

**STUDENTS VERSUS PLAGIARISM:  
HOW IS ONLINE PLAGIARISM DETECTION SERVICE PERCEIVED?**

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**Abstract**

The development of information and communication technology plays a considerable role for students in writing their theses. The positive side, it will help the students to find countless number of academic sources ranging from journal articles to complete theses written by other scholars. On the other hand, it will also create a chance for the students to commit plagiarism easier. Unoriginal writing and plagiarism in this digital era can be detected in the digital way by using plagiarism detection software. This paper elaborates how students understand the concept of plagiarism, how they avoid plagiarism, and how they perceive online plagiarism detection service. The data was taken from interviews to MA students during their period of thesis writing. This paper concludes several important outlines to be learning guidelines for the students in improving their academic writing.

Keywords: plagiarism; plagiarism detection service; academic writing

**Abstrak**

Perkembangan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi berdampak cukup signifikan bagi mahasiswa, khususnya dalam proses menulis tesis atau skripsi. Hal tersebut akan membantu mereka untuk menemukan berbagai referensi, mulai dari artikel jurnal, hingga berbagai tesis dan skripsi yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi lain. Di sisi lain, hal tersebut juga akan memudahkan mahasiswa untuk melakukan plagiat. Di era digital ini, orisinalitas ataupun plagiarisme dapat dideteksi dengan menggunakan software atau layanan deteksi plagiat. Makalah ini menjelaskan bagaimana mahasiswa memahami konsep plagiarisme, bagaimana mereka menghindari plagiarisme, dan bagaimana pendapat mereka terhadap layanan deteksi plagiarisme online. Data tersebut diambil dari wawancara yang dilakukan kepada mahasiswa S2 selama periode penulisan tesis. Makalah ini menyimpulkan beberapa hal penting untuk digunakan sebagai pedoman bagi mahasiswa dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis akademik.

Kata kunci: plagiarisme; layanan deteksi plagiat; penulisan ilmiah

## **Introduction**

Writing thesis or dissertation requires proper research skills and decent academic writing. Facts and data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and conclusion drawing are the elementary skills that every college students must have. Most universities issued a handbook or guideline in writing thesis and dissertation. Not only that, the students must also learn to elaborate their ideas and their research findings into an original report. The problem, then, lies on the students' ability and integrity to produce original writing as their final project in college.

Meanwhile, the development of information and communication technology plays a considerable role for students in writing their theses. The positive side, it will help the students to find countless number of academic sources ranging from journal articles to complete theses written by other scholars. On the other hand, it will also create a chance for the students to commit plagiarism easier. As some students will find that thesis writing is hard, they tend to employ a patchwork writing. In that case, they used some ideas and statements from multiple sources and made it fit together by simply copying and pasting without any citations (Turnitin, 2012; Razera, 2011).

Paltridge & Starfield (2007) explained that the psycho affective is one of several issues related to thesis writing in English. This includes lack of confidence and fear of failure and rejection. Furthermore, they stated that even the high achiever students would struggle in completing this advanced academic writing task. Consequently, the implementation of plagiarism prevention software might somehow affect the students in writing their theses.

As a common fact, one of the most concerning factors in thesis writing, as well as academic writing in general, is the originality of the writing. Although the clear concept of plagiarism is inexplicit, the substance of plagiarism is using unacknowledged content from the others' work. Supporting the statement, Razera (2011) explained that the concept of plagiarism might be straightforward in theory but it will be harder to be determined practically. It is reasonable since someone might rephrase others' idea, then claim it as his/her own work, while thinking it as an acceptable way. The problem will be more complex if the source is an unpublished work.

Therefore, the action to prevent plagiarism should be started in the early academic level. The first effort should be taken against plagiarism is to nurture the students in citing others' work properly as well as teaching library and referencing skills to the first years students. The lecturers should integrate some training about plagiarism in the course. These include teaching ethical writing and nurturing the students on what establishes plagiarism in addition to preparing some guidelines on writing citation and giving credit to the author (Twomey, 2009; Embleton & Helfer, 2007; Goddard & Rudzki, 2005). Supporting those arguments, Neville (2010) elaborated six knowledge related reasons for referencing ideas in writing:

1. to aid the tracing of the source of ideas;
2. to assist the writer to construct a 'web of ideas';
3. to support the writer's argument or ideas in academic writing;
4. to validate the arguments;
5. to supports the expansion of knowledge; and
6. to give credit to the work of others.

All those academic writing skills should become a standard for students in writing their theses. It means that all of the students must know how to produce academic writing, to find valid and reliable references, to paraphrase other writer's sentences, and to cite sources and references appropriately. By then, both students and lecturers, who are involved in the academic setting, should manage to keep the standard in order to produce noble and honest academics with original and high quality academic writings.

### ***Detecting Plagiarism***

In writing a paper the students will not always depend on the old school library anymore. Countless numbers of academic sources are available on the internet in this digital era. Nevertheless, the easiness of finding sources may lead to patchwork writing or plagiarism. It might be possible for some lecturers to recognize whether the student's writing is original or not. However, it is not always the best way. Unoriginal writing and plagiarism in this digital era can be detected in the digital way by using anti plagiarism software. There are some online plagiarism detection services available on the internet either free or paid based services.

Table 1. List of Some Plagiarism Detection Services in the Internet

Plagiarism Detection Services	Features	License
Turnitin <i>www.turnitin.com</i>	- Similarity Detection - Huge Repository	Commercial (Only for Institutions)
Viper <i>www.scanmyessay.com</i>	- Similarity Detection	Open Source
Grammarly <i>www.grammarly.com</i>	- Grammar Check - Spell Check - Originality Check	Paid (Commercial)
PaperRater <i>www.paperrater.com</i>	- Similarity Detection - Spell & Grammar Check - Online Proof-reader	Free / Paid (for Premium)
Plagiarism <i>www.plagiarism.com</i>	- Similarity Score - Plagiarism Risk Score - Paraphrase Score - Bad Citations Score	Free
Plagiarism Checker X <i>plagiarismcheckerx.com</i>	- Online Plagiarism - Side by Side Comparison - Bulk Search	Paid (Commercial)

The founder of *Turnitin*, Barrie (2008), explained that the software works by originating a ‘digital fingerprint’ for each paper submitted. In other words, the Turnitin servers create a pattern recognition algorithm to convert the words and sentences from the paper into computer codes. The digital fingerprint then compared to the database on the servers, which includes but not limited to the internet articles, nearly 100 million of other students’ papers, tens of millions of academic journals articles, newspapers, electronic books, and magazines. The servers already contain the digital fingerprints of all those databases. When a paper submitted, it will be compared to the databases directly, and then the website will display the originality report of the paper. The report will show and highlight the similar or unoriginal phrases or paragraphs along with the link of the matching sources. The instructor/lecturer can study the report and determine if the student commits plagiarism or the student only needs to re-paraphrase his/her writing.

A study conducted by *Turnitin* (2012) to 879 respondents of both higher and secondary education instructors to find out the dominant and challenging problems in plagiarism among the students. The study concluded that there are 10 types of

plagiarism that mostly committed by the students. *Turnitin* ranked those types of plagiarism by intent as follows:

1. Clone : Submitting another's work, word-for-word, as one's own.
2. Ctrl-C : A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.
3. Find – Replace : Changing keywords and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. Remix : Paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. Recycle : Borrowing generously from one's own previous work without citation; to self-plagiarize.
6. Hybrid : Combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. Mash Up : A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 Error : A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources.
9. Aggregator : The paper includes proper citation, but contains almost no original work.
10. Re-Tweet : This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text's original wording and/or structure.

*Turnitin* and many other plagiarism detection services have been used by many schools and institutions to this day, so does the research on its use. (See Bruton & Childers, 2016; Özbek, 2016; Ali, 2013; Graham-Matheson & Starr, 2013; Razera, 2011; Batane, 2010). This paper, however, focused on exploring how EFL students in Indonesia understand the concept of plagiarism, how they avoid plagiarism, and how they perceive online plagiarism detection service.

## **Method**

The data in this paper is taken in 2014 from a collection of interviews to seven MA students. The interviews was conducted during their period of thesis writing. I explored their opinion by asking key point of plagiarism in an in-depth-interview and occasionally give comments on each student's explanation. The whole session was tape-recorded and transcribed. I analyse the data by identifying and isolating the excerpts needed and compare it with other excerpts. I, then, concluded the all opinions appeared during the interview as displayed in the following section.

## **Results**

### ***The Students' Understanding of Plagiarism***

The data obtained from the interview shows the students' understanding of plagiarism. In the beginning, the students were asked about the references they got in writing their theses. The students admitted that they got most of the references from the internet, including journal articles, electronic books, and other websites, which are relevant to their theses. The other references, offline, they got from the library such as books and the collections of theses from the previous students.

### ***Definition of Plagiarism***

When the students were asked about the definition of plagiarism, all of them apparently knew and realise the fundamental concepts of plagiarism. The important aspects that establish plagiarism according to the students' understandings are:

1. Quoting sentences (either directly or indirectly) without providing the source;  
and
2. Quoting sentences without changing or paraphrasing the original words.

The following are the excerpt of the students' statements about plagiarism taken from the interviews.

### ***Excerpt 1. Definition of plagiarism***

"...generally, plagiarism means quoting, both directly and indirectly, without providing the source (of the quotation)." – (R-1)

"As far as I understand, plagiarism means taking other people's work and claiming it as our own work without citing the source." – (R-2)

"The definition of plagiarism is quoting or taking, a hundred percent or entirely, the references from other source without changing a single statement or words or phrases from the original source." – (R-3)

"...directly copying other's thesis without paraphrasing, that is plagiarism. For instance, in the background part, if we copy one paragraph-two paragraphs and there is no paraphrasing, just copy the entire sentences there, that is plagiarism." – (R-4)

"...taking other people's idea or opinion, made it as our own, and not cited properly, more or less." – (R-5)

"The substance of plagiarism is quoting or using other people's ideas or theories but failing to put the name of the author. (It is) only quoting without putting the source or the name of the source which he/she quotes." – (R-7)

Those students' opinion covers the fundamental definition of plagiarism, which is taking or quoting other people's work without giving any credit or proper

citation to the original writer. Additionally, they also raised several reasons of why plagiarism happened among the students:

1. The students got lack of socialization about plagiarism;
2. The students had lack of knowledge in quoting and paraphrasing sentences; and
3. The students had lack of awareness on the importance of giving credits to the authors whose ideas were taken in the students' writings.

The following are the excerpt of the students' opinion about the causes of plagiarism, which was taken from the interviews:

"It seems that the tradition of copy-paste is prominent in the students' theses writing. However, by looking at the cause of that action, most of the students unintentionally did plagiarism. Because they do not know, getting lack of socialization (about plagiarism), have lack of knowledge about how to quote and paraphrase, and have lack of awareness of the importance of citing other people's ideas, statements, or sentences." – (R-6)

### ***Ways to Avoid Plagiarism***

As the students apparently have an understanding about plagiarism, they should have known the way to prevent or avoid plagiarism. The researcher then asked the students about what they did in order not to commit plagiarism. The students suggested some ways that were factually parallel to what they define on plagiarism. The students' suggestions are:

1. Always put the source of the ideas/statements which were taken from other writers;
2. Change or paraphrase the original words which were quoted as much as possible;
3. Make sure that the quoted ideas were taken from the valid and traceable sources;
4. Always recheck the quoted ideas in terms of proper citations, proper paraphrasing, and proper indentation (for direct quotations);
5. Consider using the plagiarism prevention software in checking the writings; and
6. Always be aware of the importance of ethics in academic writing.

The following are the excerpt of the students' statements about how to avoid plagiarism, which were taken from the interviews.

### ***Excerpt 2. Ways to avoid plagiarism***

"The most safe and fundamental way (to avoid plagiarism) is providing the source when we are quoting words, not only sentences, if we realise we are quoting other person's ideas. Even though it is not even that person's ideas (i.e. he/she is also quoting), we still have to provide the source, in terms of where the quotation from was and who the original author is." – (R-1)

"...the way I used to do in order to avoid plagiarism is by putting the author's name and as much as possible, changing the sentences to be not exactly the same as the original writings, but remains putting the author's name. Although only the ideas were taken, the sources still have to be provided." – (R-2)

“...in order to avoid plagiarism, instead of merely copy and paste the words, I try to rephrase by using other words without changing the meaning (of the original words), but still giving credit or name of the author of the book or journal articles (which I quote).” – (R-3)

“The first thing to do is to make sure that the sources I use are valid and traceable. I mean, I must know the author, the year, the book title, and the publisher. The second, it is important to recheck if I made citation properly, made indentation properly, avoid (quoting) more than four sentences, paraphrasing correctly, and still cited the sources. The last, we need plagiarism detector to analyse the similarity (of the writing). Also, we can ask other people to recheck/proofread our writing.” – (R-6)

“...we supposed to be aware that what we wrote was a scientific work that would be consumed by many readers. We should realise that if our writings contains other people’s ideas, we must admit that the idea belongs to other people. Self-awareness is very important to a writer.” – (R-7)

Commonly, the students knew the fundamental ways to avoid plagiarism. They agreed that the skills of paraphrasing, making proper quotations, and proper citations are the essential way in order not to commit plagiarism. However, another student had the different opinion. That student argued that it would be more effective to prevent plagiarism if the authorities issued a specific policy or regulation about that. The following is the excerpt of that student’s point of view.

“It should not begin from the bottom up, because the students tend to seek easiness in writing their theses. I mean, it is difficult to make the students aware (of not committing plagiarism). Instead, it should be the authorities (of the university) who issue the regulation of there must be no plagiarism in the students’ theses. Because, the students prefer faster and easier way (to finish their theses) no matter how they would do it.” – (R-4)

### ***The Students’ Perceptions towards Online Plagiarism Detection Service***

Different opinions showed by the students about the way to prevent plagiarism. One of them mentioned the use of plagiarism detector, which is related to the objective of this research. As the main issue, the researcher asked the students about their perception toward the use of plagiarism prevention software. Apparently, there were students who fully agree of the idea of online plagiarism detection service; and there were also those who partly agree and partly doubt of the idea. The following are the excerpt of the students’ opinions taken from the interview.

#### ***Excerpt 3. Theses checking through plagiarism software***

“I would be excited if there is a similarity report. I want to know how much the similarity is. Therefore, I could consider if my writings, which have no source or I did not put the source, turned out to be somebody else’s.

In case the similarity exceeds the predetermined limit, it should make us learn about how to paraphrase. It should not become worries. Apart from the purpose of the graduate



program authorities to determine if the students' theses are acceptable or not, do not worry. We should appreciate the students' efforts in conducting researches and writings." – (R-1)

"I support this (theses checking through software) for my own advancement. So, why not? In terms of confidence, I actually only 75% sure. When (my thesis) exceed the similarity limit, I would be pleased to accept the result. Because it will show, which part of my thesis that is similar and which part is not. Therefore, I can correct the words in my thesis. I do not think it would burden me." – (R-2)

"I do agree with the regulation. This is apparently still in the stage of introducing. In my experience, when I was an undergraduate student, we often hear of plagiarism but there was no rule that states that we have to really pay attention (to the issue of plagiarism). With the plagiarism detector, I am sure that the students will be more aware that it should not be like that. They will find out how to avoid plagiarism. However, the student should not be less confident to cite, or even worse, fill their theses with full quotations." – (R-6)

"I actually agree if the regulation was totally implemented. Because, it could prevent plagiarism among the academics, as well as encourage us as the academics or the students to work harder on developing our skills in writing." – (R-7)

The previous are the students' positive perception on the issue if the theses should be checked through online plagiarism detection service. However, some students had different perceptions. They did not present a full support for that issue. Commonly they were worried of being detected by the software. The following are the excerpt of those students' opinions.

"In my opinion, there is some part that is good and there is some part that is not good for me. The good part, it can measure on how much we commit plagiarism in our writings. The bad, I think there will be a fear of being accused of cheating or stealing. I feel afraid more. There are some parts of my thesis, which I took without any change. So, my level of confidence is approximately tied at fifty-fifty." – (R-3)

"Personally, it will be a good thing for me. It will be good in order to improve the students' creativity to be able to make original work, not just taking other people's works. It also can improve the students' achievement.

However, I am very worried of being detected. I am worried commonly in chapter two (of the thesis), because in chapter one, it is commonly my sentence and may be some sentences from the expert. There is also no plagiarism in other chapters." – (R-4)

As the students showed different perceptions towards the use of online plagiarism detection service in checking their theses, it is also important to understand their confidence in terms of the result of the software detection. The software will display the percentage of the students' theses similarity to other writings. Some students presented high confidence of their theses similarity from the software detection. Some others worried of being detected and having high similarity percentage.

Nonetheless, all of them agreed that chapter two of their theses, which consists of previous findings and some relevant theories, will likely have the highest

similarity on the detection compared to other chapters of their theses. Their concern is reasonable since chapter two was composed based on other people's research findings and theories. The students were mostly worried of being unable to do proper paraphrasing, quotations, and citations. The following are the samples of the students' excerpt in terms of the part of their theses that they worried about.

***Excerpt 4. Doubtful part of the students' theses***

"I am still not confidence of chapter two (of my thesis), because that chapter consists of the information from other people. Should we paraphrase all of them (?). Supposedly, the policy maker should still reconsider chapter two. Because in chapter two, from my observation on the international journals, they also took all (of other's ideas) and not fully paraphrase all the ideas. They were also citing. If we cite 80% and it still considered too much, then where would we get the information (?). We are not the expert." – (R-6)

"I am still not sure. I worry mostly in chapter two. Because, I took many theories, many people's arguments to be put there, which should be paraphrased. I doubt if it is not meet the standard. I tried to paraphrase it as best as possible, but I still worry." – (R-5)

**Discussion**

Previous studies pointed out that the clear and detailed concept of plagiarism is still indistinct, but its substance can be defined generally (e.g. Dahl, 2007; Razera, 2011). Commonly, the essence of plagiarism is taking other people's statements without putting the source. On the more complex case, relying too much on the structure of the original text or just copying the text, unless it is a direct quotation, could also considered as plagiarism. Apparently, most of the students had already understood that concept (See Excerpt 1: R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, and R-7). In other words, the students seemed to know if their writings contained plagiarised texts or not.

Even though most students understood and realised the essential concept of plagiarism, it remains happening. Some students might conducted plagiarism deliberately; some others might conducted it unintentionally. Those who did plagiarism unintentionally might be unaware or have lack of knowledge and skills in paraphrasing and quoting other people's sentences (See Excerpt 1: R-6). Supporting that finding, Razera (2011) concluded that it is easier to define the concept of plagiarism theoretically, than to determine it practically. Another study pointed out that the students might be able to identify plagiarism on the obvious cases, but they still had a doubt in determining plagiarism on the 'borderline cases' (Zimitat, 2008). Therefore, in avoiding plagiarism, it is important to put the source

of every sentences, which is not the writer's original words (See Excerpt 2: R-1, R-2, R-3, R-6, and R-7).

However, relying on the students themselves to be aware might not always be effective since human errors will always occur. In most cases, the students prefer easier ways in writing their papers. Therefore, there must be a specific rule in university regarding the issue of plagiarism among the students (See Excerpt 2: R-4). The rule, as implemented in most top universities, might involve the use of plagiarism detection software to check the students' papers.

Towards the use of online plagiarism detection service, the findings of this study suggest that most of the students showed positive perceptions (See Excerpt 3: R-1, R-2, R-6, and R-7). Mainly, the students thought that the use of such software would be a challenge for them improving the quality of their writings. This is consistent with the previous studies conducted in some universities abroad (e.g. Bruton & Childers, 2016; Özbek, 2016; Ali, 2013; Dahl, 2007; Davis, 2007; Graham-Matheson & Starr, 2013). This study found out that there were several reasons supported the students' positive perception towards plagiarism prevention software:

1. The software could help the students in checking the originality of their writings;
2. The report of the software detection could become a learning tool for the students on how to paraphrase sentences and make proper quotations and citations;
3. The software could help the students to work harder in developing their skills in academic writing; and
4. The software could help the students to be more aware of the issue of plagiarism in academic writing.

Nevertheless, not all of the students displayed positive perceptions. Some of them did not display full support, or had less positive perceptions towards the use of plagiarism prevention software (See Excerpt 3: R-3, R-4). The students were worried of their theses being detected by the software. The students were mostly worried of some parts of their theses because of having lack of knowledge and/or time to paraphrase the sentences, which they took from other writers. They realised that the software will detect every similar words, between their thesis and other previous writers, and possibly be accused as plagiarism.

Those feelings of insecure, as I concluded, might be caused of the lack of skills and time of paraphrasing the other's ideas in the students' theses. In the 'review of literature' part of the thesis, contains many other people's research findings, ideas, arguments, and/or theories. The students were just not confident if they properly paraphrased all those words. They did paraphrased the sentences and put credits to each source they used in their theses, but not confident enough if the paraphrased texts would pass the similarity checking in plagiarism prevention software (See Excerpt 4: R-6, R-5). Similar to Zimitat's (2008) study, these findings indicate that the students still need to put some works in developing their academic writing skills.

### **Conclusion and the Recommended Skills**

In order to avoid the similarity detection of online plagiarism software, the students must have appropriate academic writing skills. I compiled several important outlines to be learning guidelines for the students as displayed in the following points:

1. In finding the references, the students should always use the first-hand or primary sources. Using citation within a citation is not recommended unless it is inevitable. Moreover, the references used should be valid and traceable. The students should avoid using unpublished materials as much as possible, since those sources are difficult to be traced. Additionally, the students should consider using most recent references and avoid using old-dated studies.
2. In using other people's ideas/arguments/findings, specific graphics, or research instruments, the students should always put credit to the authors. Failing to refer the authors means plagiarism.
3. In quoting words, the students should only take the important points of ideas, not the entire paragraphs. The students should paraphrase the originals words and recombine the ideas in the students' original words. Furthermore, the students may use direct quotation if they consider paraphrasing the original idea probably loses its meaning.

4. In developing their paraphrasing skills, the students should start by paraphrasing simple sentences. Afterwards, they may continue paraphrasing complex sentences and compound sentences.
5. The students should read more books and academic journal articles, which are related to their field of study. By reading more texts, the students should be familiar with academic words and expressions. Consequently, it would help them in paraphrasing and constructing their own ideas into comprehensible sentences.

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