the actual practices of those enrolled/working on the EMI programs. Overall, we offer insights into the sorely under-researched Thai EMI context and provide recommendations for teaching practice and policy with regard to plagiarism.

2. Method

2.1. Setting and sample population

Surveys were administered to teachers and students at two large Universities in Thailand, where the researchers work as senior lecturers. Both universities deliver a range of courses in Thai and English and are consistently ranked amongst the top-ten Thai universities.

University A has a four-year English bachelor's program and 35 “international” (EMI) programs. Teachers on these programs come from diverse societal and cultural backgrounds and consist primarily of Thai nationals and nationals whose first language is English (notably, British, American, and Australian citizens). Many of these teachers have taught at all levels of the Thai education system, and their educational qualifications range from Masters in Asian Studies to PhDs in Applied Linguistics. At the time of the study, University A had approximately 33,500 enrolled undergraduates (female–male ratio = 1.75:1) and 1900 teachers; at the faculty where the majority of EMI programs are run, there were approximately 1200 enrolled students and 46 teachers, all of whom were asked to take part in the survey.

University B has a full EMI college that offers 17 bachelor's degree programs and additional EMI programs in other faculties. Teachers on these programs come from a similar background to those at University A: 55% are Thai and the remainder are non-Thai nationals who specialise in English or EMI. The minimum qualification for teachers is a master's degree, and the majority have terminal degrees, often earned abroad. University B had approximately 30,000 enrolled students and 3000 staff at the time of the study. The college where the survey was administered had approximately 3800 enrolled students (female–male ratio = 1.27:1) and 135 teachers, all of whom were asked to take part.

Student participants from both universities were Thai nationals aged 18–23, who were enrolled on EMI undergraduate courses. The teacher sample consisted of Thai and international teachers who taught on the EMI programs and all had worked in Thailand for at least two years. In total, 441 surveys were collected. The final dataset represented Thai students ($n = 395$: University A = 245, University B = 150), Thai teachers ($n = 22$: University A = 13, University B = 9), and non-Thai teachers ($n = 24$: University A = 12, University B = 12).

2.2. Data collection

Data were collected between February and October 2020. Participants were invited to take part through targeted emails, social media pages, and face-to-face meetings. In all settings, invitees were given information about the research purpose, their rights, and how to access the surveys. No incentives were offered and participants were made aware that participation was voluntary. Responses were downloaded as.csv files and transferred into spreadsheets for analysis.

2.3. Survey instruments

The study used two sets of electronic survey-type questionnaires developed by the researchers, who work at University A and B and have extensive experience teaching and researching writing in Thailand. We designed the surveys based on our experience and knowledge of the issues surrounding plagiarism in this context and through an inductive content analysis of existing research. We piloted the student questionnaire on a class of fourth year English Major Undergraduates ($n = 18$) at University A. Their feedback helped us improve the layout, language used, accuracy of the translation, and time to completion

of the multiple choice/Likert scale items (approximately 10–15 min, on average). Similarly, we piloted the teacher survey on two colleagues (one Thai, one non-Thai). Their feedback was used to improve the layout and language.

Both sets of questionnaires consisted of Likert scale items, agree/disagree statements, and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were presented only to the teachers and were used to explore any strong feelings or beliefs they had about plagiarism in Thailand—the rationale being that they were more likely to provide honest answers if they were ensured of their anonymity and not confronted with an interviewer. Both sets of questionnaires were presented as online Google Forms (this was to facilitate data collection and avoid observer paradox). No personal identifiers were collected.

The student survey (available in English and Thai) contained 40 questions: four questions on demographics; eight on attitudes toward plagiarism; twelve on beliefs about plagiarism (based on Deckert, 1993, but we simplified the lead-in sentence); eleven on plagiarism practices; and five on understanding plagiarism. In total, there were 21 Likert scale items, 14 agree/disagree statements, and five multiple choice questions.

The teacher survey (available only in English) contained 33 questions: two on demographics; six on attitudes toward plagiarism; eleven on beliefs about why students plagiarise (including one open-ended questions); eleven on plagiarism practices; two on understandings; and one open-ended question on anything the teacher wanted to add. In total, 16 items were Likert scale items, seven agree/disagree statements, eight multiple choice, and two open-ended questions.

The surveys had no time limits and respondents were under no pressure to complete them quickly. Survey items can be seen in the tables in the results section, with the exception of four “practice” items and one “belief” item from the student survey, and eight “practice” items and two “understandings” from the teacher survey, which we do not report on.

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all survey results. Qualitative analysis was limited to the two open-ended questions that we presented to the teacher cohort. Here, we used inductive content analysis to examine their answers, basing our interpretations on our combined experience, the survey results, and the existing literature.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics

The average age of students was 20.16 years ($SD = 1.23$), and the sample was composed of 65.47% female, 25.58% male, 3.07% gender variant, and 0.77% transgender female.³ This is representative of enrolment on these programs. The majority of students came from English major programs ($n = 121$), with the rest coming from a mix of social studies fields, humanities, or the “hard” sciences, where English is primarily used as the medium of instruction/assessment. Fig. 1 shows a breakdown of students in terms of study year and major:

We did not ask teachers their age or gender, but asked them about their experience teaching in Thailand: 68% had over 10 years’ experience, 12% had 7–10 years’ experience, and 12% had 5–7 years; the remaining 8% had less than 5 years’ experience. Hence, the majority of our teachers are quite experienced when it comes to teaching in Thailand.

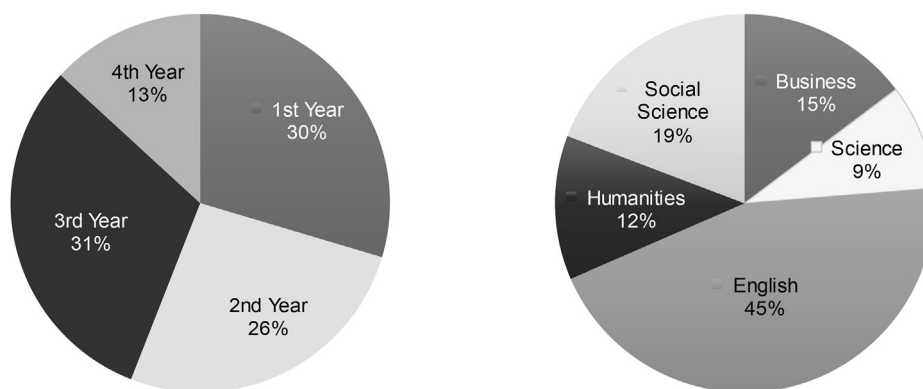


Fig. 1. Study year and major of students ($n = 395$).

³ Some students chose not to indicate their gender (5.12%) or major (12.66%).

Table 1

Students' beliefs about the ethics of plagiarism (n = 395).

Survey item	M	SD	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to myself because I am not being myself	3.26	0.71	3.19	3.33
2. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to the university because its educational goals can never be reached if students just copy information	3.28	0.72	3.20	3.35
3. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to myself because the teacher might not recognise what I did and punish or embarrass me in front of other students	3.18	0.78	3.10	3.26
4. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to the writer of the original passage because I am taking credit that they really deserve for the words and ideas	3.59	0.62	3.53	3.65
5. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to my classmates because most of them worked harder by writing in their own words, but I mainly copied and yet get the same or even better grade.	3.37	0.74	3.30	3.45
6. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to myself because I am not learning much what I just copy another person's writing.	3.32	0.75	3.25	3.40
7. When I copy without referencing, I am unfair to my teacher because they are trying to teach me to write well but I am not cooperating	3.42	0.68	3.35	3.49
8. If a student breaks plagiarism rules, they will be caught.	3.19	0.72	3.12	3.27

Note: Responses were indicated on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

3.2. Students' and teachers' perspectives on plagiarism

3.2.1. Beliefs

Table 1 shows that most students see copying without referencing—a widely agreed upon form of plagiarism—as ethically wrong as evidenced by their high levels of agreement with the statements.

Table 2 below shows students yes/no answers to general beliefs about plagiarism. Surprisingly, despite most students believing that their faculty and university were good at identifying plagiarism (79.75% and 80.76%, respectively), only 35.44% agreed with the statement, “If a student breaks plagiarism rules, they will be caught” (item 8, Table 1). Perhaps more surprisingly, only 29.37% of students think teachers take plagiarism too seriously (item 9).

Table 3 shows a breakdown of teachers' beliefs on why students may plagiarise.

The highest-scoring reasons reported by teachers as to why students plagiarise in order were (a) student did not realise how serious plagiarism was (item 3), which contradicts the findings from Tables 1 and 2, (b) poor planning (item 1), and (c) did not understand the content enough and students' belief in their writing ability (items 4 and 5, respectively).

3.2.2. Understandings and attitudes

Table 4 shows students' understandings of plagiarism.

Findings indicate that these students are confident as to why sources should be referenced and that copying from a book without citing is plagiarism (items 2 and 4, respectively). However, they are less sure about how text-matching software works (item 1), what the difference is between patchwriting and paraphrasing (item 3), and what the plagiarism rules are in their institutions (item 5). Furthermore, when asked if they included a citation when using material from the internet, only 54.82% claimed they did in +60% of cases, which suggests there are some grey areas when it comes to citation practices. This is confirmed in Table 5, which shows student attitudes toward plagiarism.

Table 5 shows that the majority of students believe that most plagiarism activities are not OK as evidenced by their disagreement with statements 2, 4, 5, and 7. This ties in with their beliefs about plagiarism above. There are, however, mixed attitudes on whether it is OK to recycle parts of another essay (item 6, $M = 2.90$), and whether it is OK to reuse photographs from the internet (item 8, $M = 2.97$). Furthermore, despite 65.74% of students claiming that they know the difference between patchwriting and plagiarism (Table 4), 65.22% agreed or somewhat agreed that patchwriting is OK (item 3, $M = 3.70$). This is somewhat similar to Löfström and Kupila's (2013) findings, where 70% of the students they sampled believed that it was not serious plagiarism if they copied material without quotation marks as long as they gave a reference, and the overall findings of Busch and Bilgin (2014) on students' understandings of plagiarism.

Moving on to teacher attitudes, Table 6 shows our respondents' attitudes on plagiarism in terms of its detection and the communication and implementation of plagiarism rules:

Table 2Students' beliefs about plagiarism in general (n = 395)^a.

	No	Yes	Total
9. I think that teachers take plagiarism too seriously.	70.63	29.37	100
11. Our faculty is good at catching students who plagiarise	20.25	79.75	100
12. The university has effective procedures in place for detecting plagiarism.	19.24	80.76	100

^a Item 10 was omitted as it contained the word “cheating” and was thus heavily loaded. We thank the anonymous reviewer for this comment.

Table 3

Teachers' beliefs about plagiarism (n = 46).

	M	SD	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. The student did not have enough time to finish their paper because of poor planning.	3.83	1.14	3.49	4.16
2. The student did not have enough time to finish their paper because of tight deadlines.	2.87	1.15	2.53	3.21
3. The student did not realise how serious plagiarism was.	3.96	1.15	3.61	4.30
4. The student did not understand the content enough to write it in his/her own words.	3.67	0.97	3.39	3.96
5. The student believed that their English writing skills were not good enough.	3.67	1.08	3.35	3.99
6. The student used an online plagiarism tool to check their work and thought that they would not be caught.	3.22	1.15	2.87	3.56
7. The student did not know how to reference correctly.	3.61	1.06	3.29	3.92
8. The student thought that referencing was too complicated and time consuming.	3.37	1.12	3.04	3.70
9. The students do not want to inject their own opinion or voice into their writing, so they use others as their own.	2.70	1.31	2.31	3.09
10. Paraphrasing and summarizing new content is too difficult for the student.	2.87	0.98	2.58	3.16

Note: Responses were indicated on a scale from not probable (1) to very probable (5).

The most surprising finding here is that teachers mostly agree that the punishment for plagiarism is not very clear ($M = 4.07$), and that most teachers believe that students will not be caught if they plagiarise. This ties in with our findings on the practices surrounding plagiarism which we will discuss next.

3.2.3. Practices surrounding plagiarism

When asked about what happens if students are caught plagiarising, 25.38% of students reported that an assignment would get an F grade and 56.09% reported that they would ask or be asked to redo the work, with a reduced grade occurring in 28.93% of cases. However, in a different section of the questionnaire, where students were asked directly if a student caught plagiarising would be asked to redo the work in their own words, 75.82% answered yes (Table 7). Hence, there is clearly some confusion amongst students as to what the punishment for plagiarism is.

Table 7 shows, somewhat surprisingly, that 42.62% of students and an overwhelming 86.96% of teachers admitted to knowing someone who has plagiarised. Furthermore, 31.56% of students and 45.65% of teachers admitted to knowing someone who has plagiarised more than once. These findings illustrate that plagiarism is a well-known phenomenon amongst these populations.

Fig. 2 shows the reported use of text-matching software from students and teachers.

Fig. 2 shows that despite both universities having text-matching software, its use is not widespread; i.e., just 42.89% of students are frequently asked to use it. This finding matches the reported figures of teachers who frequently ask for it to be used (45.27%) and is further reflected in the finding that 57.11% of students report that they are asked to submit assignments in printed form (65.73% also reported that they are asked to send files over email).

4. Discussion

4.1. Perspectives on plagiarism: harmony or discord?

4.1.1. Beliefs

In terms of beliefs surrounding the morality of plagiarism, the results from the student and teacher surveys indicate that plagiarism is clearly understood as ethically wrong in both universities. This resonates with the findings in other contexts (Busch & Bilgin, 2014; Löfström & Kupila, 2013).

In terms of teachers' beliefs on why plagiarism occurs, the highest scoring item in Table 3 was "The student did not realise how serious plagiarism was" ($M = 3.96$). This is somewhat surprising because: (a) the students scored quite highly on beliefs surrounding the ethics of plagiarism (Table 1), and when asked if they understood why sources should be documented correctly, 97.72% of students said yes (Table 4); (b) when asked if their students take plagiarism seriously (item 1, Table 6), teachers did not answer predominantly in the negative ($M = 3.29$); and (c) we would argue that this is a relatively easy issue for teachers to address in class.

Other items that scored relatively high for why students might plagiarise (Table 3) included poor planning ($M = 3.83$), student's belief in their English writing skills ($M = 3.67$), not understanding the content well enough ($M = 3.67$), and not knowing how to reference correctly ($M = 3.61$). These findings are somewhat unsurprising as the literature frequently cites such developmental issues as major contributors to unintentional plagiarism (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014).

We also asked teachers two open-ended questions: one on why students may resort to plagiarism, and one where they could add anything they liked regarding the topic of plagiarism in Thailand. Of the 24 respondents who answered, the majority reasons cited for why students plagiarised were lax rules ($n = 13$) and lack of declarative knowledge ($n = 13$), with responses such as: "Students don't think teachers will check and even if they do universities in Thailand will probably not take action that deters further plagiarism"; "they've been allowed to get away with it for years; it's not treated as a serious offense

Table 4
Students' understandings of plagiarism (n = 395).

	No	Yes	Total
1. I know how plagiarism algorithms work on software such as Turnitin.	29.70%	70.30%	100%
2. I understand why sources should be documented correctly.	2.28%	97.72%	100%
3. I know the difference between patchwriting and paraphrasing	34.26%	65.74%	100%
4. Copying from a book without crediting the source is plagiarism.	3.81%	96.19%	100%
5. I know what the rules on plagiarism are.	22.34%	77.66%	100%

Table 5
Students' attitudes on plagiarism activities (n = 395).

Survey item	M	SD	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. Taking two sentences from another student's work and changing a few words/phrases is OK.	2.49	1.10	2.38	2.60
2. It is sometimes OK to use online resources in my assignment/project without citing the author.	1.96	1.04	1.86	2.06
3. It is OK to copy and then change a few sentences/phrases as long as you give a citation.	3.70	1.24	3.58	3.82
4. It is OK to take opinions from the internet and include them in my work without citing them.	2.09	1.11	1.98	2.20
5. If I copy and paste from an internet source I don't have to use quotation marks in my citation.	1.68	0.93	1.59	1.77
6. It is OK to use a paragraph or sentence from an essay that I handed in for another assignment.	2.90	1.33	2.77	3.04
7. It is OK to cite a source and misspell the author's name	1.75	0.98	1.66	1.85
8. It is OK to take a photograph from the internet and put it in my work	2.97	1.28	2.84	3.09

Note: Responses were indicated on a scale from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Table 6
Teachers' attitudes on plagiarism activities (n = 45).

	M	SD	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
1. My students take plagiarism seriously	3.29	1.18	2.93	3.64
2. If a student breaks plagiarism rules, they will be caught	2.71	0.97	2.42	3.00
3. Some teachers do not explain plagiarism clearly enough.	3.31	1.16	2.96	3.66
4. University does not always explain plagiarism clearly enough.	3.53	1.06	3.22	3.85
5. The punishment for plagiarism is not very clear and/or varies between subjects/teachers.	4.07	1.07	3.74	4.39
6. The university has effective procedures in place for detecting plagiarism.	3.18	1.15	2.83	3.52

Note: Responses range from disagree (1) to agree (5); one participant did not complete this section of the survey.

Table 7
Students' and teachers' exposure to plagiarism

	No		Yes		Total
	S	T	S	T	
1. If a student is caught violating plagiarism rules, they will ask/be asked to redo the work in their own words.	24.18	13.04	75.82	86.96	100%
2. I know at least one student who has broken plagiarism rules.	57.38	13.04	42.62	86.96	100%
3. I know at least one student who has broken plagiarism rules more than once.	68.44	54.35	31.56	45.65	100%

Note: S = Student (n = 396); T = Teacher (n = 46).

by their schools, peers or teachers"; and "Students are not clear about what plagiarism is". Other reasons given were laziness (n = 9), plagiarism being a cultural problem (n = 8), and lack of student ability (n = 5).

4.1.2. Understandings and attitudes

In terms of understandings, there seems to be both harmony and discord amongst students and teachers. For instance, although students and teachers reported similar levels of understanding when it came to how text-matching software works (70.3% and 73.91%, respectively), there was a noticeable difference when it came to knowing what the rules on plagiarism were (77.6% and 97.83%, respectively). The students' uncertainty around the rules is reflected in their responses to questions such as "Taking two sentences from another student's work and changing a few words/phrases is OK" (M = 2.49), and "It is OK to use a paragraph or sentence from an essay that I handed in for another assignment" (M = 2.90). This uncertainty is further supported by the teachers' responses to items such as "University does not always explain plagiarism clearly enough" (M = 3.53), and "Some teachers do not explain plagiarism clearly enough" (M = 3.31). Such variations in understandings may be confounded by the fact that many classes taught in English cut across majors, and thus one class can be composed of

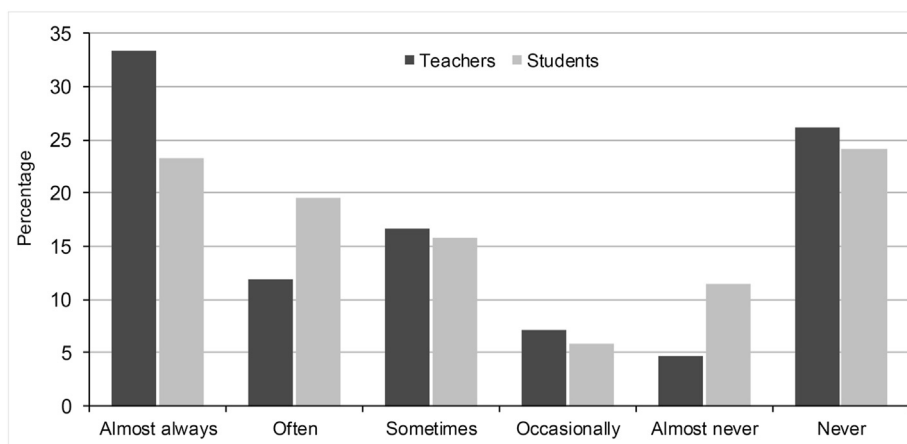


Fig. 2. Reported use of text-matching software.

students who bring with them different experiences and expectations when it comes to academic understandings and practices.

Overall, one could argue that differences in understandings could be addressed through explicit instruction for both student and teacher, focusing on the rules and regulations of the institution. However, as the next section highlights, this would be a somewhat reductionist and possibly fruitless endeavour in our context.

4.1.3. Practices

As reflected upon by [Charubusp \(2015\)](#), the practices surrounding plagiarism in many Thai universities are often not clear. For example, in our study, there was widespread confusion amongst students as to what the punishment for plagiarism was, with 25.38% of students reporting that they would get an F grade, and 56.09% reporting that they would be asked to redo the work with a reduced grade. This is supported by the level of teacher agreement to the statement “The punishment for plagiarism is not very clear and/or varies between subjects/teachers” ($M = 4.07$, [Table 6](#)). There was, however, some agreement that students would be asked to redo the work, with 75.82% of students reporting that they would be asked to resubmit, whilst 86.96% of teachers reported that they would ask the student to resubmit ([Table 7](#)). Clearly, these findings suggest that there is not a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism in place at these departments despite the fact that it is an ongoing issue—both students and teachers reported knowing students who had plagiarised (57.38% and 86.96%, respectively). Several of our teacher respondents echoed this view in their open-ended answers, making statements such as “Students expect teachers to be apathetic to it”, “Our faculty does not want us to let students fail”, and “Lecturers do not take plagiarism seriously”.

Furthermore, this issue is also somewhat confounded by an apparent lack of consistency in using text-matching software. For instance, both groups reported that such software is not widely used: just 42.89% of students were frequently asked to submit work through systems like Turnitin, with a similar level of teachers (41.3%) asking for such software to be used. These figures are somewhat supported by the reported preferred submission format being “Files sent over email” (students = 65.73%; teachers = 41.31%).

What is perhaps more surprising, though, is the relatively high dependency on hard copies for submission, with printed pages (students = 57.11%; teachers = 28.26) or even hand-written pages (students = 11.42%; teachers = 17.39%) being asked for. Such formats arguably make it more difficult to detect and justify the identification of plagiarism as the onus is clearly on the teacher. Perhaps this is why only 35.44% of students agreed with the statement “If a student breaks plagiarism rules they will be caught”. That is, despite students believing that their faculty is good at detecting plagiarism⁴ (79.75%), in many instances, it may well be the sole responsibility of a teacher to identify an act of plagiarism. This would also explain the relatively low percentage of students who think teachers take plagiarism too seriously (29.37%).

Overall, even though plagiarism in our context is seen as ethically wrong, it is still recognised as a widespread problem. And whilst some incidences may be linked to gaps in declarative knowledge and/or lack of ability, it seems that some students may be playing a system that is flawed in terms of detection, varying assessment procedures, and an unwritten mantra that punishment will probably not be severe. However, we believe it is more nuanced than this. Specifically, in our institutions we see a heterogeneous mix of L2 English students who would arguably require different approaches—EFL, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and EMI—and a similarly heterogeneous mix of lecturers who teach (or have taught) across all three platforms. Yet, as discussed in the next section, we see top-down policies that sweep across the board. Perhaps this is

⁴ 54.35% of teachers think their faculty is good at catching students who plagiarise.

why we see wide variation in the implementation of plagiarism policies. As Pecorari (2016) notes, instances of “plagiarism” can be situated along two parallel continuums, one with varying levels of academic literacy and one with varying levels of academic integrity. Yet institutional policies are often rigid and punitive (i.e., they mainly deal with “integrity”), and are thus not capable of covering all the contexts found in universities like ours.

4.2. Academic policies: expectation versus reality

At both of the universities in this study, official policy indicates severe penalties for plagiarism. The student handbook of University B includes a broad definition of plagiarism as taking the ideas or words of someone else and goes on to describe ghost-writing, verbatim plagiarism, and self-plagiarism, using relatively accessible terminology. Moreover, the university handbook indicates that plagiarism will be investigated and that penalties may include receiving a failing grade for the course, for all courses in which the student is enrolled, suspension for the next academic term, or even dismissal from the program in which the student is enrolled. Similar definitions and policies are found in the documents of University A, and such information is easily accessible on both universities’ websites, library portals, and social media pages (in Thai and English). However, the policy documents of both universities are primarily moral and regulatory, and there is little mention of how to prevent plagiarism. As Charubusp and Sivell (2016) remark, this type of narrow ethical discourse, which oversimplifies and focuses on punishment rather than guidance, is arguably not very helpful in terms of guiding students to write well.

Furthermore, despite the strong rhetoric of punishment, the enforcement of these strongly-worded policies seems to be relatively lax. In the open-ended questions, for instance, lax enforcement was the most widely cited reason by teachers for plagiarism among students ($n = 13$). This was reflected in the fact that the majority of students surveyed indicated that a student caught plagiarising would be asked to redo their work—a clear breach of official policy—whereas many of the other students had contradictory responses on what the punishment for plagiarism actually was. One possible explanation for this discrepancy in policy implementation may lie with the heterogeneity of the teachers working on EMI programs in settings such as ours. Namely, teachers’ who work in contexts like ours have backgrounds ranging from practical, language-oriented teaching qualifications (masters in Teaching EFL/ESL and/or English teaching certificates) to the more academic, advanced degrees in specific disciplines with little focus on how to explicitly teach English. Accordingly, there may be differences in how such teachers prioritise language support versus the value of content represented in “accurate” language (Thomas et al., forthcoming). This, in turn, may impact the situated understandings and practices of these academic gatekeepers at the student–teacher level.

In terms of the implementation of text-matching software, both universities have subscriptions to Turnitin and they both provide information to students and teachers on how to enrol and use it. University A has had Turnitin since 2015 and University B has had it since 2008; however, its use does not seem to be mandatory in all courses; i.e., although teachers are given the option to request Turnitin access from their library services or IT department, not all faculties or academic divisions mandate its use. As a result, the use of such software by the students and teachers was relatively low at 42.89% and 41.3%, respectively (as discussed above). Again, this seems like a relatively easy fix: the compulsory use of text-matching software on all courses that require assignments that include written text (essays, PowerPoints, etc.); yet in practice there seems to be a breakdown in institution–teacher communication, where perhaps too much agency is being given to the teachers. For instance, teachers may prefer printed submissions over Turnitin files for practical rather than pedagogical reasons: the paper format is easier on the eyes, is arguably more portable, and does not require any technological skills on the part of the teacher.

We can think of several other reasons that may limit the compulsory use of Turnitin or comparable software: (a) the cost of subscription; (b) teachers’ confidence in using such technology; (c) teachers’ beliefs in the efficacy of such a system; and/or (d) whether a teacher values written language competence or subject-matter knowledge more. With reference to the cost of subscription, Turnitin has various subscription packages, each of which only allow an institution to register a certain number of students. Both universities in our study have large student populations (over 30,000 each) and this would probably equate to a costly subscription. Second, in terms of teachers’ confidence in using such software, this also seems to fall under the remit of institutional finances with regard to providing sufficient training. Third, teachers may only value such a system in this context if it, and it alone, is responsible for gauging acts of plagiarism. However, such software still requires human intervention and a justifiable level of originality—both in terms of intentional and unintentional plagiarism—to be established (Stapleton, 2012).

Overall, the above discussion highlights that we cannot simply lay the blame for plagiarism solely on students in this context. Specifically, the fact that plagiarism is such a multifaceted problem, means that teachers and institutions have a crucial role to play in terms of academic support and the provision of clear, bespoke policies that recognise interdisciplinary and developmental differences in academic literacy and not just ethics (see Merkel, 2021). Moreover, disingenuous institutional policies, where expectations and realities do not always line up, may foster an atmosphere of distrust and dishonesty. Therefore, if an institution has a policy that all papers should be submitted to text-matching software (e.g., Turnitin), and that any identified instances of plagiarism will result in an F grade, then non-implementation of such policies may do more harm than good in the long run.

However, as Young (2013) argues, preventing academic dishonesty through stricter punishment is perhaps not feasible in the Thai context, as there is an inherent tension between the ideal (what teachers want) and the reality of university policies dictated by commercial drives (what teachers can do). Hence, in combating plagiarism in our context (and others), we advocate for original rubrics that call for self-reflection and critical evaluation in a narrow context, as this makes it more

difficult for a student to directly draw on the work of others. Not only are original rubrics advisable, but also original writing assignments, rather than recipe topics, in the first place. We also recommend breaking a project down into phases, so that a teacher can award marks for planning, collecting sources, outlining, etc., or using technological developments to highlight the value of the writing process (see [Bowen & Van Waes, 2020](#)). Finally, in terms of institutional policies, we support the inclusion of an honour code, where students are asked to sign a declaration as part of their submission, and the implementation of clearer guidelines on what constitutes an EMI course and how such courses are to be assessed in terms of language/content.

5. Conclusion

Overall, by exploring the perspectives and practices of students and teachers at two Thai universities through a relatively large survey sample, we hope to have made several contributions to research into academic integrity and plagiarism.

First, by examining plagiarism in a South East Asian EMI setting, we have attempted to fill a void in plagiarism research whilst also adding to the relative scarcity of studies that directly examine and compare student and teacher perspectives in an EMI context. Accordingly, the study showed (a) a clear difference between students' and teachers' views on plagiarism and the academic practices surrounding it, and (b) both groups viewed plagiarism as ethically wrong. These findings accord with those of previous studies in different contexts ([Busch & Bilgin, 2014](#); [Löfström & Kupila, 2013](#)).

Second, we hope to have added to the debate on how context can play a role in plagiarism practices. Specifically, although we cannot be sure that students are aware of an implicit policy under which consequences for plagiarism are minimal, their behaviour, and the beliefs and practices of their teachers, certainly suggest that there is such a thing. Yet we believe that such a laissez-faire attitude to punitive policies may have arisen in response to the need for a more nuanced operationalisation of plagiarism at the classroom level. In other words, it may not be a lack of understanding from teachers that drives such incongruent practices but, in fact, a very real understanding (implicit or explicit) that plagiarism is not just an issue of integrity, but is also a developmental one (academic literacy), and that this is further complicated by heavy workloads, lack of educational support, and institutional drives for increased student/financial numbers and successful "prestigious" programs. In light of this, we made several suggestions as to how plagiarism can be tackled in our context and similar contexts with regard to teaching practices and institutional mandates.

We conclude by stating that plagiarism appears not so much to be an accepted practice in our context, but more of a tolerated one—tolerated in part because of a disconnect between the understandings of students and teachers, yet also because of a delicate balancing act between teacher agency, beliefs and practices, and top-down policy-driven mandates. In this light, we hope to have contributed to understandings of how academic gatekeepers—in this instance, teachers who function as intermediaries between institutional policies and students—navigate the intricacies of plagiarism in a complex context.

5.1. Limitations

Whilst surveys can provide insights into general trends and patterns, there were two primary limitations in ours: (a) respondents may have under- or over-reported practices as sensitive as those we cover; (b) as the literature shows, plagiarism is a context-dependent phenomenon, yet respondents were asked about their perspectives and practices in a decontextualised, generalised manner; (c) respondents represent just two institutions at the "upper" level of Thai Education. Furthermore, it is possible that mainly students and teachers with strong negative or positive views on plagiarism responded, whilst those with more neutral views did not feel the need to respond. Finally, some students may have been unfamiliar with certain terminology used in the English survey, such as "patchwriting". Nevertheless, despite these limitations, we hope to have provided a more thorough glimpse into the issues surrounding plagiarism in our context and hope that our results will help shape future policy making, educational practices, and general understandings of plagiarism in EMI settings.

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Availability of data and material (data transparency)

Our data is freely available for inspection and can be seen in the supplementary material.

Code availability (software application or custom code)

Not applicable.

We also hereby declare that this work has not been previously published, and is not currently being considered for publication in any other venues. Furthermore, we acknowledge that we will not submit this work to any other venue until we have written notification of a decision from the editorial board of the Journal.

Declaration of competing interest

The study has no conflicts of interest or competing interests.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2021.100992>.

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