

Iranian ESP Students' and Professors' Perceptions of Plagiaristic Behaviors in Academic Writing: The Case of Veterinarian Course

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Research Paper

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Abstract

Considering the significance of writing academically in an international context by veterinary students and a low emphasis on writing honesty in this academic community, the current study aimed to investigate the perceptions of ESP students and their veterinarian professors at the Islamic Azad University of Babol toward plagiarism. To this end, this study attempted to find first, how students have defined plagiarism and what their reasons for doing plagiarism were. It also aimed to explore the causes of the students' unethical behaviors from their professors' perspectives. Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 ESP students along with 10 ESP professors. The participants' responses were analyzed by using thematic analysis. Findings related to the first research question indicated that the students could just vaguely define plagiarism. According to the findings of the second research question, the students reported a list of reasons that included: Unawareness of writing rules, lack of enough experience, lack of motivation, and their tutor ignorance in detecting plagiarism. Regarding the results of the third research question, the professors presented various important reasons for plagiaristic behaviors of the students such as the students' indolence, underestimating the value of honest behaviors by policymakers, and lack of any writing course in the veterinarian educational program.

Keywords: Plagiarism, ESP Students, ESP Professors, Academic Writing, Veterinarian

1. Introduction

Writing academically is considered a demanding job for university students, particularly for ESP learners. Writing honesty in academic contexts has been considered a critical issue in the scientific community over the last years. Academic dishonesty refers to any published or unpublished form of "cheating," "fraud," and "plagiarism," and the theft of ideas and other forms of intellectual property (Jones, Taylor, Irvin, & Faircloth, 2001, p. 4). Mason (2009) defines plagiarism as any intentional or unintentional use of someone else's ideas, words, or concepts as one's own, without a clear ascription of their origin.

Writing research, students need to use intertextuality. Regarding intertextuality, which is the connection between a text and other texts, Richards and Schmidt (2002) refer to the factors that make use of a text contingent on the awareness of other texts. As Zhao and Hirvela (2015) point, intertextuality practices need a complex set of literacy skills and knowledge; hence, writing academically is a difficult task for many college students. Pennycook (1996) lists textual borrowing in several key issues in second language education such as the role of memory, the nature of language learning, the ownership of texts, the concepts of the author, authority, authenticity, and the cross-cultural relations that emerge in educational contexts. Students need to be trained explicitly regarding the rules of writing. Inability and unfamiliarity with writing conventions push students to do some plagiaristic behaviors.

The concern of doing some unethical behaviors in academic contexts is a prevalent issue that covers all scientific contexts. The Iranian academic setting is not apart from this issue. Most researchers

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have addressed this concern in EFL and ESL domains; however, in the ESP area, it has been neglected. Accordingly, due to the prevalence of plagiarism employed by ESP students, and the dearth of research on this issue, the current paper tried to shed new light on plagiarism in the ESP domain. Therefore, in light of the discussion above, this study aimed to explore how ESP students define plagiarism. It also went to reveal what their reasons were for plagiarizing. Additionally, it aimed to investigate the reasons for students' unethical behaviors from their professors' perspective.

2. Literature Review

Plagiarism universality in a community is highly related to different perspectives in a particular academic context. Some of these issues were discussed by Flowerdew and Li (2008), such as cultural understanding, developmental perspective, disciplinary perspective, students' beliefs and practices, faculty views, and an emphasis on an anti-plagiarism pedagogy. Having significant academic honesty, students may plagiarize for different reasons. Pupovac, Bilic-Zulle, and Petrovecki (2008) note that due to the lack of knowledge or lack of consequences for such behaviors, many cases of plagiarism are committed. Many published discussions of student plagiarism in composition studies begin with the assumption that plagiarism exists as a result of one of the two possible reasons (Howard, 1995): First, as mentioned by Counsell (2004), students' disability in academic writing leads to plagiaristic acts, and second, according to Yasami and Yarmohammadi (2014), students plagiarize because of lacking ideas about how to conduct research, increasing their score, time pressure, and fear of failure. McGowan (2005) notes that students plagiarize due to the lack of research knowledge when language difficulties come in.

Smith, Ghazali, and Minhad (2007) detail the causes of plagiarism in two internal and external classifications. Internal causes include *1. Lack of awareness, 2. Personal attitudes, and 3. Lack of competence*. Lack of awareness: It happens when the students are not aware of the plagiarism rules and the penalties for its detection. Personal attitude: The degree of willingness to expend effort will be reflected in the incidence of plagiarism. Lack of competence: The students' inadequate confidence in completing assignments may lead them to plagiarize. On the other hand, the external causes include *1. Pressure, 2. Internet facilities, and 3. Institution*. Pressure: It emanates from the task, time, grade, and family pressures, which may contribute to plagiarism. Internet facilities: The ease of downloading and accessing information simplify the act of plagiarism. Institution: Rules and attitudes in prevention, detection, and punishment have vital roles in the incidence of plagiarism. All of these reasons, which are extracted by rigorous research, should be taken into consideration by policymakers, administrators, and instructors to provide comprehensive programs in promoting academic honesty.

Many students consider plagiarism as just a direct copy of someone's words. However, there are different kinds of plagiarism. Naik, Landge, and Mahender (2015) put forward a comprehensive classification of different types of plagiarisms: *1. copy-paste*: It refers to direct copying, perhaps with slight modifications into the text to alter the author's name. *2. Disguised plagiarism*: Disguised plagiarism happens when the text is copied from a source, and then some attempts are made to conceal the copy without supplying references or just for a portion of the text taken. *3. Plagiarism by translation*: When a document is taken and translated from a single language, either manually or by means of an automated translation system and is used without the source. *4. Shake and Paste*: A copy and paste variation can often be seen among students, whereby paragraphs are taken from many different sources and gathered, often without a functional order. *5. Structural Plagiarism*: Structural plagiarism is to take the idea of another person, their sequence of arguments, their choice of quotes from other people, or even the footnotes they use in the same order without giving credit. *6. Mosaic plagiarism*: It is also called paraphrasing patchwork, referring to collecting materials from different sources that cater to the same subject of interest and rephrasing the phrases, changing words, using synonyms, and improvising on grammar styles to eventually generate one's research paper without referencing the sources. *7. Metaphor plagiarism*: Metaphors are used either to clarify an idea or to give the reader an analogy that better touches the senses or emotions than a simple description of the object or process. Thus, metaphors are an important part of the creative style of an author. *8. Idea plagiarism*: If one copies in a source document an innovative idea or a solution

given by another person or when he/she does not provide a solution or an idea of his own, it is said that plagiarism has occurred. 9 *Self-plagiarism*: When the author of the research paper reuses his previous work(s) to create a new work.

The last decades have witnessed a huge growth in the necessity of writing honesty in the academic contexts (Armstrong & Delbridge, 2008; Cheung, 2018; Doró, 2014; Hamidun, Hashim & Othman, 2012; Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko, & Osinulu, 2016; Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013; Selemani, Chawinga, & Dube, 2018; Yasami & Yarmohammadi, 2014; Walker, 2010). One early study by Deckert (1993) aimed to discover ESL students' perspectives on plagiarism in Hong Kong. The research included 170 first-year and 41 third-year Chinese students at one of Hong Kong's tertiary-level universities, all majoring in science. Before any classroom mentioning of plagiarism, a questionnaire was administered to the first-year students. The outcomes of the questionnaire revealed that students were little acquainted with, and barely understood, the Western notion of plagiarism. They also showed less concern about the original writer's rights, according to the findings. Overall, third-year students were more willing to accept plagiarism and showed greater respect for the original author and the integrity question. It is concluded that these first-year students in a Western academic environment require clear orientation and training on how to prevent plagiarism while writing.

In another study, Mu (2010) tried to understand how EFL students incorporate source materials in their English academic writing in China. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys were conducted in this study. Results indicated that students' information was very little about academic writing codes. Therefore, because of insufficient training and experience in academic writing and their lack of understanding of accepted academic conduct, the students attributed their plagiarism to them.

To further examine teachers' perceptions of plagiarism, Sutherland-Smith (2005) targeted 11 EAP teachers at South-Coast University. Data were collected by a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews, and seven different elements were extracted. The research outcomes revealed that it is difficult for staff members teaching the same topic to achieve an agreed concept of plagiarism, and plagiarism is a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing a range of human intent. As a result, the indicated principles of plagiarism are applied by universities differently.

In Iran, Yasami and Yarmohammadi (2014) performed a study to understand Iranian postgraduate students' perceptions of plagiarism and the differences between males and females in this regard. The research included 102 postgraduate students (47 males and 55 females). Concerning the research results, some explanations, including the time constraints, lack of ideas, desire to obtain a better score, lack of understanding of the challenge, lack of respect for the course or the teacher, and lack of interest in the subject, were provided. Results have also shown that plagiarism is more prevalent among men than women.

Considering the significance of writing academically by veterinarian students and underestimating writing honesty in this academic community, the present study endeavored to investigate and analyze first, how ESP students define plagiarisms. It also went on to reveal what their reasons for doing plagiaristic behaviors were. Moreover, it aimed to investigate the reason for the students' unethical behaviors from their professors' perspective. Consequently, the following research questions were answered in this study:

Research Question One: How do Iranian ESP students of veterinarian define plagiarism?

Research Question Two: What are the ESP students' reasons for doing plagiarism?

Research Question Three: What are the causes of plagiarism among ESP students from their professors' perspectives?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions and opinions of ESP students and professors about the reasons for students' committing plagiarism in academic writing. Therefore, due to the types of research questions and the goals of this study, a qualitative research method was used to present the results comprehensively and accurately.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study included 40 students as well as 10 ESP professors of veterinary at Babol Islamic Azad University. They were both male and female, and their age ranged from 19 to 60. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling. The data were collected from both undergraduate and postgraduate students. These students had passed just two English courses, including a general English and an EAP course, each lasting for a semester with 16 sessions and four hours a week. Writing an English paper was not an obligation during their program; however, they were expected to extract an English paper from their thesis before or after their viva session.

3.3. Instruments

Following the purpose of this study, a semi-structured interview was conducted to explore the participants' perceptions toward plagiarism. The participants' responses were recorded with an audio recorder to precisely transcribe the data and obtain the relevant themes. The interview questions included 7 main questions along with several sub-questions that were administrated by the researcher (Appendix A). Each interview lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. Regarding content validity, the interview items were reexamined for their language and content appropriateness by three experts, who were Ph.D. holders of TEFL and veterinary.

3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

The design of this study was qualitative. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was utilized for data collection to reveal the instructors' and learners' views toward plagiarism. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes. The interview questions were administrated by the researcher, and they were re-examined by four experts to ensure the appropriateness of both the language and the content of the designed questions. The interview responses were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interviews were done in Persian, and later, they were translated into English by the researcher. The data collected in the interview were directly transcribed to avoid any bias. Then, the data were analyzed in the form of thematic analysis to reveal the related themes. First, the transcriptions were reviewed several times to decode the data. Next, all codes were extracted to generate initial coding. Then, based on the research questions' themes, the related and unrelated parts of the transcribed text were examined cyclically to check if the given codes were based on the keywords and dominated patterns. After coding all the data, the researchers derived the sub-themes based on the main statements. The resulting themes were then organized based on the dominant patterns of the categories. Finally, some quotations were extracted relevant to each theme, and they were given a title. The process of thematic analysis in the form of thematic maps is depicted in the following sections.

4. Results

This research addressed the Iranian ESP students' and professors' perceptions toward plagiarism. In doing so, 40 ESP students and 10 ESP professors who had majored in veterinary were interviewed to comment on the reasons behind plagiaristic behaviors. The interviewees' responses were analyzed thematically, and the data saturation point was reached when the last participants were interviewed. The results of thematic analysis and thematic map on each theme are explained in detail in the following sections.

4.1. Students' Definition of Plagiarism

Before asking students to present their reasons for doing plagiarism, it was necessary to ask them to define plagiarism. According to the first research question, students in total were familiar with the concept of plagiarism. The majority of students used the "copy-paste" term in defining plagiarism. The knowledge of most students in plagiarism description was confined to just this simple definition: "using someone's word or idea without referencing". The students could define this question in a general way rather than detailed it. When they were asked to explain different types of plagiarism, they did not answer.

4.2. Students' Reasons for Doing Plagiarism

The following themes were derived regarding the second research question, which was concerned with exploring the students' reasons for doing plagiarism:

4.2.1. Unfamiliarity in the Writing Rules

The most significant theme that emerged from the interview was related to the unawareness of the writing conventions. A great majority of the students unanimously complained about the lack of any training about the academic writing principles. Some of the students commented that their disability in writing academically tempts them to have some copy-paste. They found it too difficult to write a stylistic paper. The following extracts are some example of their reasons:

- I'm not familiar with the writing rules. We haven't passed any course in writing or research.*
- All of my partial knowledge in writing is based on my self-study than any training.*
- I can write in simple and easy words. I don't know how to write proficiently. To do this, we need a lot of practice.*
- I wish I could write professionally but it seems it is too difficult. In fact, I have difficulty expressing my ideas clearly. I think I need more practice.*

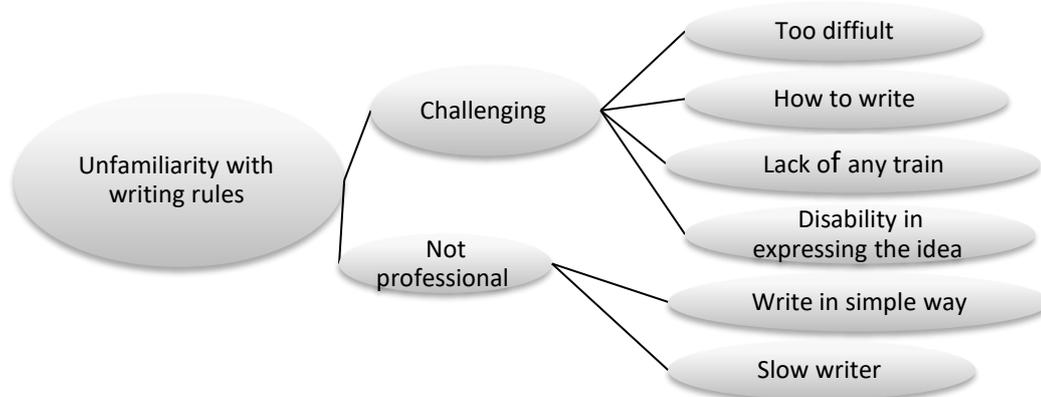


Figure 1: Unfamiliarity with the Academic Writing Rules

4.2.2. Easiness of Plagiarism

Some students confessed that they plagiarize because of its convenience. They commented that everything is accessible to them, and there is no need to make trouble for themselves. Students' disability in writing leads them to choose the easiest way.

- It takes a long time if I want to try to write in a well-organized and professional way. Actually, writing a paper is a demanding job. And, I should allocate most of my time to writing. So, I try to use some other techniques.*
- I think I am a person with a lack of idea in writing. It is really difficult to create something from myself.*



Figure 2: Easiness of Plagiarism

4.2.3. Lack of Motivation

A cursory examination of the students' works was the other reason that pushed students toward doing plagiarism. Some students did not have any motivation for writing honestly. They noted that their honest behaviors in writing were not that important to their professors. They complained that they rarely got prized or punished for their projects. Giving no feedback, professors diminished the value of honesty in this academic context.

We are never got any good or bad feedback from our professors. If I write honestly or dishonestly, nobody cares about it.

I'm sure that our professors don't read our works. And they don't understand if I plagiarize. Even when they catch me cheating, they don't consider any penalty, because it is a normal incident for them.

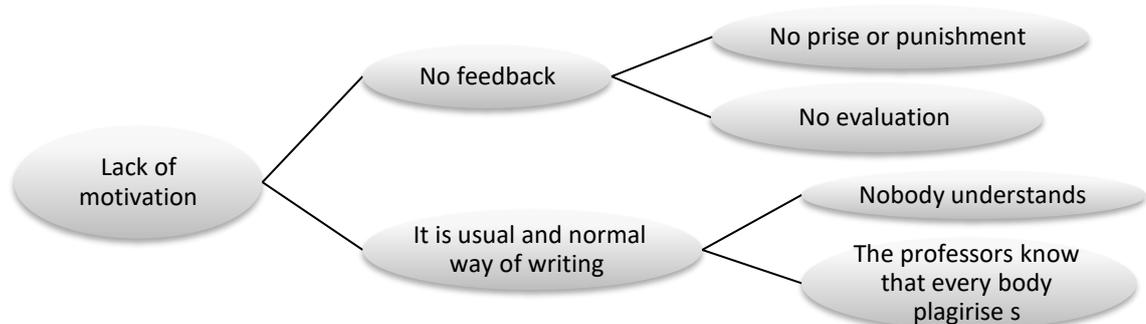


Figure 3: Lack of Motivation

4.2.4. Tutor Ignorance in Detecting Plagiarism

Some students believed that detecting plagiarism is a demanding job for their professors. They mentioned that their professors are not fully aware of plagiarism check tools. Students believed that professors could not find students' plagiarism with just a glance. They were never warned by their professors that in case they did plagiarism, whether or not they would be caught and punished.

Our professors ignored detecting plagiarism because finding our plagiarism is too difficult for them or maybe it is not important at all. They never talk about its consequence.

They rarely put their time to detect our plagiarism. And I think they are not equipped with plagiarism check tools to find our plagiarism. So how they can find them?

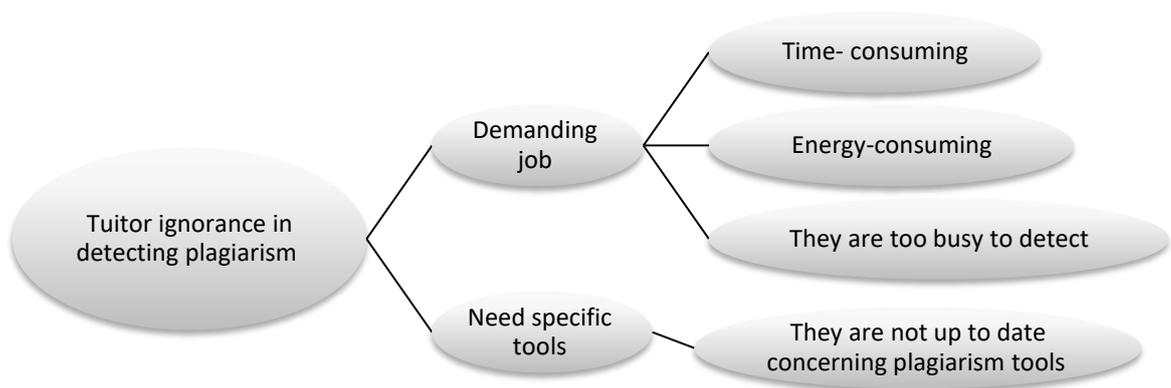


Figure 4: Tutors' Ignorance in Detecting Plagiarism

4.3. ESP Professors' Perceptions toward Students' Plagiarism

To answer the third research question which was concerned with considering the causes of students' plagiarism from their professors' point of view, 10 ESP professors at Babol Azad University participated in this study. The following themes were extracted from the data:

4.3.1. Students' Indolence

The majority of the professors believed that some students prefer to reach their goals without making any effort. The professors argued that their dishonest behaviors have nothing to do with their ability or disability in writing, and it is entirely the students' preference and does not reflect their professors' activity at all.

Students plagiarize because they choose the easiest way rather than making effort.

Unfortunately, some students don't want to bother themselves to do something true. I have some talented students, and I know that they are proficient, but they plagiarize as well.

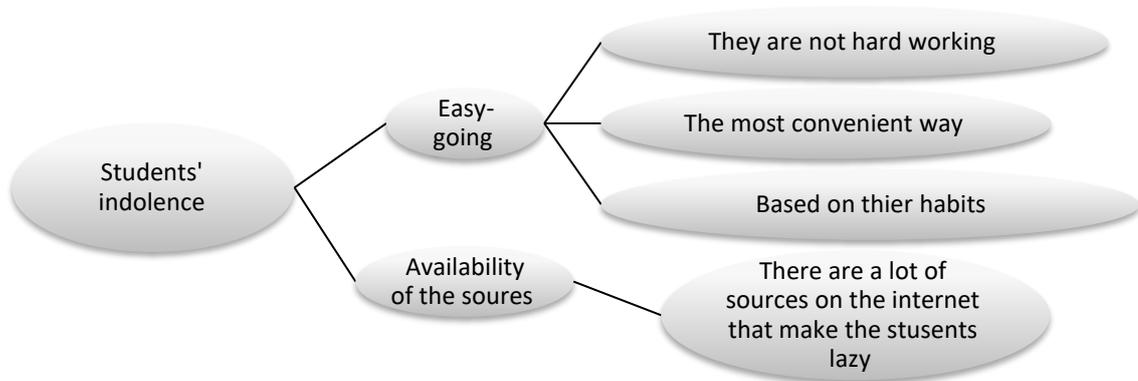


Figure 5: The Professors' Comments (Students' Indolence)

4.3.2. Minimization of the Value of Writing Honesty by Officials' Policies

Some professors believed that beliefs toward plagiarism should change basically. They commented that there should be serious reconsiderations about cheating by official policies from school to university. In our educational setting, students are trained to skip from challenging situations rather than trying and practicing. They accused authorities, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and parents of underestimating the value of academic dishonesty.

The act of plagiarism is out of our control. I could not do anything now; they must be trained in this way. There are no clear and definite rules about how to write originally.

Why should there be some institutes that advertise doing projects? Authorities shouldn't allow such dishonest behaviors. However, there are no restrictions in this regard.

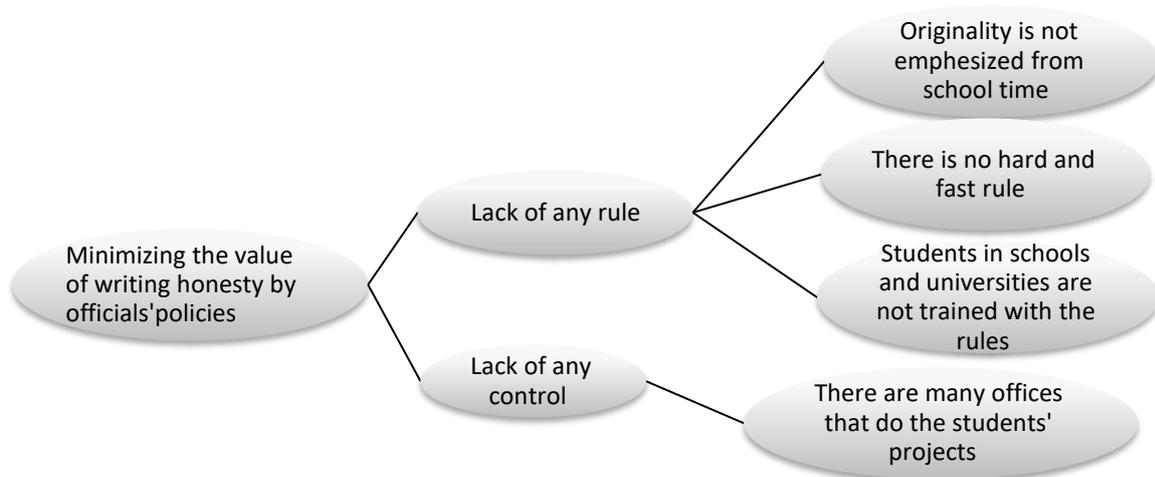


Figure 6. The Professors' Comments (Minimizing the Value of Writing Honesty by Officials' Policies)

4.3.3. Lack of Any Writing or Research Course in the Veterinarian Chart

Some professors complained about the lack of writing or research courses in the chart. Regarding the great importance of writing quality English papers, veterinary students should be equipped with the knowledge of academic writing rules. They mentioned that this is our responsibility to provide students with the necessary programs.

"How and where should students practice academic writing when there aren't any appropriate circumstances?" To engage students in academic writing, we need to provide extra-curricular activities like different workshops or programs.

"There should be serious revisions on the veterinary chart to involve some writing or research courses in it".

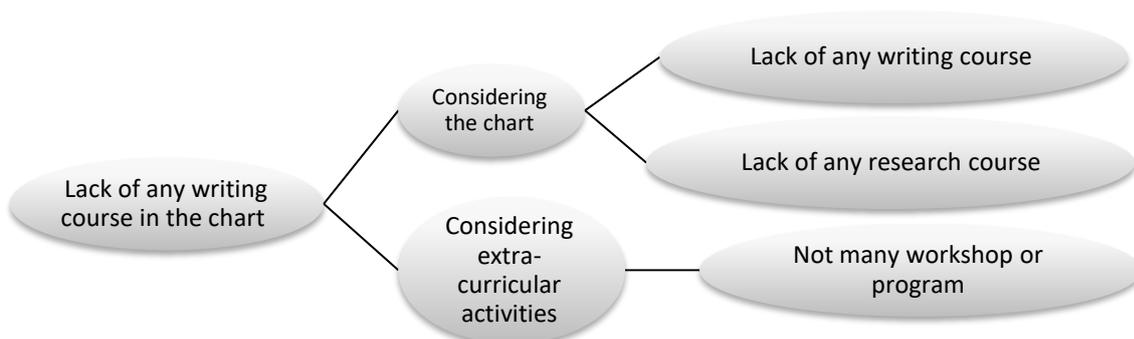


Figure 7: The Professors' Comments (Lack of Any Writing or Research Course in the Chart)

5. Discussion

Considering the importance of writing academically in an international setting by veterinary students, it was necessary to understand the ethical behavior as a salient feature of academic writing. Therefore, at the starting point, this study was concerned with discovering how students define plagiarism. Then, it tried to consider the reasons for doing plagiarism from the students' and their professors' points of view. To this aim, 40 ESP students along with 10 professors from the Azad University of Babol participated in this study. The participants' responses were analyzed by using thematic analysis. Regarding the first question, the students generally defined plagiarism

correctly. Thus, their knowledge was confined to a general conception of plagiarism rather than going through details in various kinds of plagiarism. They believed that plagiarism is only a direct copy from other resources. They hardly considered summarizing, paraphrasing, and getting the idea of someone else as kinds of plagiarism. These findings were in line with what Rezanejad and Rezaei (2013) found in their research study on Iranian language students. From among the 122 participants of their study, a minority of students believed that plagiarism is getting ideas from other sources without permission and acknowledgment. More than 80% of the language students thought that plagiarism is just copying and pasting without mentioning the source.

Regarding the second question, which was the main goal of this study, the students presented different reasons. Although they had a negative attitude toward plagiarism, they did it with different intents. The majority of the students complained about their unawareness of the academic writing rules. They were not equipped with the knowledge of how to give proper citation and employing the referencing techniques, and they had not attended any program in this regard. Lack of enough experience and practice in writing led the students to use simple words rather than related expression and discourse. Consequently, they mixed their own words with other expressions borrowed from other texts. As Kolich (1983) notes, students plagiarize to get the work done because they do not believe that they can successfully do such a hard work (as cited in Mu, 2010). Appropriate training about citation and referencing reduces the degree of plagiarism. It can be concluded that insufficient training in academic writing leads them to do some unethical practices intentionally or unintentionally. The results are in line with (Armstrong & Delbridge, 2008; Idiegbeyan-ose, Nkiko, & Osinulu, 2016; Yasami & Yarmohammadi, 2014) who examined the lack of awareness as a deceive factor in plagiaristic behaviors.

In contrast, some students confessed that they did plagiarism because it was fast and easy. Unfortunately, doing real research for many students was a demanding job. Therefore, they preferred to select the more convenient way. To our disappointment, this can be attributed to students' indolence. Interestingly, this reason is consistent with the first theme that was extracted from the professors' reasons for plagiarism incidents (Doró, 2014; Selemanni, Chawinga, & Dube, 2018).

Lack of motivation in writing was another main theme extracted from the students' statements. There are many reasons for demotivation in writing but according to the results of this study, the students addressed their professors' ignorance to give feedback to their works, made them reluctant to do their bests. In other words, students' demotivation in writing honesty originated from their professors neglecting praising and punishing. These results were in agreement with (Cheung, 2018; Hamidun, Hashim, & Othman, 2012; Lo & Hyland, 2007) who proved the effective role of motivation in promoting writing ability. The next theme, being "tutor ignorance in detecting plagiarism", addressed the next reason for overlooking writing honesty. As the students mentioned, the professor's ignorance to warn about plagiarism provided this conception that it is a demanding job to find students' plagiarism. The students were not informed of plagiarism consequences; therefore, they found it an insignificant issue. The findings revealed that prior warning in plagiarism detection increases plagiarism avoidance among students (Batane, 2010; Savage, 2004; Shi, 2004; Stapleton, 2012; Walker, 2010).

To answer the third research question, concerned with exploring the ESP professors' perspective about plagiarism, the findings of the study indicated that the professors considered students' indolence the main reason for doing plagiarism. They claimed that, unfortunately, our students are used to reaching their goals most quickly. These findings also overlapped with the results of the students' interviews. As both the professors and students unanimously claimed, plagiarism occurs because of its convenience. Another important theme from the professor's perspective was that plagiarism is an issue that should be reformed radically, and it is not something in the hand of just professors. Unfortunately, the value of academic honesty is underestimated in educational settings. It can be concluded that to solve the plagiarism problem, all the authorities, policymakers, teachers, professors, administrators, students, and even parents should reconsider their attitudes and activities. These findings were in line with the views of Sutherland-Smith (2005),

who argued that concerns about the implementation of the plagiarism policy should be acknowledged by policymakers and academic workers. Moreover, the professors complained about lacking any writing or research courses in veterinary charts. Although veterinary students are expected to write English papers, the importance of incorporating writing courses in this field is understated. Unfortunately, formal training in academic writing for undergraduate students of veterinary is generally lacking in Iran.

6. Conclusion and Implication

Regarding the presented reasons by the professors and students for doing plagiarism, it can be concluded that doing dishonest behaviors is a problem that originates from the students', academic members', authorities', and policymakers' flaws. Certainly, just considering the students' attitudes and views in this respect is not fair. The incuriosity approach should be eliminated by other members of this cycle. There should be a basic reconsideration in the Iranian education system to apply principles to avoid plagiaristic behaviors.

Students should be trained about research methodology and academic writing, with a focus on including honest behaviors in academic settings, particularly in medical and veterinary settings due to their sensitivity. Thus, the best way to stop plagiarism is to teach students and emphasize honesty in scientific and professional works (Petrovecki, 2001). Universities should run seminars or workshops that directly address plagiarism and unethical practices. It is worth mentioning that most students' understanding of plagiarism is confined to just direct copy pasting without putting the source. Therefore, they need to be trained explicitly about different kinds of plagiarism.

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Appendix A: Students' Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of plagiarism?
 - How do you define plagiarism?
 - Name different kinds of plagiarism?
2. Why do you think students plagiarize?
3. What do you know about academic writing?
 - Why is academic writing important?
4. How much do your professors care about originality?
 - Have they ever warned you about detecting plagiarism?
 - Has your plagiarism ever been caught by your professors?
5. How much does your academic context care about originality?
6. Have you ever passed any writing or research course?
7. How much have these courses assisted you in dealing with plagiarism?

Professors' Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of plagiarism?
 - How do you define plagiarism?
 - Name different kinds of plagiarism?
2. Why do the students have trouble in writing?
3. Why do you think students plagiarize?
 - What may have prompted the students to plagiarize?
4. Whose responsibility is it to build up the concept of originality?
5. What is the university role in promoting originality?
6. How do you train your students to avoid plagiarism and promote their academic writing?
7. How much is research originality valued in our education context?