

Academic Dishonesty at Universities: The Case of Plagiarism Among Iranian Language Students

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Abstract This study investigated Iranian language students' perception of and familiarity with plagiarism, their attitudes toward their professors regarding this issue, and their reasons for doing so. The participants were 122 undergraduate and graduate language students in Translation, Literature, TEFL, and Linguistics who filled out a validated and piloted questionnaire. Overall, the results indicated that students had different views about the definition of plagiarism and plagiarism was mostly perceived by students as using someone else's *words* as if they were their own rather than taking someone's *ideas* without permission. It was also found that in their academic career, students mostly consider *copying a completed assignment of their friend* as an act of academic dishonesty. In addition, they mostly argued that professors at universities *guess about who might have done plagiarism* instead of checking it themselves and they used different strategies to detect plagiarism. The study also indicated that Iranian students had different reasons for plagiarism but they mostly plagiarize because of *easiness of plagiarism*. Finally, the results of the survey showed that the majority learned about plagiarism from their university professors.

Keywords Academic dishonesty · Plagiarism · Iran · Perception · Language students

Introduction

With an exponential growth of academic and literary publications in the world, differentiating the words of one's own from the words of others has become really difficult. Texts are so intricately intertwined that sometimes words can surreptitiously creep into texts without the primary source being acknowledged. Such a deed is construed as misconduct by the academia and sometimes misinterpreted or misconstrued by the less professional community and hence passed off as mere reproduction of texts. The main term denoting this crime is plagiarism or word theft which is sometimes difficult to be differentiated from intertextuality. Plagiarism has become an interesting topic for research in academia and recent

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publications verify this wide-spread interest (Abasi et al. 2006; Ange'lil-Carter 2000; Hamp–Lyons 2009; Lathrop and Foss 2000; Marsh 2007; Martin 1994; Park 2003; Pecorari 2003; Pennycook 1996; Stapleton 2011; Sutherland-Smith 2005a, b).

With the rise of this issue and its spread into the academic discourse community, horns are honked by the academia to root out academic corruption and subsequently terminate all such misdemeanor. To do so, research can be of great help to academic institutions in terminating this malady. Whereas a lot of research studies have focused on this concept, still more research is crucial to be done exclusively for different fields of studies and sociocultural and academic contexts because plagiarism is believed to be differently perceived in different cultures (Liu 2005). In fact, the notion of plagiarism is the issue this article is going to examine among the students of different fields of English language studies (Translation, Literature, TEFL, and Linguistics) in the context of Iran.

Review of Literature

The perennial problem of plagiarism comes under different names including: *misappropriation*, *faulty citation*, *copyright infringement*, *literary theft*, *imitation*, *cheating*, *cribbing*, and *stealing* (Marsh 2007). Although some researchers claim that plagiarism is not synonymous with cheating, some other researchers (e.g. Leming 1980; Raffetto 1985; Haines et al. 1986; Roberts 1986) believe that the word plagiarism must be viewed as part of the problem of cheating. The word *plagiarism* has origins in antiquity (Pecorari 2008), and its negative associations stretch back as far: “the derivation from the Latin word meaning ‘kidnap’ or ‘plunder’ is indicative of how since its first usage in this way it has been regarded as a criminal activity- parallel to stealing other people’s offspring!” (Ange'lil-Carter 2000, pp. 16–17). What is common among diverse definitions of plagiarism is that they all consider plagiarism as fraud. In addition, the use of the words ‘take’, ‘steal’, and ‘pass off’ in some dictionary definitions indicates the intentionality of the action as a basic requirement for plagiarism to happen (Sutherland-Smith 2008).

According to Moody (2007), the concept of plagiarism has been considered from a number of different perspectives. However, he tries to look upon plagiarism from a different perspective and make a distinction between plagiarism and intertextuality. He further states:

At one extreme is the notion of plagiarism, usually defined as the unattributed reproduction of the language, information and/or ideas of other writers. The term is pejorative, and the practice is viewed by scholars as intellectual dishonesty and by teachers as a barrier to academic development. This point of view can be contrasted with the postmodern theory of intertextuality, which postulates that since all texts are necessarily related to prior texts through a network of links, writers (often unwittingly) make use of what has previously been written and thus some degree of borrowing is inevitable. Indeed, it is seen to be a necessary requirement for successful communication since a text is always in a ‘dialogue’ with other texts. A comparison between these two perspectives and their implications can offer some helpful insights to the teacher of academic writing (pp. 195–196).

Plagiarism as a crime is experiencing a steep increase as a result of improvements and developments in technology and especially the utilization of the Internet, different search engines, various available databases, information sources and term papers for sale provided by the Internet for students (Quah et al. 2012). Roberts (2008) referred to a survey of some 35,000 students conducted in the 2002/2003 academic year in the U.S and Canada done by

McCabe (2003). In this survey, McCabe came up with some opposing results. He reported that around 36 % of the respondents voluntarily reported one or more instances of cut-and-paste plagiarism from the Internet sources. In doing their assignments and term projects, many students commit plagiarism, that is to say, they copy some parts from other sources without acknowledging the main source. Some may claim that it is unintentional and some could actually be intentional breaking of the rules of the institute to meet deadlines (Dawson 2004; Song-Turner 2008).

An important point to bear in mind when talking about plagiarism is that different groups of people from various academic levels and of different disciplines across different countries may have differing views regarding plagiarism, its definitions, and its legal or ethical issues. As Sutherland-Smith (2008) pointed out, there are some discrepancies regarding the views toward plagiarism among students and university staff. In the same lines, Ashworth et al. (1997) state that the value attributed to plagiarism in the students' system of values, is relatively lower than the one given by academic staff. Interestingly, plagiarism is even considered by some as an appropriate means of academic learning. However, there seems to be less research done on attitude toward plagiarism across different fields of studies. Literature indicates that initially research misconduct was rife in biomedical research (Fox 1994). Franzen et al. (2007) came up with certain characteristics of biomedical research that might facilitate or lead to research misconduct. Nevertheless, research misconduct later spread to other major fields of study. There were few cases of research misconduct seen in social sciences but Bartlett and Smallwood (2004) mentioned two examples of research misconduct done by a political scientist and a geographer.

In addition, another interesting area of research appears to be scrutinizing the motives and causes behind acts of academic dishonesty. Many research studies have focused on the reasons behind plagiarism and why students engage in academic dishonesty. Bamford and Sergiou (2005) investigated the reasons behind plagiarism through a questionnaire with some close-ended and open-ended questions. Their sample was international students from 17 different countries. At last, they concluded that the main reasons for the reported plagiarism were external pressures to succeed or time pressure.

Jones (2011) tried to investigate the reasons why students engage in academic dishonesty, mainly cheating and Internet plagiarism. He looked into the problem by exploring the perspective of a group of 48 students in an online business communication course. The results of the study confirmed that 92 % of the students engage in acts of academic dishonesty because of a need to make better grades. Other reasons mentioned by the participants constituted: being too busy, lack of enough time to complete assignments or study for tests, not having any interest, considering academic dishonesty as no big deal since everyone else is doing it, and finally peer pressure.

Nevertheless, regarding the context of the previous studies it should be pointed out that the majority of the studies on plagiarism were conducted in western countries, specifically studying issues related to overseas students and examining the effect of differing cultural attitudes on understanding plagiarism. There has also been an inadequate amount of research investigating what university students actually think about the concept of plagiarism and what it means to them. There seems to be a lack of research done in Asian contexts and mainly in a developing country like Iran. The Iranian Association for Ethics in Science and Technology and its affiliated *Journal of Ethics in Science and Technology* are responsible for propagating appropriate codes of ethics in research. Furthermore, in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context of Iran, except for a study done regarding the notion of cheating as a prevalent type of academic dishonesty among language students (Ahmadi 2012), there has been little research on this topic. Moreover, recently there has been some critiques and

editorials (e.g. Ardalan et al. 2009; Butler 2009; Ghazinoory et al. 2011) on plagiarism issues in Iran which call for its more scientific investigations in Iran. Subsequently, this study surveys the attitudes of Iranian language students at universities regarding the concept of plagiarism. We have explored the Iranian language students' attitudes toward plagiarism, their definitions and understandings of the phenomenon, and their reasons for it. Therefore, the research questions addressed in this study are:

1. How do Iranian students of Translation Studies, TEFL, Linguistics, and English Literature define plagiarism? What is the predominant definition for plagiarism selected by the students in each of these fields?
2. What do they consider practically as plagiarism in their own academic career?
3. How do they consider their professors regarding plagiarism?
4. How do they think their professors detect plagiarism?
5. What are the reasons for plagiarism in their opinion? What is the most prevalent one?
6. Have they ever been taught about plagiarism before? If yes, when and where?
7. What is the main source through which they get familiar with the concept of plagiarism?

Method

Participants

There are four major fields of study found in the departments of foreign languages and linguistics in the Iranian universities. They include Translation Studies, English Literature, TEFL, and Linguistics, with TEFL having the most number of students among them. Since not many universities in Iran have undergraduate programs for TEFL, only one participant took part in this study from this group. A total of 122 participants, 52 males and 70 females participated in this study. As can be seen in Table 1, 16 participants were students of Translation Studies, 20 from English Literature, 67 from TEFL, and 19 came from the field of Linguistics. The mean age for the participants was 28.06 (SD=6.32) with the minimum age of 18 and a maximum of 58 years.

Instrument: Plagiarism Questionnaire

The main instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire developed by the researchers themselves based on the instructions in Khatib and Rezaei (2013). To generate the questionnaire items, we reviewed the literature on plagiarism and related topics (e.g. Abasi and Graves 2008; Comas-Forgas and Sureda-Negra 2010; Dawson and Overfield 2006; Jensen

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the participants of the study

Field of study	Degree			Total
	B.A.	M.A.	PhD	
Translation studies	4	11	1	16
English literature	13	6	1	20
TEFL	1	51	15	67
Linguistics	3	11	5	19
Total	21	79	22	122

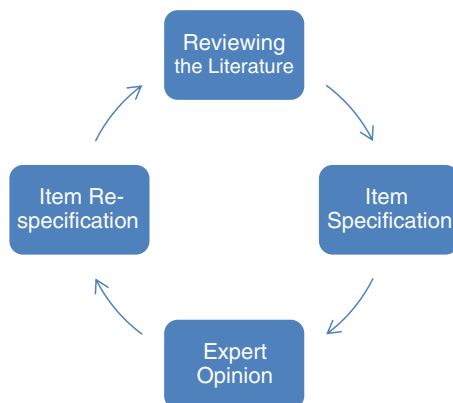
et al. 2002; Eret and Gokmenoglu 2010; Ahmadi 2012; Sendag et al. 2012). Then, the main factors to be considered in developing the questionnaire were decided on. After preparing the first draft of the survey, we also consulted some other experienced researchers on the topic to detect the probable defects of the questionnaire. It must also be mentioned here that the questionnaire items were mainly generated to directly tap the research questions in this study and hence meet content validity. Besides, we also cross checked the questionnaire items with a panel of experts to see how far the items were representative of what we were after. Figure 1 below shows the iterative steps for the questionnaire development.

The questionnaire includes six major sections with every part directly addressing our research questions accompanied by a last section which recorded the participants' basic demographic information including age, gender, field of study, and education level. It was placed at the end with no inquiry for name to keep the respondents' answers completely confidential. It must be noted that the survey (see the Appendix for the complete form of the questionnaire) was prepared based on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = slightly disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree).

Section one (items 1 to 6) of the questionnaire included six items which were supposed to check the respondents' definitions of plagiarism. Section two (items 7 to 12) constituted 6 items and was considered to discover what the Iranian language students practically consider as plagiarism in their own academic career. In the next part, section three (items 13 to 21), we were after knowing what Iranian language students think about their professors' attitudes towards plagiarism, their degree of harshness toward the phenomenon, and their ability in detecting the cases of plagiarism. To realize the reasons behind plagiarism, section four (items 22 to 34) was added to the questionnaire. In this part, the respondents were provided with 13 main reasons for plagiarism. In the last two sections (items 35 to 42), the respondents were asked about their familiarity with the notion of plagiarism; that is when they first heard of plagiarism and how they got the most information on the topic.

In addition, to make sure of the reliability of the questionnaire, the survey was piloted with 113 Iranian English language students similar to the target population the study was planned for. They were undergraduate and graduate students from different universities in Iran. The results for the Cronbach's Alpha showed that the internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was 0.80 which shows a high internal consistency. None of the items was discarded because all the items showed a respectable degree of reliability.

Fig. 1 The iterative steps in questionnaire development



Data Collection Procedure

As mentioned before, the data for this study was collected through a questionnaire. To facilitate the data collection procedure, the researchers used the www.surveymonkey.com website by uploading the questionnaire and asking the participants to fill out the questionnaire online. The data was collected both by sending the link to the participants' emails and by hand through printed form administration. The participants were in fact selected based on their willingness to contribute to this study which subsequently increased the reliability of the findings based on the participants' self-participation and willingness. The researchers mainly found the participants from conferences, universities, and workshops or seminars. Moreover, the respondents were kindly asked to send the online questionnaire link to their interested friends too. For the sake of anonymity, the respondents were not asked to put their names on the questionnaires.

Results

The first research question in this study was:

1. How do Iranian students of Translation Studies, TEFL, Linguistics, and English Literature define plagiarism? What is the predominant definition for plagiarism selected by the students in each of these fields?

As illustrated in Table 2, in order to answer this research question the students were presented with six items related to the notion of plagiarism and its different definitions. There was also an open-ended item at the end of each section of the questionnaire to let the respondents add their own comments and opinions.

More explanation on the results is provided below through the figures. As Fig. 2 illustrates, items 3 and 5 were selected by exactly the same percentage of the participants. From among 122 respondents in this study, 81.1 % of students equally agreed that plagiarism is: *using someone else's results as if they were their own* (item 3) and *copying and pasting without acknowledging the original source* (item 5). Moreover, as shown the next most frequent items were items 1 and 2 which came after items 3 and 5 with very little difference. As shown in the figure, 80.3 % of the respondents believed that plagiarism is respectively *using someone else's words and ideas as if they were their own*.

As presented in Fig. 2, it is evident that there is no remarkable difference in the adoption of these four different items (items 1, 2, 3, and 5) by the students. It also indicates that 70.5 % of the students have said that: *plagiarism is getting ideas from a source and paraphrasing them but without acknowledging the original source*. Finally, the least number of participants (40.2 %) went for item 4 which states that: *plagiarism is getting your ideas from a text book*.

Table 2 Six options proposed as definitions of plagiarism

Item 1: Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>words</u> as if they were your own.
Item 2: Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>ideas</u> as if they were your own.
Item 3: Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>results</u> as if they were your own.
Item 4: Plagiarism is getting your ideas from a text book.
Item 5: Plagiarism is copying and pasting without acknowledging the original source.
Item 6: Plagiarism is getting ideas from a source and paraphrasing them but <u>without</u> acknowledging the original source.

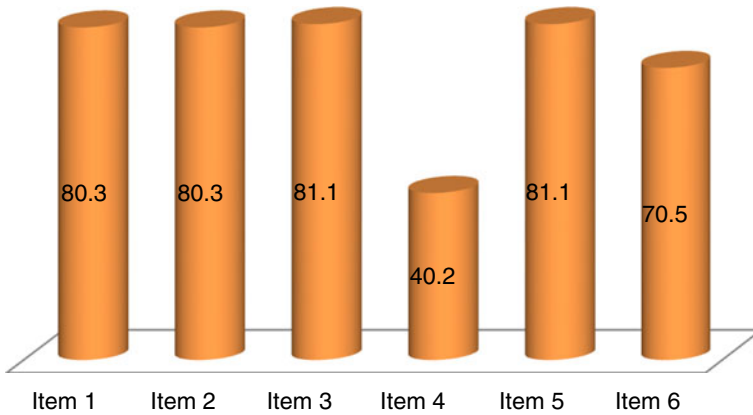


Fig. 2 Total percentage of students who agreed on different items on definition of plagiarism

In order to answer the second part of research question one, the definition which was selected by more participants in each of these fields is presented. To make the results easier to understand, Fig. 3 may help a lot. It depicts the percentage by which the students of different fields of study agreed on different definitions of plagiarism mentioned before. As depicted in Fig. 3, equally 75 % of participants believed that *plagiarism is using someone else’s ideas as if they were their own and copying and pasting without acknowledging the original source* respectively. In the field of English Literature, *plagiarism as using someone else’s ideas and results as if they were their own* was the predominant view selected by 95 % of the respondents. However, among the students of TEFL, with a noticeable difference,

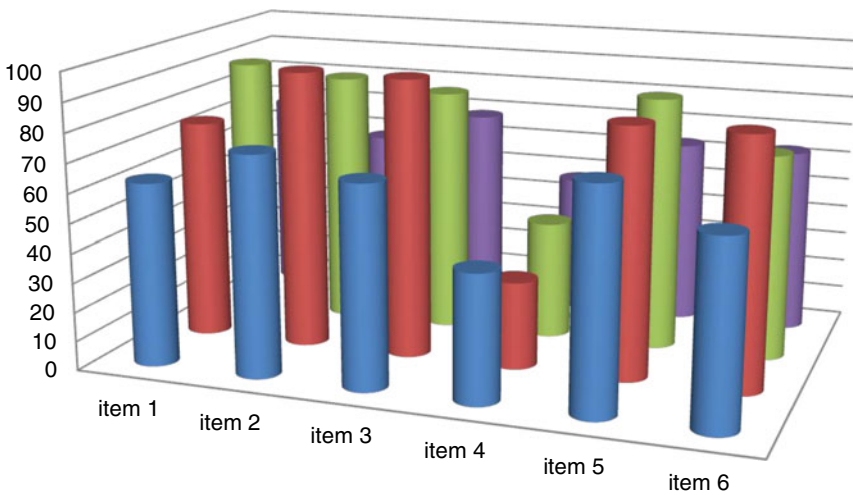


Fig. 3 Percentage of different disciplines’ agreement on the definition of plagiarism

89.5 % of respondents agreed that *plagiarism is using someone else's words as if they were their own*. Finally, 68.42 % of the students of Linguistics acknowledged that *plagiarism is using someone else's words and results as if they were their own*.

However, students from all fields of study showed less certainty with the concept of getting their ideas from a text book as plagiarism, with the least percentage (30 %) from the students of English Literature. The highest percentage regarding item 4 came from the students of Linguistics. 47.36 % of students of Linguistics agreed that getting ideas from a text book without acknowledging the original source is regarded as plagiarism. Finally, 43.75 % and 40.29 % of students of Translation and TEFL respectively agreed on item 4.

The second research question in this study was:

2. What do they consider practically as plagiarism in their own academic career?

Concerning our second research question, Table 3 presents the results. It is illustrated that 90.16 % of the students believed that submitting an assignment produced as a joint effort but

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for what language students consider as plagiarism

You may be accused of plagiarism if you:	Strongly agree		agree		Slightly agree		Slightly disagree		disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. Submit an assignment produced as a joint effort but under your name only	38	31.14 %	46	37.70 %	26	21.31 %	3	13.63 %	8	6.55 %	1	0.81 %
2. Copy a completed assignment that your friend has emailed to you	58	47.54 %	40	32.78 %	13	10.65 %	4	3.27 %	5	4.09 %	2	1.63 %
3. Lend a completed assignment to a friend who then copies some parts of it.	20	16.39 %	36	29.50 %	20	16.39 %	21	17.21 %	17	13.93 %	8	6.55 %
4. Pass off someone else's work as your own and for your own benefit	70	57.37 %	32	26.22 %	8	6.55 %	6	4.91 %	1	0.81 %	5	4.09 %
5. Work on a term project with your classmates/professor and submit the article under your name only	56	45.90 %	34	27.86 %	14	11.47 %	7	5.73 %	4	3.27 %	7	5.73 %
6. Take a questionnaire from an article and work on it without acknowledging the source and writer	47	38.52 %	34	27.86 %	15	12.29 %	12	9.83 %	7	5.73 %	7	5.73 %

F Frequency, P Percentage

under their name only was regarded as plagiarism whereas 90.97 % agreed that if they copied a completed assignment from their friend was regarded as plagiarism. Furthermore, 62.28 % of Iranian language students believed that plagiarism constituted lending a completed assignment to a friend. Also 85.2 % acknowledged that if they work on a term project with their classmates/professor and submit the article under their name only, they are actually a plagiarist. Our last finding in this section was that 90.14 % of the participants considered passing off someone else’s work as their own and for their own benefit as plagiarism.

Figure 4 below can better demonstrate the results. It is interesting that whereas 90.97 % of the participants consider copying a completed assignment that their friend has emailed to them as plagiarism; only 62.28 % consider lending a project to their friends as plagiarism!

The third research question in this study was:

3. How do they consider their professors regarding plagiarism?

Table 4 below demonstrates the results for what language students think of their professors regarding plagiarism. The results showed that 36.2 % of the participants believed that professors *do not care about detecting plagiarism*, whereas about 64 % disagreed; 34.5 % showed that *their professors do not have the ability to detect plagiarism*. Interestingly, 41 % thought that *professors can detect plagiarism but they do not care to penalize students* and 56.6 % of the participants also believed that *their professors warn them too much about plagiarism*. In addition, 62.3 % and 31 % of the language students respectively believed that Iranian professors at universities guessed about who might have done plagiarism and read the whole term paper to find familiar sentences from famous scholars to detect plagiarism.

The fourth research question in this study was:

4. How do they think their professors detect plagiarism?

In this section of the questionnaire, we were interested to know how Iranian language students think regarding the detection of plagiarism by university professors. This part of the survey constitutes three items. As illustrated in Table 5, only 11.5 % of participants strongly agreed that their professors used the Internet and search engines to detect plagiarism whereas this method should be the commonest way to detect plagiarism. However, it was observed in particular that 48.4 % of the students believed that *professors detect plagiarism by judging*

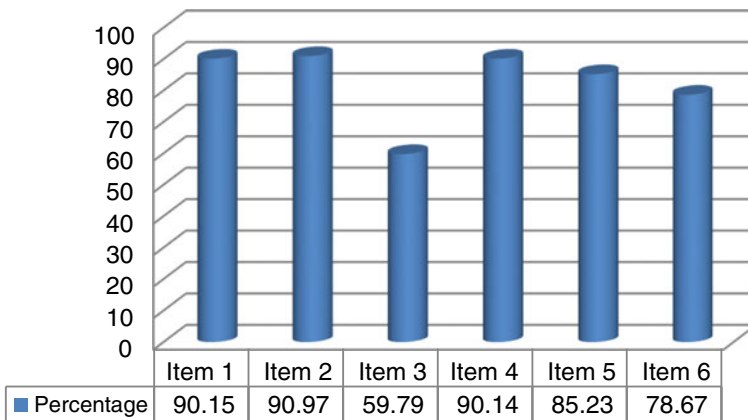


Fig. 4 Agreement percentage of what respondents consider as plagiarism in their own academic career

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for what language students think of their professors regarding plagiarism

I think my professors:	Strongly agree		agree		Slightly agree		Slightly disagree		disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
	1. Do not care about detecting plagiarism.	8	6.6 %	18	14.8 %	18	14.8 %	20	16.4 %	35	28.7 %	23
2. Do not have the ability to detect plagiarism.	8	6.6 %	13	10.7 %	21	17.2 %	15	12.3 %	42	34.4 %	23	18.9 %
3. Detect plagiarism but they do not care to penalize us.	2	1.6 %	16	13.1 %	33	27 %	17	13.9 %	31	25.4 %	23	18.9 %
4. Warn us too much about plagiarism.	15	12.3 %	35	28.7 %	19	15.6 %	21	17.2 %	23	18.9 %	9	7.4 %
5. Guess about who might have done plagiarism	8	6.6 %	33	27 %	35	28.7 %	24	19.7 %	13	10.7 %	9	7.4 %
6. Read the whole term paper to find familiar sentences from famous scholars	4	3.3 %	14	11.5 %	21	17.2 %	27	22.1 %	34	27.9 %	22	18 %

F Frequency, P Percentage

based on students' characteristic, 75.3 % assumed that plagiarism is detected from the professors' teaching experience, and lastly 70.5 % stated that their professors use the Internet and search engines to detect plagiarism.

The fifth research question in this study was:

5. What are the reasons for plagiarism in their opinion? What is the most prevalent one?

The results concerning the reasons for plagiarism are presented in Table 6 in the form of frequency and percentage. Several reasons could be accounted for plagiarism. As can be seen, the language students were presented with 13 different major reasons for plagiarism as detected in the literature. More than 84 % of the students said that easiness of plagiarism was the major

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for what language students think of their professors regarding the detection of plagiarism

I think my professors:	Strongly agree		agree		Slightly agree		Slightly disagree		disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
	1. Detect plagiarism by judging based on students' characteristic	3	2.5 %	23	18.9 %	33	27 %	26	21.3 %	24	19.7 %	13
2. Detect plagiarism from their teaching experience	6	4.9 %	43	35.2 %	43	35.2 %	13	10.7 %	13	10.7 %	4	3.3 %
3. Use internet and search engines to detect plagiarism	14	11.5 %	34	27.9 %	38	31.1 %	16	13.1 %	12	9.8 %	8	6.6 %

F Frequency, P Percentage

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for the reasons for plagiarism

Reasons for plagiarism	F	P
1. Easiness of plagiarizing	103	84.4 %
2. Not having a good command of the language	100	82 %
3. No training in universities on the issue of plagiarism	91	73.9 %
4. Lack of time to meet the deadlines	85	69.7 %
5. Lack of attention from professors to term projects	85	69.7 %
6. More confidence & belief in the original text	80	65.5 %
7. Not being aware of the severity of plagiarism and its subsequences.	79	64.8 %
8. Lack of clarity of university regulations	78	63.9 %
9. Lack of attention from professors to detection of plagiarism	76	62.3 %
10. The same treatment to those who plagiarize and those who don't	76	62.3 %
11.No difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects	73	59.8 %
12. Because everyone else is doing it	36	29.5 %
13. Just for fun	19	15.6 %

reason for it. With little difference, 82 % believed that students plagiarized because of not having a good command of the language and 73.9 % of the participants also stated that students plagiarized because universities did not provide any training on plagiarism. Other reasons which were reported in the order of priority included 'lack of time to meet the deadline' (69.7 %), 'lack of attention from professors to term projects' (69.7 %), 'more confidence and belief in the original text' (65.5 %), 'not being aware of the severity of plagiarism and its subsequences' (64.8 %), 'lack of clarity of university regulations' (63.9 %), 'lack of attention from professors to detect plagiarism' (62.3 %), 'the same treatment to those who plagiarize and those who don't' (62.3 %), 'no difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects' (59.8 %), and 'because everyone else is doing it' (29.5 %). Hopefully the least frequent item was plagiarizing just for the fun of it (15.6 %)!

The sixth research question in this study was:

6. Have they ever been taught about plagiarism before? If yes, when and where?

To answer this research question and find out about the familiarity of Iranian language students with the widespread problem of plagiarism, three items were suggested to the students (item 35 to 37 in the survey). Results of this research question are presented in the order of priority in Table 7 below. Not surprisingly, there was a good deal of agreement that showed most of the students (76.2 %) first heard of plagiarism from their university professors; 26.3 % of the students stated that they first heard of plagiarism from their high school teachers; and the least frequent item was 18.8 % which goes for getting information from workshops or seminars.

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for the familiarity of the students with plagiarism

I first heard of plagiarism:	F	P
1. From university professors.	93	76.2 %
2. From my high school teachers.	32	26.3 %
3. In some workshops or seminars on plagiarism.	23	18.8 %

The seventh research question in this study was:

7. What is the main source through which they get familiar with the concept of plagiarism?

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for different sources through which the students get familiar with plagiarism. It indicates that all the various sources mentioned in the prepared survey are used to some extent by some of the participants. As presented in Table 8, with a remarkable difference the most common source for students to get information on plagiarism is university professors (87.6 %). Internet was the next source to get information about plagiarism (59.9 %). The next sources were newspapers and magazines (49.2 %), friends or family members from higher levels of education (42.6 %) and finally the TV and radio (41 %).

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the perception and attitude of Iranian language students towards plagiarism. We primarily aimed to address the paucity of this research among EFL language students in the context of Iran. The participants of the study were 122 language students in Translation Studies, English Literature, TEFL, and Linguistics.

As Gullifer and Tyson (2010, p. 463) stated, ‘theory and research in psychology show that a thorough understanding of an individual’s view of an issue or problem is an essential requirement for successful change of that person’s attitudes and behavior’. However, it must be pointed out that only a handful of studies have been conducted to explore students’ perceptions of plagiarism, and they mainly are likely to focus on the reasons for plagiarism (e.g. Ashworth et al. 1997; Devlin and Gray 2007; Marsden et al. 2005). The findings of this study showed that more than half of the participants thought that plagiarism was *copying and pasting without acknowledging the original source*. This may be due to the fact that this is the most predominant and prevalent definition of the concept and most students consider varying degrees of copying as plagiarism. This is in line with Selwyn (2008) who also found that most of the participants ($N=1,222$) were involved in acts of *copying* something, whether a few sentences (59 %), paragraphs (30 %), pages (12 %) or the whole essay (4 %) from a website into an assignment without citing them.

The results of our study also showed that only 18.8 % of the students said that they had attended workshops or seminars on plagiarism. This indicated that Iranian universities do not provide enough training and information on plagiarism. Accordingly, 87.6 % of the respondents acknowledged that university professors were the main source through which they got familiar with plagiarism. With little difference the participants also stated that plagiarism was using someone else’s *words* and *results* as if they were their own. This could be explained by the fact that they also resemble the task of copying and pasting.

Table 8 Descriptive statistics for sources of getting familiar with plagiarism issues

Items	F	P
1. University professors	107	87.6 %
2. Internet	73	59.9 %
3. Newspapers and magazines	60	49.2 %
4. Friends or family members from higher levels of education	52	42.6 %
5. TV and radio	50	41 %

Although separate research is required, the results of this study suggest that not only language students but also students of other majors might not really consider *using someone else's ideas without permission* as plagiarism. This is comparable with Dawson and Overfield (2006) who also found that students knew that the act of using someone else's words was regarded as plagiarism, but getting ideas from a textbook or using someone else's ideas without their permission was not seen as plagiarism. In this study, language students from all the fields showed uncertainty about the concept of getting ideas from a text book as plagiarism, with the least percentage (30 %) from the students of English Literature. This may be due to the fact that students of Literature are always encouraged to read more if they want to write better. It is believed that reading a lot can facilitate writing skill too. Some even argue that one cannot be a good writer or poet unless they read a lot first. That is to say in order to learn to write, teachers often encourage or even force students to read and also memorize some parts of previous well-known classical works and then use them in their own pieces of writing, whether a story or a poem. It means that Iranian students are mostly encouraged to memorize in order to learn better. However, this should not suffocate creativity in the students. Imitation for them is maybe only a base for learning to be creative. All in all, this may seem illogical to the students of Literature to consider getting ideas from other books as a type of plagiarism.

Not only English Literature students but also most Iranian students seem to experience misconceptions regarding the actual meaning and definition of plagiarism. This may be due to some factors such as discrepancies in pedagogical implications in different countries which itself can originate from cultural issues as it is difficult to separate education from culture because 'educational systems are part of a cultural tradition' (Amsberry 2009, p. 34).

One point to bear in mind is that some students copy because this is the way they are taught in their country's educational system. Iranian educational system encourages students to memorize to a large extent. Similarly, Gu and Brooks (2008, p. 347) concluded that among Chinese postgraduate students, memorization is not regarded as a "rote learning experience, but a form of learning that also promotes deep cognitive and affective learning".

In the second research question, the researchers intended to estimate participants' views regarding the practical side of plagiarism. It is worthwhile remembering that plagiarism takes many different forms and as could be observed in this study, the participants had different perceptions of plagiarism. For one thing, more than 90 % of the participants considered plagiarism as *copying a completed assignment that their friend had emailed to them or passing off someone else's work as their own and for their own benefit*. This was in fact very similar to the findings of a study by Jones (2011) in which 100 % of the participants stated that *turning in another person's assignment as their own assignment* meant plagiarism.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the results section, one interesting finding was that whereas 90.97 % of the participants considered copying a completed assignment that their friends had emailed to them as plagiarism, only 62.28 % considered lending a project to their friends as plagiarism. This could arise from both psychological and social features attributed to the Iranian students. For one thing, it is a strong belief in Iran that people themselves are responsible for whatever they do in their lives. That means, most Iranian students think that if they intentionally ask a friend to send them their assignment to use for their own benefit, it is considered as an act of plagiarism. But they think that they cannot have any control over what others are going to do with their project. They do not believe that if they send their project to a friend and then their friends use it for their own benefit, it would be plagiarism! In fact, they believe their friends are guilty but not they themselves! As for the social issues relating to this phenomenon, it can be argued that the majority of Iranians follow the custom and tradition of 'taarof' which makes Iranians feel uneasy to say no to their friends' requests for their assignments. They may say yes to a friend's enquiry for their term paper though

unwittingly. Some even regard their friendship much more important than adhering to the rules and disciplines. No matter what their action means in the academic context, they try to keep their friends around. This may again arise from the lack of strict rules in the academic context and the need for some standard penalties in the country.

Our results also lend some support to the fact that Iranian students had differing ideas regarding their professors' views toward plagiarism and their ability to detect it. This can be due to the fact that the respondents were from different educational levels. To whatever reason it was related to, it is really disappointing that the Iranian students in this study consider their professors inconsiderate of plagiarism and its penalties. What we really need in the context of Iran is mainly an agreed-upon definition of plagiarism and some standard penalties for the students who plagiarize. It gives the impression that some professors do not bother themselves detecting plagiarism or punishing the students. Some may even detect plagiarism but remain silent, as they believe that the educational institutions would not collaborate with them if the person has a high profile. As it was pointed out, 56.6 % of the students believed that their professors warned them too much about plagiarism. This can also have a positive implication. If the students state that their professors warn them about plagiarism, this can implicate that they really wish to eliminate academic dishonesty. They may indeed try hard to eradicate plagiarism. Despite all these endeavors, it appears that due to the lack of a set of standard rules and regulations from the Iranian institutional policy makers and departments, the university professors try to rely on their own standards to punish plagiarism cases. This can justify why 41 % of the students said that professors *could detect plagiarism but they did not care to penalize the students*. In the same lines, Bjorklund and Wenestam (1999) stated that approximately 20 % of instructors take no notice of cases of obvious plagiarism, often because of the tension that may result from dealing with such issues.

Regarding our fourth research question, we found that 70.5 % declared that their professors *use the Internet and search engines to detect plagiarism*. However before doing the study, we expected a percentage of 90 and above for this item. We thought almost all Iranian university students must be familiar with common, ordinary plagiarism detection procedures such as using the Internet or other famous detection software (e.g. Turnitin). The results were not in tandem with our optimist expectations which explains why Iranian students tend to plagiarize in their projects. As mentioned in the reasons for plagiarism section, 73.9 % of the students claimed that they plagiarized because they received no training in universities on plagiarism. Besides, 64.8 % of the respondents stated that not being aware of the severity of plagiarism and its consequences is the reason students plagiarize. For instance, many of them (76.2 %) said that they *first* heard the word *plagiarism* when they entered university, with no previous background on the concept. This is also supported by the fact that only 18.8 % of students had attended workshops on plagiarism.

However, it goes without saying that in order to address plagiarism, we first need to recognize its causes and reasons. Among the 13 different reasons for plagiarism, the most frequent one was the *easiness of plagiarism* (84.4 %) which has two explanations. First of all, many of the participants in this study claimed that their professors either did not care about detecting plagiarism or did not have the ability to discover plagiarism. This may justify why the participants believed that it is generally easy to plagiarize. On the other hand, the Internet is often perceived by researchers as an easy and accessible tool for plagiarism. Although some researchers are not sure of this reason (McCabe 2003), some maintain that the Internet is the primary 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), which is mainly done through the famous *cut and paste* procedure with or without paraphrasing. Moreover, there are many web sites (some free of charge) which provide the students with a complete

essay or term paper (Bennett 2005). Nevertheless, Furedi (2003, p.16), argued that the Internet does not “possess the moral power to incite otherwise honest students to cheat”.

Some other frequent reasons for plagiarism among the Iranian language students were *not having a good command of the language* (82 %) and *too much workload and lack of time to meet the deadlines* (69.70 %). This finding is in line with Song-Turner (2008) and Jones (2011) who also found these two factors as the main reasons for plagiarism among students. Bamford and Sergiou (2005) also concluded that time pressure was the main reason for plagiarism among students. In the same lines, Devlin and Gray (2007) came up with eight categories of reasons for plagiarism among Australian students which included *poor academic skills* and *pressures of different kinds* (e.g. time pressure). Furthermore, 63.9 % of participants stated that students plagiarize because they do not have enough clear information and understanding of institutional policies and regulations. This finding is in line with Jordan (2001) who found that students who reported greater understanding of institutional policies were mainly classified as non-cheaters rather than cheaters.

The results of this survey also indicated that 29.5 % of the students plagiarize because *everyone else is doing it* and 62.3 % plagiarize because their *professors do not pay enough attention to the detection of plagiarism*. Burnett (2002) also points out that there is higher probability for plagiarism when students realize that their professors do not bother to read their papers or review their work meticulously. These findings are as well in line with Jones (2011). In his study, Jones concluded that 25 % of students 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. 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. Finally 15.6 % of the students mentioned that they plagiarize *just for fun*. This was in fact the reason chosen by the least number of participants. This finding is in line with Devlin and Gray (2007). One reason given by students for plagiarism at the university level in their study was that some students plagiarized because they enjoyed plagiarizing. They believed that ‘to do it the hard way is stupid’. That is to say, they felt proud of plagiarizing.

Moreover, it is argued that high school students judge academic dishonesty more leniently than college students and they also engage in more cheating behavior (Evans and Craig 1990; Jensen et al. 2002). Evans and Craig (1990) also found that academic cheating reached its highest point at the high school level. In the same lines, some research studies have shown that college students claimed that they involved in more acts of academic dishonesty when they were high school students (Davis et al. 1992; Davis and Ludvigson 1995). All these findings alert us to inform our students of plagiarism and its consequences at earlier stages of their education, i.e. school. As found in this study, 76.2 % of Iranian language students first heard of plagiarism from their university professors which means university was the first place in which they got familiar with the notion of academic dishonesty in general and plagiarism in particular. Jones (2011) as well reported that the main way of disseminating information on plagiarism for the students was informally through professors' lectures or talks. Besides, professors' syllabi can mention plagiarism and its consequences directly to the students so that students will be aware of its possible consequences.

One argument raised here might be the fact that students at schools are not generally involved in serious research and hence are not accordingly educated about plagiarism. Even if they are asked to do a project, they easily make an inappropriate use of the web resources with some cut-and-pastes without acknowledging the main sources. In most cases, even the

teachers themselves ask their students to use the Internet for doing their term projects. Perhaps high school teachers themselves do not have much information on the issue; however, it is the duty of teachers to teach students how to use the internet for research purposes. In our research study, no more than 26.3 % of the respondents acknowledged that they first heard of plagiarism from their high school teachers. Another interesting point is that many acts of plagiarism are unintentional and some students may plagiarize unwittingly due to the lack of knowledge on the concept. This indeed proves the significance of early education on acts of academic dishonesty in order to root out the epidemic and “chronic” problem of academic dishonesty (Maramark and Maline 1993, p. 4). The drama starts when we see many students come to realize what plagiarism is when they are doing their graduate studies, the level in which they really are expected to do serious research.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicated that Iranian language students had different ideas about plagiarism. Overall, the results showed great variations in the participants’ views regarding the definition of plagiarism and its practical issues. This reinforces the fact that Iranian students need more training and information on the concept of academic dishonesty and more specifically plagiarism. We need to place a strong emphasis on issues of prevention and education. The more the students know about plagiarism, the less they would be involved in acts of academic dishonesty. Also this proves the need for an agreed upon punishment procedure for students who plagiarize in academic institutions in Iran. Universities need to establish committees to decide about these cases and related rules should be established in universities to alert students and make them take plagiarism more seriously. There is also a need for ‘a more holistic institutional approach that recognizes the need for a shared responsibility between the student, staff and institution, supported by external quality agencies’ (Macdonald and Carroll 2006, p. 233).

To root out this problem some instructional procedures can also be employed. First of all, academic dishonesty policies should be explicitly taught to the students, especially to those at high schools or newcomers at universities. They need to be reminded of the severity of the consequences for those who plagiarize. Nowadays the majority of top universities in the world follow certain codes of ethics for their academics. The majority of universities in the world are not equipped with plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin which is not easily available at Iranian universities to be used for checking research projects. More specifically students need to be informed of detection software and the procedures professors use to detect plagiarism. This should be part of all courses at universities and plagiarism issues and their penalties must be explicitly stated in all course syllabuses.

If only the students know that their professors can discover cases of plagiarism, they would at least consider it with more care. Moreover, the rules of citation and proper ways of citing others’ works should be taught to students. In order to fulfill this purpose, all students should pass a course in academic writing with a focus on academic citation and referencing system. In addition, using some famous tools such as *EndNote*, *Easybib*, *Son of Citation Machine*, or *The Citation Generator* which facilitates the citation process by automatically generating the references based on the information provided (Jones 2011) can be taught to students. In addition, an interesting website called ‘*Professors against Plagiarism*’ (<http://pap.blog.ir>) is launched by a group of Iranian professors at Sharif University of Technology and elsewhere to stop plagiarism in academia. All these attempts can help reduce plagiarism among students and other academics.

Limitations and Further Research

The questionnaire developed and validated in this study is a valuable instrument for running a nation-wide survey. As a follow-up phase of this study, we intend to administer the same questionnaire to a wider context throughout the country. The main limitation of this study was that the participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate and also the number of participants of different fields of study was not equal. This may decrease the generalizability of the findings of the study, as the sample may not be representative of the whole population. However, for future research interested researchers can employ the questionnaire in this study to run larger sample studies either in Iran or other contexts.

Plagiarism is a very delicate issue to research and that is why an anonymous survey was used to research this topic. In addition, online administration of the questionnaire gathered the data more willingly from the participants. Although interviewing could also be used as a post-survey instrument, the researchers found it off-putting for the Iranian students who were reluctant to easily express their ideas about plagiarism. However, future studies can use interviewing but the interviewer should be close to the participants to be able to work well.

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Appendix

Table 9

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1						
	Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>words</u> as if they were your own.					
2						
	Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>ideas</u> as if they were your own.					
3						
	Plagiarism is using someone else's <u>results</u> as if they were your own.					
4						
	Plagiarism is getting your ideas from a text book.					
5						
	Plagiarism is copying and pasting <u>without</u> acknowledging the original source.					
6						
	Plagiarism is getting ideas from a source and paraphrasing them but <u>without</u> acknowledging the original source.					
<i>You may be accused of plagiarism if you:</i>						
7						
	submit an assignment produced as a joint effort but under your name only.					
8						
	copy a completed assignment that your friend has emailed to you.					
9						
	lend a completed assignment to a friend who then copies some parts of it.					

Table 9 (continued)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10						
pass off someone else's work as your own and for your own benefit.						
11						
you work on a term project with your <u>classmates/professor</u> and submit the article under your name only.						
12						
take a questionnaire from an article and work on it without acknowledging the source and writer.						
I think my professors:						
13						
do not care about detecting plagiarism.						
14						
do not have the ability to detect plagiarism.						
15						
detect plagiarism but they do not care to penalize us.						
16						
warn us too much about plagiarism.						
17						
guess about who might have done plagiarism.						
18						
read the whole term paper to find familiar sentences from famous scholars.						
19						
detect plagiarism by judging based on students' characteristics.						
20						
detect plagiarism from their teaching experience.						
21						
use the internet and search engines to detect plagiarism.						
<i>Students plagiarize because:</i>						
22						
it is easy to plagiarize.						
23						
they do not have a good command of English.						
24						
they usually do not have enough time to meet the deadlines.						
25						
professors do not pay much attention to detect plagiarism.						
26						
just for fun.						
27						
they do not know much about the severity of plagiarism and its consequences.						
28						
most Iranian professors themselves do not care much about term projects, why should I do so? They only think of our exam papers as a criterion for our final grades. I prefer to invest more time on reading for the test rather than doing my term projects.						
29						
there is no difference in teachers' evaluation of the plagiarized and non-plagiarized projects.						
30						
everyone else is doing it.						
31						
they feel the original text is well-written and difficult to be changed.						

Table 9 (continued)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
32						
of the lack of clarity of university regulations.						
33						
universities do not take responsibilities for teaching students what is considered as plagiarism.						
34						
of the same treatment to those who plagiarize and those who don't.						
<i>I first heard of plagiarism:</i>						
35						
from my <u>high school teachers</u> .						
36						
from <u>my university professors</u> .						
37						
in <u>workshops or seminars</u> on plagiarism.						
<i>The main source through which I got the most information about plagiarism is:</i>						
38						
The Internet						
39						
University professors						
40						
TV and radio						
41						
Newspapers and magazines						
42						
Friends or family members						

Participants Background:						
Gender:	male <input type="checkbox"/>		female <input type="checkbox"/>			
Age:						
Field of study:	Translation <input type="checkbox"/>	Literature <input type="checkbox"/>	TEFL <input type="checkbox"/>	Linguistics <input type="checkbox"/>		
University degree:	B.A. <input type="checkbox"/>	M.A. <input type="checkbox"/>	PhD <input type="checkbox"/>			

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