

## **Plagiarism Awareness and Academic Writing Ability: The Relationship with the EFL Students' Plagiarism Practice**

**Maulidya Namira<sup>1</sup>, Maria Teodora Ping<sup>2</sup>, Bibit Suhatmady<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>dhea.namira123@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>mariateodoraping@fkip.unmul.ac.id, <sup>3</sup>suhatmady@yahoo.com

### **ABSTRACT**

Plagiarism is considered as the writing difficulty and has been a topic among researchers in the past ten years. Many studies explored plagiarism perceptions and the reasons behind plagiarism. Some studies also attempted to find an association between the elements that might contribute to plagiarism such as writing skills, language level, studying behavior, etc. However, most of the studies does not include the plagiarism rate or similarity index as one of the research variables. To fill this gap, this study aimed to find out whether there is any relationship between plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability towards the students' actual plagiarism practice. The 30 respondents are students of the English Department in Mulawarman University who has written an academic paper namely a Mini research proposal. This study design is quantitative-correlational design with a Multiple regression data analysis technique. The study three main findings are; (1) there is no significant relationship between plagiarism awareness and plagiarism rate; (2) there is a significant negative relationship between academic writing ability and plagiarism rate; and (3) there is a simultaneous relationship between plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability with plagiarism rate. Additionally, academic writing ability has more influence on plagiarism rate than plagiarism awareness.

**Key Words:** Plagiarism; Plagiarism Awareness; Plagiarism Rate; Plagiarism Practice; Academic Writing Ability

### **INTRODUCTION**

Academic writing is intended to express a set of knowledge on a particular topic (Chin et al., 2012). This style of writing differs from other types of writing in that it necessitates the acceptance of numerous important academic rules. Academic writing, according to Oshima & Hogue (2006), requires facts, statistic data, quotations, and other evidence to back up the writer's thoughts and opinions. In addition, there are four ways to use information from sources: directly or indirectly quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. These techniques are designed to keep students from plagiarizing.

Plagiarism is derived from the Latin word "Plagiarius," which meaning "kidnapper, seducer, or plunderer" (Gokmenoglu, 2017). Plagiarism in this context means 'kidnapping' something, which could be ideas, language, codes, etc. Plagiarism, on the other hand, has become a complicated issue when it comes to a solid definition. Because of the various plagiarism definitions among experts, universities, and institutions, it is argued that there is almost no universally accepted definition (Starovoytova, 2017). Some higher education institutions have their own definitions of plagiarism. Plagiarism, according to Stanford

University (n.d), is defined as the use of another's work without giving acceptable and adequate credit to or acknowledgment of it.

Plagiarism has always been a concern in education for both faculty and students because of the importance of academic writing. Furthermore, due to technological advancements, it has grown even more in the past ten years. Avoiding plagiarism is one of the most regulatory standards in the academic community. However, numerous studies have reported that many students, staff, teachers, and even lecturers plagiarize in their academic papers and studies. As per Pradiansyah (2015), 81.5% of 120 participants who served as representatives of Muhammadiyah Surakarta University admitted to plagiarizing their coursework by failed to properly cite the sources. On a bigger scale, Pew Research Centers' Parker and Lenhart (2011) surveyed 1,055 college presidents in the United States. According to the survey, 55% of college presidents believe that the rate of paper plagiarism among students has increased during the last ten years. They also added that the computer and the internet are the primary sources for the majority of the students.

The reasons for this act are various. Patak and Tahir (2019) interviewed some Mendeley advisors, who stated that plagiarism occurs for three main reasons: time constraints, laziness, and a busy life. MacLennan (2018) found that most of the students have limited knowledge and awareness of how to properly cite sources. Plagiarism is also often triggered by difficult assignments, such as writing on an unfamiliar topic. Low awareness of plagiarism, according to Darwish & Sadeqi (2016), is one of the primary contributors for students to plagiarize both intentionally and unintentionally.

Goyal et al. (2014) conducted a study to investigate the impact of plagiarism awareness seminars. As to the findings, 78% of students did not understand the plagiarism terms prior to the seminar. After the seminar, 99 percent of the students said they had a better understanding of the plagiarism concepts. They also claimed that they finally aware of plagiarism and why it should be avoided. The students admitted in the interview that they couldn't tell the difference between plagiarized and paraphrased text, which could be due to a lack of awareness about plagiarism. Additionally, Singh (2017) discovered that the major reason for students' plagiarism is a lack of knowledge and skills in academic and research writing. Both Goyal et al. (2014) and Singh (2017) agreed that additional academic/scientific writing workshops and analytical skills are needed to help students understand how to cite appropriately and learn how to avoid plagiarism so they can give credit to the original authors.

Babaii & Nejadghanbar (2017) found that lack of awareness of plagiarism and academic writing abilities are two factors that lead to students' plagiarism behavior. The students probably know a little or even do not know about plagiarism and what constitutes it, which leads them to do it unconsciously. On the other hand, knowing what plagiarism is and being able

to avoid it by using some academic writing techniques such as summarizing and paraphrasing are the essential skills to avoid plagiarism. Lacking academic writing skills then could lead the students to be involved with plagiarism as they most likely have difficulties in using such techniques. These factors are related to each other, which then cause them to commit plagiarism behaviour in the end.

Plagiarism is a complex issue, as previously stated. It entails a range of viewpoints, concepts, and judgments in terms of acceptance. The way the plagiarism topic has been raised, especially in the last ten years, is due to the various viewpoints among teachers, readers, and experts. Many research looked into students' perceptions of plagiarism, the causes or variables that lead to plagiarism, and the relationships between the elements that might contribute to plagiarism. The majority of these studies used a questionnaire and/or interviews to collect data. Also, the most of these studies do not take into account the students' actual plagiarism practice.

Based on this context, this study tries to also examined the plagiarism rate or similarity index in students' academic papers to see the students' plagiarism practice. Furthermore, the researcher believes that assessing academic writing ability is essential because knowing what plagiarism is and how to avoid it are two of the most significant standards in academic writing. Under this manner, this study attempted to fill these gaps by conducting a study to explore the students' awareness of plagiarism and their academic writing ability relationship with the EFL students' plagiarism practice.

## **METHOD**

This research design is quantitative-correlational design. The collected data were analyzed by using a Pearson correlation and a Multiple regression analysis. The plagiarism rate is the criterion variable (dependent variable) and plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability are the two predictor factors (independent variables).

The study's participants are 30 English Department students in Mulawarman University who studied plagiarism in Advanced Writing course and wrote a Mini Research Proposal as their final project in Research course. The chosen samples are students who are in or have completed their fifth semester of study based on these criteria. A total of 30 students were chosen from their availability to be studied (Convenience Sampling).

The data was collected using four different instruments. The first two instruments are two plagiarism detection software namely Quetext and Turnitin. Both plagiarism detection programs can identify plagiarized phrases, provide information of the original source, and calculate the document's overall similarity index. The other instrument is an adapted Plagiarism awareness questionnaire by Jereb et al. in Ratnasari (2019) which is to measure the students'

awareness towards plagiarism. Finally, the last instrument is to measure the students' academic writing ability which is adapted Transparent Academic Writing Rubric (TAWR) by Razi (2015). The two assessors who assessed the students' academic writing ability are lecturers in English Department. The validity and reliability for the questionnaire was tested by content validity with Pearson bivariate and Cronbach alpha reliability. Also, the average scores from plagiarism rate and academic writing ability were also tested by Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) to prove the inter-rater reliability of the data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Data Descriptions

#### a. Students' Plagiarism Awareness

The average student's plagiarism awareness score is 52, indicating that they have a moderate level of awareness. For further details, around 1 (3%) student had very high awareness, 9 (30%) students who had high awareness, 13 (43%) students who had moderate awareness, 5 (17%) students who had low awareness and finally 2 (7%) students who had very low awareness. The highest score for plagiarism awareness was 64, while the lowest score was 38. The students' awareness of plagiarism is presented with the following chart in the Figure 1;

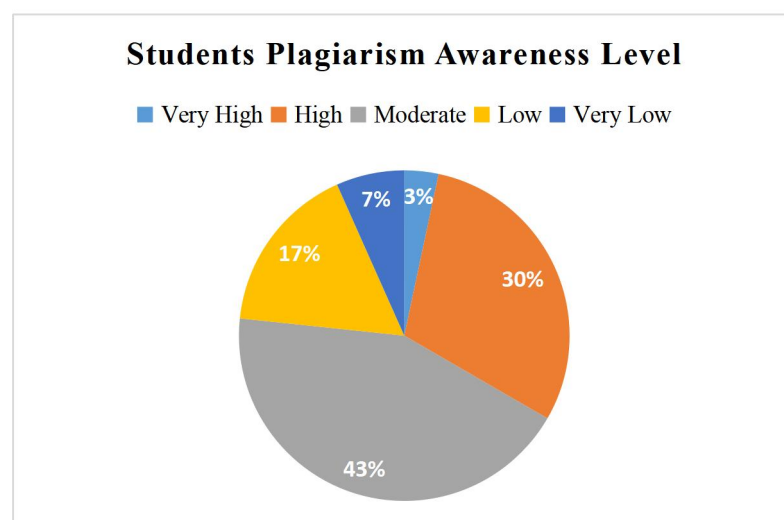
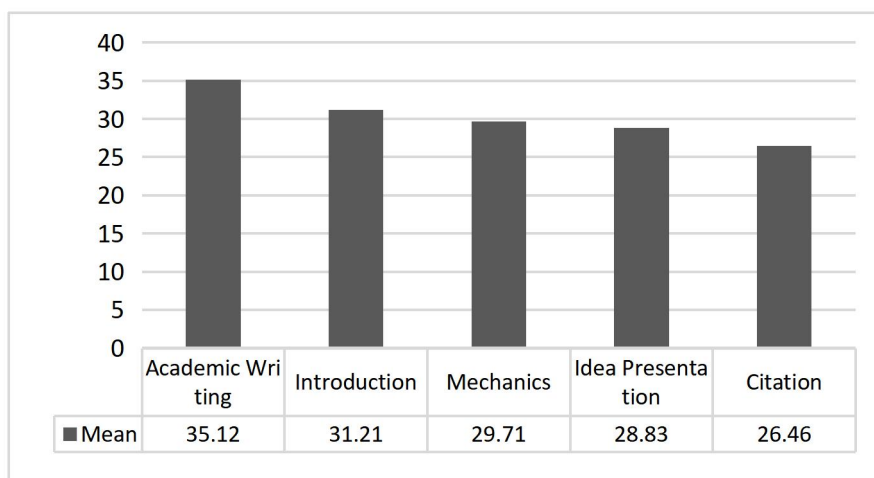


Figure 1. Students' Plagiarism Awareness Level

#### b. Students' Academic Writing Ability

The Transparent academic writing rubric (TAWR) consists of 5 writing evaluation criteria as follows; (1) Introduction; (2) Citation; (3) Academic writing; (4) Idea presentation; and (5) Mechanics. The highest score for academic writing ability was

70, while the lowest score was 25.5. Furthermore, the student's academic writing ability mean from each category are presented with the following chart in the Figure 2



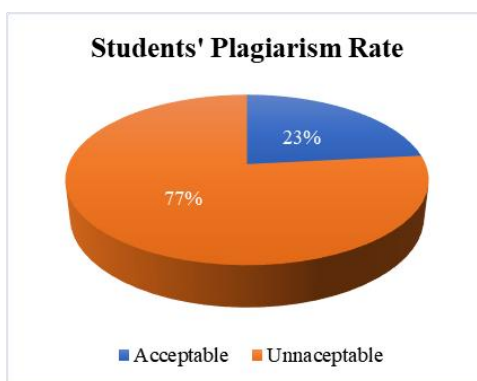
**Figure 2. Students' mean values in five categories of TAWR**

From the chart above, it can be seen that the highest score mean is from Academic Writing which is 35.12, the second-highest score is from Introduction which is 31.21, the third is from Mechanics which is 29.71, the fourth is from Idea presentation which is 28.83, and finally, the lowest mean score is from Citation which is 26.46.

As a result, the majority of students appear to have a decent understanding of academic writing techniques and/or rules, and they are capable of applying this knowledge to their academic papers. In contrary, the category citation received the lowest mean scores, showing that students are having the most difficulties with citation-related techniques such APA rules for in-text citation and references.

**c. Students' Plagiarism Rate**

Both plagiarism checker software's results were tested with an Intra-rater reliability ICC and the average score was used for further analysis. The plagiarism rate scores categorization is adapted from Turnitin guideline in similarity index acceptance and the categorization consists of two categories; acceptable and unacceptable. The following are the chart presented the students' plagiarism rate scores;



**Figure 3. Students' Plagiarism Rate Acceptance**

The highest percentage of students' plagiarism rate was 65%, while the lowest was 9,5%. Turnitin's similarity index acceptability standards as per Smart (2020) states that anything less than 25% of the similarity index is acceptable. On the other hand, a similarity index value of equal to or greater than 25% is regarded unacceptable and requires revision. According to the chart above, approximately 77% of students' mini research proposal plagiarism rate is unacceptable, while only 23% is acceptable. Finally, the majority of the mini-research ideas submitted by the students contained unacceptable levels of plagiarism.

## **HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

### **Research Question 1: Is there any significant relationship between students' plagiarism awareness with plagiarism rate?**

Among the 30 English Department students, the number of students' plagiarism awareness were negatively correlated with the plagiarism rate,  $r(36) = -.19$ ,  $p = .267$ . However, the results shows that the students' awareness does not significantly affect their plagiarism rate or similarity index in their papers. The negative correlation means that the higher the students' plagiarism awareness, the lower their detected plagiarism rate.

Numerous research found lack of awareness towards plagiarism became one of the reasons students commit plagiarism (Starovoytova & Namango, 2016). In other words, high awareness towards plagiarism might have a role in reducing the students' plagiarism. This is because the students who understand the plagiarism concepts and the importance of avoiding it will most likely be able to avoid it in their own will. A similar study was conducted by Mahmud et al. (2020), and the results show that students who have a strong awareness of plagiarism are less likely to plagiarize in their assignments. However, other studies have reported that even if students are aware that plagiarism should be avoided, they will still plagiarize (Abukari, 2016; Selemani et al., 2018; Sentleng & King, 2012; Thomas & Zyl, 2012). Many studies have looked into the causes for intentional plagiarism, including the desire for good grades, poor time management, laziness, a busy life, and mimicking what others have done (Abukari, 2016; Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016; Patak & Tahir, 2019; Rets & Ilya, 2018).

In his study, Abukari (2016) discovered that students had adequate awareness of plagiarism, but that their plagiarism rate was also rather high. Furthermore, the students claimed to have plagiarized in a variety of different ways. The students also stated that a lack of understanding of plagiarism concepts is one of the major reasons they plagiarize. Also, they appeared to have shallow understanding of the university's plagiarism policies. Rodhiya et al. (2020) investigated students' understanding and awareness of plagiarism in a study. The

majority of students claimed to understand what plagiarism is, according to the study. All of the students agreed that plagiarism had been taught to them at university. However, the majority of them appeared to lack a thorough understanding of the various types of plagiarism, resulting in unintentional plagiarism.

The findings of this study, which show that there is no significant relationship between students' plagiarism awareness and plagiarism rate, suggest that students with a high awareness of plagiarism do not necessarily have a high or low plagiarism rate, and vice versa. Even if students are aware of plagiarism and comprehend it, there is still the risk that they will part in plagiarism, both intentionally and unintentionally. This is because many other factors contribute students to plagiarize as mentioned above.

**Research Question 2: Is there any significant relationship between students' academic writing ability with plagiarism rate?**

There has been a significant correlation between the students' academic writing ability and plagiarism rate,  $r(36) = -.47$ ,  $p = .008$ . The negative value represents a negative correlation, meaning that students with strong writing ability are associated to students with lower plagiarism rates, and vice versa. Theoretically, many research have revealed that a lack of academic writing abilities and/or skill is one of the most common reasons for students to engage in plagiarism (Rodhiya et al., 2020; Singh, 2017). These studies also suggested that students with adequate academic writing abilities and/or writing skills were less likely to plagiarize.

Goh (2013) used Turnitin to examine undergraduate students' academic papers. According to the results, the rate of detected plagiarism among students decreases as they progress in their education. The plagiarism rate was higher among first- and second-year students than the third-year students. According to Goh (2013), this may be because senior students have more experience and understanding in academic writing, leading them to be able demonstrate ideas from a wide range of sources through critical analysis. Another study by Perkins et al. (2020) discovered that an academic writing workshop program reduces the rate of detected plagiarism in students' papers. The students' detected plagiarism rate has decreased as much as 37.01% compared to their first paper submission during the program. These findings indicate that the students were able to avoid plagiarism due to their increased understanding and knowledge about academic writing techniques and rules. According to MacLennan (2018), even if students understand what plagiarism is, they will still plagiarize. This occurred for a variety of reasons, one of which is a lack of proper academic writing skills and/or abilities, which include the capacity to summarize, paraphrase, and apply reference and

citation requirements. As a result, they were unsure if they had plagiarized due to a lack of understanding of referencing rules and techniques, which is one of the most important academic writing skills.

The abovementioned research findings and interpretations are aligned with this study findings, showing that a student's academic writing ability is correlated with their plagiarism rate. In this study, the lower the detected plagiarism rate or similarity index, the higher the students' academic writing ability. Since academic writing ability includes the ability to summarize and paraphrase numerous ideas from multiple sources in critical analysis, having these talents may help students avoid plagiarism and improve academic integrity.

**Research Question 3: Is there any simultaneous significant relationship between students' plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability with plagiarism rate?**

The ANOVA regression analysis results suggest that there was a significant simultaneous correlation between plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability with plagiarism rate,  $F(2, 27) = 4.44$ ,  $p = .021$  with an  $R^2$  of .248. The students' predicted plagiarism rate is equal to  $67.087 - .194$  (plagiarism awareness) -  $.130$  (academic writing ability). Every unit increase in plagiarism awareness, there is  $-.130$  unit decrease in the predicted score of plagiarism rate (Y) and every unit increase in academic writing ability, there is  $-.194$  unit decrease in the predicted score of plagiarism rate (Y). Finally, both plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability were significant predictors of plagiarism rate.

The R square value indicates that plagiarism awareness and academic writing abilities had a simultaneous influence of 24.8 % towards the plagiarism rate. According to Hair et al. (2011)'s R-square interpreting guideline, the R square value of this study is weak because it is less than .25. In details, academic writing ability has a more significant influence than plagiarism awareness as it has a higher B coefficient value ( $-.194 > -.130$ ). This finding is also supported by how the coefficient of determination or R square value of academic writing ability towards plagiarism rate was higher than plagiarism awareness ( $.228 > .039$ ). It means that the plagiarism rate was explained by academic writing ability by .228 or 22.8%. On the other hand, plagiarism awareness only had .039 or as much as 3.9%. These R square values are also considered weak because the values fall below .25.

Plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability are related to each other. Being aware of plagiarism means knowing what is plagiarism including the concepts and the different types, and understand why plagiarism should be avoided especially in academic writing (Ratnasari, 2019). Academic writing ability, on the other hand, encompasses all of the skills and



abilities required to compose a good academic paper. This includes understanding and applying academic writing rules and techniques such as objective language, paragraph unity, paragraph coherence, summarizing, paraphrasing, citations, references, and academic vocabulary selections, etc.

The comprehension and ability to summarize, paraphrase, and apply the citations or references rules are essential abilities in academic writing because these abilities are aimed to avoid plagiarism (Fazilatfar et al., 2018; Hu & Lei, 2016; Pecorari, 2013). As a result, the higher individual's academic writing ability, the more likely one is to avoid plagiarism. Similarly, plagiarism awareness encourages students to avoid plagiarism. The more students understand about plagiarism, such as the different types and why it must be avoided, the more likely they are to avoid it on their own. A lot of students are aware of plagiarism, however, their limited knowledge about plagiarism types made them commit plagiarism unintentionally (Rodhiya, 2020). This occurred because they were unaware that plagiarism encompassed more than just 'copy and paste'. As a result, they were also unaware that some of the other plagiarism acts they had committed in the past were also considered plagiarism. If these students were able to distinguish between different sorts of plagiarism, they would most likely avoid it as much as possible.

As mentioned above, the influence of plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability was as much as 24.8%. It indicates that other factors such as laziness, a busy life, a desire for good grades, and rarely or never receiving a serious penalty, and others, may contribute to plagiarism by up to 75.2%. Furthermore, academic writing ability has a greater significant influence on plagiarism rates than awareness of plagiarism. This could also explain why the computation results in the first hypothesis test indicated no significant correlation between plagiarism awareness and plagiarism rate. Because simply being aware of plagiarism does not always prevent students from plagiarizing.

Many other factors may influence students' decisions to plagiarize, even if they are aware that they should not. Academic writing ability, on the other hand, appears to contribute more because it incorporates all of the plagiarism tactics and guidelines, such as summarize, paraphrase, citations, references, and so on. Students that possess these competencies will most likely be able to avoid plagiarism with ease. Furthermore, most students will have learnt about plagiarism either before or during their studying of these academic writing skills and abilities. As a conclusion, it's plausible to say that academic writing ability has a greater influence on plagiarism rates than plagiarism awareness.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions are summarized from the study findings and discussions aligned with the purpose of this study. The first finding is there is no significant relationship between plagiarism awareness and plagiarism rate, which means the students awareness does not significantly affect their plagiarism rate or similarity index in their papers. A lot of studies found that high awareness towards plagiarism might lower the chance for the students to plagiarize. However, some studies also found that the students with high awareness towards plagiarism would still commit plagiarism. Many reasons might contribute to this act such as aiming for good grades, poor time management, laziness, busy life, and following the others who also do it (Abukari, 2016; Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016; Patak & Tahir, 2019; Rets & Ilya, 2018).

The second finding is there was a significant negative correlation between academic writing ability and plagiarism rate. This means the students who had high academic writing ability is associated with the students who have lower plagiarism rate and vice versa. Theoretically, these findings are supported by many studies that found that one of the main reasons for students to plagiarize is lacking academic writing ability (Rodhiya et al., 2020; Singh, 2017). These studies also implied if the students had a proper or high level of academic writing ability, the students might be able to avoid plagiarism with the skills they had.

Finally, the last finding indicates that there was a simultaneous relationship between plagiarism awareness and academic writing ability towards plagiarism rate. Both independent variables are related and complement each other. Awareness of plagiarism include knowing what is plagiarism, the plagiarism types, and why does it need to be avoided. Meanwhile, academic writing ability includes the ability to write good academic writing such as citation and referencing rules. The students need to be aware of plagiarism and have a good academic writing ability to avoid plagiarism easily.

By these findings, the researcher suggests the lecturers and the university to maximize the teaching-learning process about plagiarism and academic writing. Aside from teaching academic writing techniques more in-depth especially related to the citation and referencing rules, the lecturers also should try to put more effort into raising the students' awareness of plagiarism. This can be done by always including the writing assignment rules such as to not consist of any plagiarism, explain the university policies of plagiarism, and finally maximize the teaching-learning process during the academic writing or plagiarism related courses.

The university also should strictly enforce the plagiarism related regulations and provide appropriate sanctions to the students and lecturers who were found to violate the rules. This will cause the students to be more cautious in writing their academic papers. Furthermore, the university also should facilitate their students and teaching staff in helping them to write academic assignments and papers such as conducting an academic writing related program or

workshops and give access to the paid writing assistance and/or plagiarism detector software for free. This will help the students and teaching staff to enhance their writing and support the academic integrity at the same time.

The limitation of this study is the researcher only depends on software to detect the plagiarism rate. Plagiarism checker software might come from the most recent technology, but they could not remove the human assist as the manual checkers. It is because software usually works automatically based on a certain algorithm so it does not always accurately flag the plagiarized words. Sometimes it detected the commonly used terms as plagiarism. Some plagiarism checkers also could not identify the direct quotations. Therefore, it is suggested for the further researcher to combine the plagiarism checker software with the help of a human checker as well to get the most accurate data.

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