INVESTIGATING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
PLAGIARISM IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Presented to the faculty of the American University of Sharjah

College of Arts and Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by

RANDA FAYEZ BOU-MEHDI

B.S. 2005

Sharjah, UAE

August 2010

We approve the thesis of Randa Fayez Bou-Mehdi

Date of signature

_____   _____

Dr. Cindy Gunn
Associate Professor
Thesis Advisor

_____   _____

Dr. Rodney Tyson
Associate Professor
Graduate Committee

_____   _____

Dr. Anne Shine
Assistant Professor
Graduate Committee

_____   _____

Dr. Pia Anderson
Program Director, MA TESOL

_____   _____

Dr. William Heidcamp
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

_____   _____

Mr. Kevin Mitchell
Director, Graduate and Undergraduate Program

INVESTIGATING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
PLAGIARISM IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

Randa Fayez Bou-Mehdi, Candidate for the Master of Arts Degree

American University of Sharjah, 2010

ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a controversial issue nowadays, with some researchers arguing that students plagiarize because they are dishonest, and others believing that students plagiarize because they lack the specific research and citation skills required in the writing classroom. Others believe that students who are taught that plagiarism is unethical would not plagiarize if they were equipped with the necessary skills to accomplish the assignment. Following a clear pedagogy on what plagiarism means and how to avoid it would reduce the number of plagiarism cases in schools.

This research sought to answer the following three research questions by involving 115 male and female students who study at a private school in Dubai:

(1) Do students know what plagiarism is?

(2) What research skills do these students say their teachers teach them?

(3) Under what circumstances, if any, might students plagiarize?

These students were in grade 10 and they were of different nationalities, both Arab and non-Arab. I distributed questionnaires which included open-ended and close-ended questions, from which I collected both quantitative and qualitative data.

The findings indicated that the female students were more aware of plagiarism than the male students were. Students' responses have shown that most of the students learned about plagiarism from sources other than their school environment. In addition, most students said that they were taught how to summarize and paraphrase but not how to quote. However, many students reported facing difficulty in paraphrasing. This may suggest that students are plagiarizing when they find it difficult to paraphrase because they do not know how to quote. The majority of the students said that they see themselves in situations where they or their classmates might plagiarize, for reasons like lack of research skills, time constraints, or not having enough information about the topic.

CONTENTS

FIGURES

Figure

TABLES

Table

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Dr. Cindy Gunn who is always around to help me overcome the numerous stumbling blocks that seem to get in my way. Thank you! I know I can always count on you. Dr. Rodney Tyson and Dr. Anne Shine, my committee members, thank you for your invaluable suggestions and comments. A big thanks goes out to all of my professors in the MA TESOL program; I am a better teacher because of you!

To my mother, father, sister, and brothers, thank you for your continuous support. Mom, I wouldn't have been able to go on without your help. Thank you for every minute you spent with Amalia while I worked on my paper. Dad, you will always be my role model; it's from you that I receive the strength to persevere and never give up. Dunya, my sweet sister, thank you for staying up late to help me stay awake and meet my deadlines, and a big thanks to your lovely son for playing with Amalia while I was busy writing the paper. Rabih and Khaled, my caring brothers, thank you for being there for me whenever I needed you.

Last but not least, to my soul mate, Zahi Kiwan, thank you for being an incessant source of love and support. Your patience and words of encouragement were the engine that kept me going. Yes, we made it!

DEDICATION

To Amalia Kiwan, my gorgeous bundle of joy who first saw light when I was a student in the MA TESOL program, I love you. Sorry if I spent more time reading this paper than reading to you. From now on, I am all yours.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research papers have become a requirement not only in colleges and universities, but also in many schools. Students are often asked to write research papers in their Science, Social Studies, and English writing classes. With the wide availability of print sources and immediate access of the Internet, information can be easily found. While finding the information could be easy, the process of writing the research paper including correctly documenting resources is not, which may be one reason why students plagiarize. Plagiarism is a major issue challenging teachers nowadays. According to Davis (2000), "[Teachers] love to assign [research reports], but they hate to grade them especially because they are so frequently plagiarized" (p. 182). Therefore, teachers have an important role in teaching students how to go through the research writing process in order to draw them away from plagiarizing.

A research assignment has two parts to it. On the one hand, it fosters students' writing skills, and on the other hand, it helps students practice browsing the Internet, reading books and other print sources, finding information, and judging the credibility of the resources, all of which play an essential role in enhancing students' critical thinking. Thus, not only does plagiarism offend teachers, but it also hinders the students' critical thinking and writing skills. Plagiarism, defined by Gatrell (2006), as "an attempt to pass off the written work of another person as your own without giving them the credit to which they are due" (p. 97), is a technique, intentionally or unintentionally, many students employ while writing their research paper assignments. When students copy and paste someone else's work into their papers they fail to meet the objectives of the assignment.

However, why students plagiarize can be puzzling to teachers. Do students plagiarize because they find it an easy way out of the assignment? Is it always the students' fault? One of my beliefs as a teacher is that teachers should first do all that they can do before blaming students for plagiarizing. According to Howard and Davies (2009), "Using sources with integrity is complex. The solution is teaching skills, not vilifying the Internet" (p. 64). Based on my experience in teaching writing to high school students, I have found out that many students plagiarize unintentionally. That is, they plagiarize because they don't know how to summarize, paraphrase, or cite – the basic components to writing a research paper.

A classroom practice research study that I had conducted with my grade 9 students two years ago at a private school in Dubai aroused my interest in investigating students' attitudes towards plagiarism. Over a term of four months, I taught my students step by step how to write research papers using the process writing approach. The assignment was divided into sections to help students manage their time and avoid procrastination. The result was that I believe I succeeded in encouraging them to become critical thinkers and writers and in teaching them the basic skills they needed to avoid plagiarism. I taught them how to quote, summarize, paraphrase, and synthesize information from different sources, because like Lathrop and Foss (2000), I believe that "part of helping students learn to recognize and avoid plagiarism is teaching the specific skills required" (p. 117). A major finding of my classroom research was that out of 70 research papers, only one paper was plagiarized (Bou-Mehdi, 2009, p. 51).

Coming from the conclusion that "many [students] proved to be able to do some critical thinking with proper guidance and encouragement from their surroundings" (Bou-Mehdi, 2009, p. 51), this research takes the first study a step

further. Like Thompson and Williams (2000), I believe that "students can best be helped by having plagiarism introduced at the secondary level" (p. 127). Thus, the participants in this study were grade 10 male and female students with an age range of 14 to 17 years old who studied at a private school in Dubai. They were surveyed to collect data to answer the following three research questions:

(1) Do students know what plagiarism is?

(2) What research skills do these students say their teachers teach them?

(3) Under what circumstances, if any, might students plagiarize?

Overview of Chapters and Appendices

Chapter 1 presented the introduction, the background of the study, and the research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. It discusses the differences between intentional and unintentional plagiarism and provides strategies to teachers to help students avoid plagiarism. Chapter 3, the methodology section, presents information about the data collection process, the participants, the school in which the study was conducted, and the questionnaire that was used. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data that were obtained from the questionnaires. Chapter 5 concludes the paper by providing a summary of the findings, discussing the limitations, and suggesting implications.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review has four sections to provide background into the issue of

plagiarism. First, the concept of academic integrity is explained and a clear definition

of plagiarism is provided. Next, the evolution of plagiarism in the Internet era is

discussed. Then, the differences between intentional and unintentional plagiarism are

highlighted. Finally, tips on how to help students avoid plagiarism are listed and

explained in the last section.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Over the recent years, cases of academic dishonesty in educational institutions

have dramatically increased. Educators are continuously compelled to confront

students who perform unethical actions that negate academic integrity policies not

only in colleges, but also in high schools (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). With

regards to written assignments, one of the policies of academic integrity "requires that

all writers acknowledge the work of others and that action be taken if there is any

wrongdoing" (Hayes & Introna, 2005, p. 214). Plagiarism can be defined as "the use

of other people's work and the submission of it as though it were one's own work"

(Flowerdew & Li, 2007, p. 163). According to this definition, plagiarism contradicts

the academic integrity policy stated earlier. Since "enforcing standards of academic

integrity is a central responsibility of teachers" (Lathrop & Foss, 2005, p. xv),

plagiarism has therefore imposed great challenges on English teachers in writing

classrooms.

Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) listed several reasons why educators should

be concerned about academic integrity. The first reason is that the grades of students

who plagiarize or cheat may be higher than what they deserve, and thus fairness to honest students is compromised. The second reason is that the way teachers and administrators respond to students' dishonesty in the classroom can seriously affect the students' attitudes towards plagiarism. As Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) explain, "When students see other students cheating and do not see faculty members and administrators addressing such behavior, they may decide that academic dishonesty is acceptable or at least permissible" (p. 4). The third reason discussed by the authors is that "when honest students see some of their peers cheat and get away with it, especially if it appears that instructors do not seem to care, they become frustrated and angry" (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002, p. 5). The discouragement that honest students feel may demotivate them and drive them to become dishonest.

The fourth reason explained is that teachers, when faced with plagiarized papers, may react with disappointment and feel that their relationship with the students has been compromised with an offensive insult. Therefore, teachers end up feeling personally insulted and start having negative attitudes towards "students, administrators, and the educational process" (Whitley & Keither-Spiegel, 2002, p. 5). The effect on the students' behavior in universities or in their future careers is the fifth reason why educators should be concerned about academic dishonesty. Students who cheat or plagiarize in high school may continue to do the same in college or in their professional lives. The last reason given by the Whitley and Keith-Spiegel is that if educational institutions do not issue strict rules to help students avoid plagiarism, then their reputation will be critically affected.

For these six reasons, Whitley and Keith-Spiegel believe that administrators and teachers in educational institutions are responsible to help students become aware

of academic integrity policies to help them avoid any dishonest actions like plagiarism.

Plagiarism and the Internet

Even though plagiarism is not a new issue, it has recently become of major concern to English teachers, especially after the rise of the Internet and the integration of technology and education (Howard & Davies, 2009). A debate exists as to whether the Internet is to be blamed for student plagiarism, especially since, as Pickard (2006) notes, it "has made a rich new source of information available to students" (p. 216). According to Sutherland-Smith (2008), "The Internet is often touted as the source and reason of perceived increases in plagiarism" (p. 101). One reason for this is the vast amounts of information available with the click of a mouse to anyone who accesses the Internet at any time. Students need not worry about going to the library, borrowing books, reading them, or having to return them on time.

Marshall and Garry (2005) believe that the convenience of the Internet provides students with a wide variety of sources not only to conduct research, but also to plagiarize. However, Williams (2002) states that plagiarism started well before the rise of the Internet, but "given the proliferation of easily accessible electronic resources in recent times, it has become easier for students to cut and paste slabs of text" into their research papers.

In addition, Pecorari (2008) believes that plagiarism now takes less time for students because of how user-friendly online research has become. Contrary to plagiarizing from a book or a magazine, students do not need to retype their findings when copying and pasting from a website. As Scanlon (2003) points out, with the availability of the Internet, no "time-consuming physical work" is needed anymore (p.

164). There is a major downside to this phenomenon though. As Howard and Davies (2009) warn, "tremendous amounts of both reputable and questionable information are available online" (p. 64), so when students browse the Internet searching for information, they may come across sources that are not credible and end up copying and pasting inaccurate information.

In addition, when employing the copy-paste technique, students skip the essential process of reading, understanding, and judging the information (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Therefore, instead of using the research assignment to enhance their research and writing skills, students turn to the Internet to find a website with the needed information. Lathrop and Foss (2005) agree with Sutherland-Smith that the goal of asking students to conduct research is to "help [them] learn to formulate a question or problem, identify and locate the information needed, evaluate and organize the relevant information, and then report their findings" (p. 164). All of these skills are meant to foster students' critical thinking, and when skipped, students lose a major opportunity to practice and conduct research.

Ironically though, the Internet has not only opened doors for students to plagiarize, but it has also made it easier for teachers to detect plagiarism. Teachers can choose from a wide range of software that serves as plagiarism detectors to check their students' papers. In many institutions, students are asked to upload their papers using software like *Turnitin.com*, defined by Scanlon and Neumann (2002) as "a service that scans student papers for text lifted from Websites and marks each suspect passage with a link to its probable online source" (p. 374). After that, explains Blum (2009), teachers are sent a report that informs them whether the paper is plagiarized or not. However, teachers should not simply rely on this software to grade their students' papers, since this software, for example, cannot tell if the quotes cited by the student

7

are falsified. Because of the inaccuracy of such software, high dependency of teachers on this software might lead to some plagiarized papers remaining unnoticed.

In relation to plagiarism, the Internet appears to have some advantages and disadvantages. The emergence of the Internet has not only speeded up the process of copying and pasting information for students, but it has also facilitated the procedure of detecting plagiarism for teachers.

Intentional and Unintentional Plagiarism: Reasons and Motives

Much of the literature concurs that plagiarism could be either intentional or unintentional. According to Sutherland-Smith (2008), "anything less than a clear intention to plagiarize should be considered as an action less than plagiarism" (p. 24). Sisti (2007) argues that not all students plagiarize with the intention to deceive their teachers, as most often "plagiarism results from student confusion about what constitutes plagiarism, paraphrasing, content synthesis, and proper citation" (Sisti, 2007, p. 218). Wilhoit (1994) agrees with Sisti, as he too believes that, although there always will be insincere students, most students plagiarize because they lack proper citation techniques. For example, if students do not know how to cite, then they cannot be blamed for plagiarizing. Flowerdew and Li (2007) suggest,

> It is necessary to distinguish between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, characterized respectively by an intention to cheat, on the one hand, and ignorance of the expected conventions on the part of novices learning the target discourse conventions, on the other. (p. 164)

Wilhoit (1994) also recognizes the importance of discerning whether the act of plagiarism was done intentionally or unintentionally by the student. In both cases,

8

explains Wilhoit, it is necessary for the teacher to explain to students how to avoid plagiarism by teaching them how to summarize, paraphrase, quote, and cite.

Students who plagiarize deliberately have reasons different from those who do it unintentionally. Wilhoit (1994) suggests that "part of teaching students how to avoid problems is understanding their reasoning and acknowledging the differences between intentional and unintentional misrepresentation" (p. 162). The distinction between these two types of plagiarism becomes essential when identifying students' motives for plagiarizing. While intentional plagiarism is triggered by several external and internal factors, students' misunderstanding of some key terminologies and poor research skills may lead them to commit unintentional plagiarism.

Intentional Plagiarism

Both external and internal factors play a role in influencing a student's conscious decision to copy-paste the assignment from one or more sources. Ma, Wan, and Lu (2008) state that one external force that drives students to plagiarize is pressure to perform well in school. According to "Educational Tips on Plagiarism Prevention" (n.d.), this pressure comes from three different sources: family members, classmates, and teachers. Many parents and teachers put their children and students under stress because they want them to get high grades in school. Lathrop and Foss (2000) state that one example of this is when parents and teachers compare a student to his/her siblings and expect him/her to have a similar good performance. Students, in turn, plagiarize "with the hope of materially improving their grades" (McCord, 2009, p. 606) in order to satisfy their parents and teachers.

Moreover, Devlin and Gray (2007) list competitiveness in the classroom as one of the reasons that provoke students to want to get higher grades, and thus plagiarize. Students compete with their peers to obtain scholarships or awards in

9

school which may drive some of them to think that plagiarizing is the fastest route to good achievement. In addition, when they see that their peers are plagiarizing, students develop the attitude of "Everybody else is doing it" and get motivated to do the same (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, p. 173). Furthermore, Gatrell (2006) maintains that some students plagiarize because they underestimate their teachers' ability to detect plagiarism and think that they will never find out.

Internal factors also urge students to copy-paste. Williams (2002) suggests that procrastination on the part of the students leads them to panic when the time to submit their work is near. Students underestimate how much time and effort research papers require to be completed. Gatrell (2006) explains that when students are "behind with their work, and feeling desperate," they sometimes resort to plagiarism as it is the quickest way to complete the assignment (p. 98). According to Sutherland-Smith (2008), when students are not interested in the topic assigned by the teacher or when they do not have enough information about it, they often find it much easier to copy and paste from the Internet or from any printed source.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Many students plagiarize accidentally because they are unfamiliar with key concepts pertaining to conducting research (Sharkey & Culp, 2005). According to Sisti (2007), "Often plagiarism results from student confusion about what constitutes plagiarism, paraphrasing, content synthesis, and proper citation" (p. 218). When teachers do not explain to students what plagiarism means or what it entails, students copy and paste not knowing that it is an unethical act. Hayes and Introna (2005) suggest that "due to the growing staff-student ratio, staff have less time to talk through issues regarding writing practices, which has contributed to the rise in the number of cases of plagiarism" (p. 214).

Not only do students misunderstand plagiarism, but they also have a misconception of the term *common knowledge*, which, according to Murray (2008), need not be cited when used by students. However, the problem results when "many students cannot distinguish common knowledge from information which merits attribution" (Whitaker, 1993, p. 512). What is common knowledge to students might not be common knowledge to teachers, and vice versa, which is why, England (2008) explains, many students face difficulties when deciding which information to cite and which to consider as common knowledge. According to "Educational Tips on Plagiarism Prevention" (n.d.), teachers should explain to their students the famous advice, "when in doubt, cite sources."

McCord (2009) presents the strong claim that students who plagiarize inadvertently do so because they have not been taught properly how to write from sources by summarizing, paraphrasing, and citing. This lack of research skills impacts students' writing ability, making them plagiarize because they do not know of a better alternative. Wilhoit (1994) blames "incorrect instruction" for students' unintentional plagiarism, as he believes that students "turn in plagiarized work because they have not yet fully learned how to avoid it or, unfortunately, have actually been taught to write incorrectly" (p. 162). Senders (2008) seems to agree with the other researchers as he too deems ignorance to be the most common cause of students' unintentional plagiarism.

As noted above, plagiarism can either be intentional or unintentional. Several internal and external factors influence some students to intentionally plagiarize. Some other students, however, unintentionally plagiarize because they are not taught how to avoid it.

Avoiding Plagiarism

All of these reasons call for urgent attention from teachers to guide students to

an honest and ethical approach to writing by teaching them how to avoid plagiarism.

Howard (2002) believes that instead of punishing students, teachers need to recognize

that their "own pedagogy needs reform" (p. 47). One strategy that teachers should

implement is to make sure that students know and understand what is expected of

them (Nadelson, 2007). Clear pedagogy on what plagiarism involves is of extreme

importance to students who are expected to write original papers. If teachers intend to

penalize students when they plagiarize, then a coherent definition of plagiarism and

how to avoid it should be written in a handbook for students to review at any time

they feel is needed (Angelil-Carter, 2000). An alternative, as suggested by Wilhoit

(1994), is "to distribute to students a printed statement defining plagiarism…offering

examples and outlining the penalties that will result from intentional plagiarism" (p.

163).

Liddell and Fong (2008) also agree with Angelil-Carter and Wilhoit on the

need to provide students with "declarative knowledge" and "procedural knowledge"

(p. 2). Declarative knowledge can be developed by providing students with a full

explanation of what plagiarism is, while procedural knowledge includes suggestions

and tips on how to prevent students from committing it (Liddell & Fong, 2008).

According to Thompson and Williams (2000), "Discussions of plagiarism will not

only sensitize students but can help them to avoid potential problems, such as scoring

poorly on international exams or being placed inappropriately in lower-level language

classes" (p. 127).

Granitz and Loewy (2007) criticize teachers who expect students to cite

correctly without teaching them how to do so (p. 301). Instead of focusing on how to

spot plagiarism and administer punishments, teachers are asked to focus on preventing

students from plagiarizing by educating them and equipping them with specific

research and citation skills. Jackson, Tway, and Frager (2000) suggest that teachers

"take a short article, make copies for all the students, and then verbalize methods of

paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing sources" (p. 172).

Moreover, Liddell and Fong (2008) believe in the importance of explaining to

students the ethical values that lie behind avoiding plagiarism. Students should learn

to avoid plagiarism not out of fear of punishment, but rather out of profound

understanding of ethics and integrity. Pearson (2005) also encourages teachers to

"present plagiarism as an ethical and moral issue…of trust between student and

teacher, and among peers" (p. 142). Doing this awakens the sense of righteousness in

students and helps them "to understand how the knowledge and skills they are

learning are important in their lives and for their future, and to value honest mastery"

(Lathrop & Foss, 2005, p. 38).

Another effective approach to plagiarism proposed by Lathrop and Foss

(2005) is "good teaching with a focus on the writing process" (p. 164). In other

words, when following this approach, students are required to complete the

assignment in parts, which makes it very difficult for them to plagiarize. When it's

time to submit the final draft, Wilhoit (1994) suggests asking students to submit all

the rough drafts as well so that they will be deterred from plagiarizing or buying their

papers. Galles (2005) also suggests that students submit "an annotated bibliography

with a synopsis of each reference" (p. 167) to ensure that students have read and

understood the sources in their reference list. The process writing approach helps

students avoid procrastination, which was discussed earlier as one of the excuses

students use to justify plagiarism. Moreover, Sisti (2007) urges teachers to ask

students "to present their projects to the class in their own words" (p. 227) in order to check whether they really met the objectives of reading, analyzing, and synthesizing the information.

Several researchers agree that one of the reasons students plagiarize is their lack of research skills. This fact stirs the "need to convey to all of the students more effectively what is meant by plagiarism and how to avoid it" (Marshall & Garry, 2006, p. 33). Once this is done successfully, I believe that students would not plagiarize as often. I strongly agree with Levin (2006) when he says,

> It is not plagiarism that is the key issue, but the fact that students − at all levels in the education system − are being tested on their use of skills that they have not been taught. The key issue is: How can teaching and learning in our education system be improved? We can then go on to assess whether, if they were improved, there would be a need for the plagiarism police as presently constituted. (p. 20)

After consulting the literature, I have identified many influencing reasons that compel students to plagiarize. Whether intentional or unintentional as noted in the literature, plagiarism is a concern for teachers. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers find out whether students know what plagiarism means and how to avoid it. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

As noted in the literature, plagiarism is a serious issue for both teachers and students. This study focused on looking at this issue from the students' points of view. This chapter provides information about the data collection procedures, the context in which the data was collected, the participants of the study, and the tool used to collect the data in order to answer the research questions:

(1) Do students know what plagiarism is?

(2) What research skills do these students say their teachers teach them?

(3) Under what circumstances, if any, might students plagiarize?

Data Collection

In order to answer my research questions, I designed a questionnaire of four sections (see Appendix A) and distributed it to 115 male and female students at a private school in Dubai. After contacting the Chief Academic Officer of the school, I received the approval to conduct my research with these students. I was then referred to the Head of the English Department who assisted me throughout the data collection process. After coordinating with the girls' and boys' sections and receiving their approval, the Head of the English Department asked me to visit the school on the 15th of February, 2010, to collect my data. Since I was not granted permission to distribute the questionnaires to the students myself, the questionnaires were distributed to the students by their teachers. I went through the questions with the Head of the English Department who in turn made sure that the teachers responsible for distributing the questionnaires had no queries. Nevertheless, I waited in the school while the

15

questionnaires were being filled out by the students, in case one of the students posed a question that the teacher did not know the answer to.

Before distributing the questionnaires, the teachers explained to the students that participating in this study would not affect their grades in any way, as their responses would remain anonymous and they would not be asked to write their names on any part of the questionnaire. The questionnaires filled in by the girls were then sealed in envelopes and sent to the co-director's office, while the ones filled by the boys were sealed in envelopes and sent to the Head of the English Department's office. I collected the envelopes from the offices and was told by both the co-director and the Head of the English Department that all the students filled out the questionnaires and that the process went smoothly.

Context

Based in Dubai, the school that I chose for my research is a private school that follows the American curriculum. Students are segregated from grade five onwards into the girls' section and the boy's section, and there are separate buildings and facilities for each section. The medium of instruction is English, as all subjects are taught in English except Islamic Studies and Social Studies which are both taught in Arabic. Students take seven English classes of 50 minutes each per week, in which they are taught literature, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. In the literature and vocabulary classes, students use the *Elements of Literature* books, published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, a Harcourt Classroom Education Company based in Texas. As for the grammar and writing classes, students have notes compiled by their teachers from the textbook *Elements of Language*, also published by Holt, Rinehart, and

Winston. An emphasis is placed on fostering students' writing skills in this school. Starting in grade nine, writing research papers is a requirement in the syllabus.

Participants

The participants were grade 10 male and female students who study at a private school in Dubai. Their age group ranged between 14 and 17 years old. Totaling to 115 participants, 55 male students and 60 female students from six different sections participated in this study. The students, whose English proficiency level ranged from intermediate to advanced, were from various countries in the Gulf region, the Middle East region, North Africa, East Asia, South Asia, North America, and Australia. Since the students were of both Arab and non-Arab nationalities and studied in a school where the medium of instruction is English, I did not translate the questionnaire into Arabic.

Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) is divided into four sections. It includes close-ended and open-ended questions, from which I collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The first section of the survey was designed to collect background information on the students. Each student had to fill in some information about his/her age, gender, and nationality. The 10 questions in the remaining three sections were a combination of nine fixed alternative questions and one Likert-scale question, and there was additional space after all questions for the students to further explain their answers or to write their comments.

Each section in the questionnaire was dedicated to answer one research question. The first research question, "Do students know what plagiarism is?" was

answered by questions one, two, three, and four from Section Two. This section checked whether students were aware of plagiarism by asking them if they were familiar with the definition of the term plagiarism. The second research question, "What research skills do students say their teachers teach them?" was answered by questions five, six, and seven from Section Three. In this section students were directly asked if they were taught how to avoid plagiarism and how to write research papers. In addition, students indicated whether or not they were taught how to summarize, paraphrase, or quote by ticking the appropriate box labeled "Yes" or "No" or "I am not sure."

The last research question, "Under what circumstances, if any, would students plagiarize?" was answered by questions nine and 10 from Section Four. In question nine students were asked if they saw themselves in a situation where they would plagiarize. Question 10 included ten circumstances to which students had to answer with "Always" (all the time), "Sometimes" (from time to time), or "Never" (not at all). These circumstances reflected situations during which students thought their classmates might plagiarize. I also included the choice "Other (please specify)" followed by a blank line after the 10 statements to give students the chance to write about another situation if they desired.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The objective of this study was to investigate students' attitudes toward plagiarism in the writing classroom. Specifically, it explored students' awareness of plagiarism and their familiarity with research writing skills. In addition, it examined the circumstances under which students might plagiarize in the writing classroom. My three research questions were:

(1) Do students know what plagiarism is?

(2) What research skills do these students say their teachers teach them?

(3) Under what circumstances, if any, might students plagiarize?

This chapter presents the analysis of the data and reports and explains the findings. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides an introduction. The second section explains the demographics of the participants. Sections three, four, and five present the results to the three research questions respectively.

Demographics

There were 115 students who participated in the study. 60 females and 55 males whose ages ranged between 14 and 17 years old filled in the questionnaires (see Table 1). The students were of various nationalities, with the majority being Arabs and a few from Australia, Canada, the USA, India, China, and New Zealand (see Table 2). Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize the demographic data of students who participated in the study.

Table 1: Age and Gender of Participants

	Age			
	14	15	16	17
Male (55)	20	29	5	1
Female (60)	19	35	6	0

As outlined in Tables 2 and 3 below, 46 Arab male students and 54 Arab female students participated in the study, while nine non-Arab male students and six non-Arab female students were amongst the participants.

Table 2: Country and Gender of Arab Participants

Gender	Arab Nationalities								
	Palestine	Lebanon	Jordan	Algeria	Syria	Egypt	Iraq	UAE	Libya
Male (46)	4	18	6	1	2	7	3	4	1
Female (54)	9	14	8	1	6	4	5	6	1

Table 3: Country and Gender of Non-Arab Participants

Gender	Non-Arab Nationalities							
	China	Canada	USA	New Zealand	Australia	Armenia	India	Multi-national
Male (9)	0	3	2	1	2	1	0	0
Female (6)	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1

Students' Awareness of Plagiarism

The second section of the survey included four questions through which students' awareness of the definition of plagiarism is unveiled. For the first question, "Did you know that the definition of plagiarism is copying or stealing someone else's words or ideas and claiming or presenting them as if they were your own?" out of the 115 male and female students, a total of 70 students (61%) said that they did know the definition of plagiarism while 45 students (39%) said that they did not (see Figure 1 below).
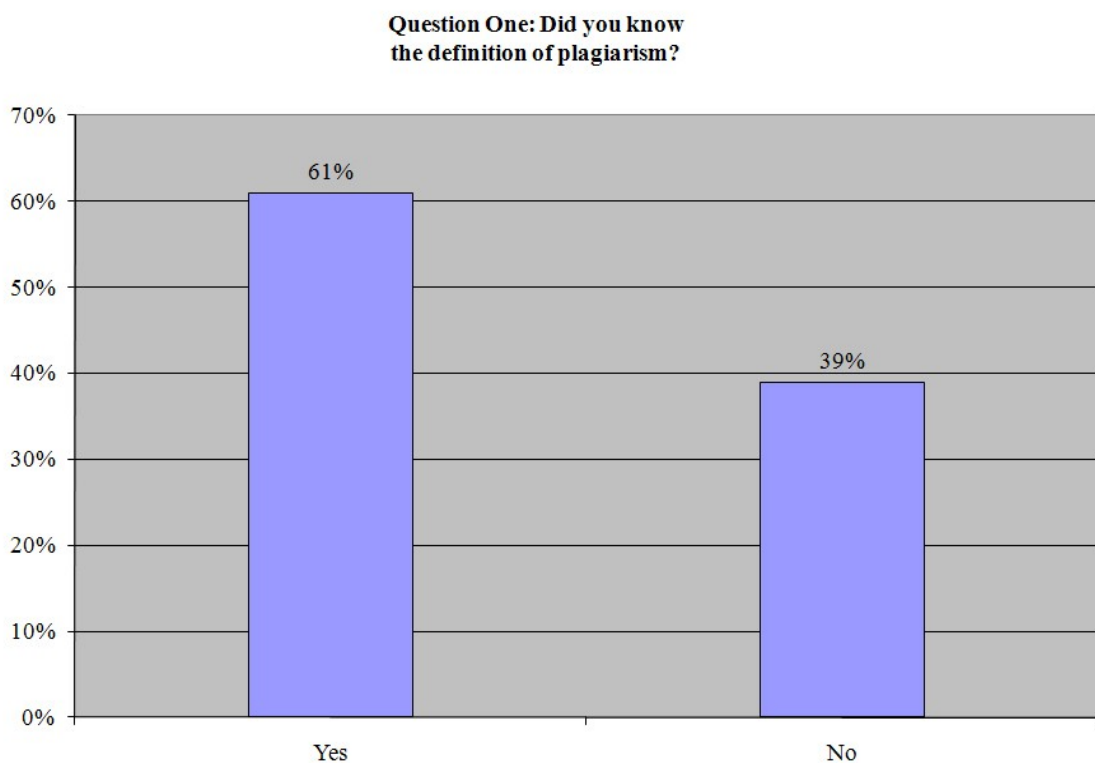

Figure 1: Students' Responses to Question One

However, as Figure 2 displays, a major discrepancy is noticeable between male students' responses and female students' responses. While 77% of the female students responded to question one in the affirmative, more than 50% of the male students were unfamiliar with the meaning of plagiarism.

**Question One: Did you know
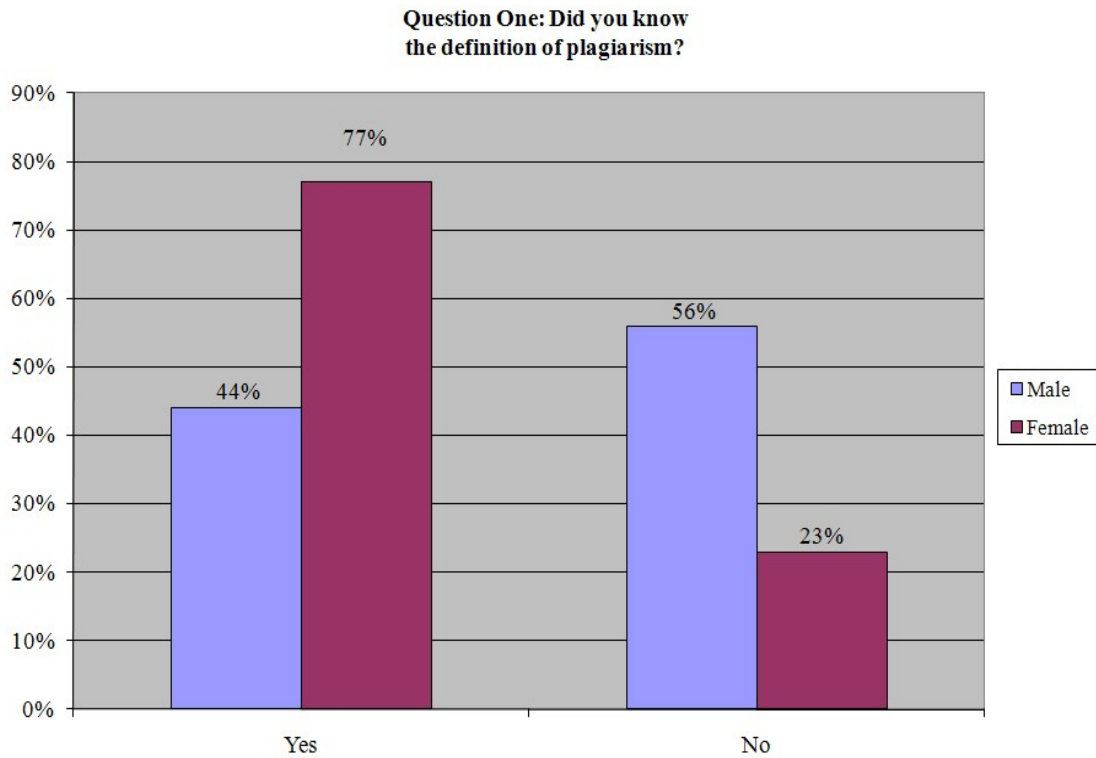the definition of plagiarism?**

Figure 2: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question One

Moreover, when asked to state how they learned the definition, only seven

male students and 28 female students (30%) stated that they learned the definition in

school from their teachers. Even here, a substantial difference is noted between the

genders' responses, as the number of female students who learned the definition of

plagiarism from their teachers at school outweighs that of male students by four times.

In addition, some of the female students explained that their English teachers had told

them not to plagiarize when they had to do oral presentations. One female student

noted, "In school because while we want to do any presentation the teacher kept

telling us no plagiarism[1]." Another female student also had a similar response, as she

wrote, "When the teacher asks us to do a presentation she mentions that she doesn't

want it as copy, paste." Seven out of the 28 female students mentioned that they

learned the term plagiarism before having to do the oral presentation assignment for

---
[1] Students' answers have not been edited.

22

their English class, while none of the male students wrote anything about the oral presentations.

Moreover, several male and female students said that they learned about plagiarism from parents, friends or siblings who study in universities. Others said that they read about it in books, heard about it while watching a movie or a TV program, or found out about it somewhere on the Internet (see Table 4). Two female American students, two Canadian male students, and one Australian male student stated that they learned the definition from their parents.

In addition, three non-Arab students, two males from the USA and New Zealand, and one Canadian female, indicated that they learned the definition from their previous schools in their home countries. One American male student noted, "When I used to live in America they taught all the students about it. If they would get caught he/she would be punished." He also added, "I suggest that the school should teach the children while they are young about plagiarism so that they learn how to write a research paper or a project."

Table 4: Students' Responses to Question One (2nd Part)

Students learned about plagiarism from...	Males	Females	Total
Teacher	7	28	35
Books / TV / Internet	5	9	14
Parents / Friends / Siblings in university	8	6	14
Previous school in home country	2	1	3
Unknown	2	2	4
Total	24	46	70

In question two, "Now that you know the definition of the term plagiarism, do you consider copying and pasting from the Internet or from books to fulfill a research assignment to be plagiarism? Why or why not?" responses were divided almost

equally into affirmative and negative, as 52% of the students seemed to consider copying and pasting from the Internet or from books to be plagiarism. As shown in Figure 3 below, minimal discrepancy was noted between the male students' responses and those of the female students; 53% of the male students and 52% of the female students ticked yes.

Question Two: Do you consider copying and pasting from the Internet or from books to be plagiarism?
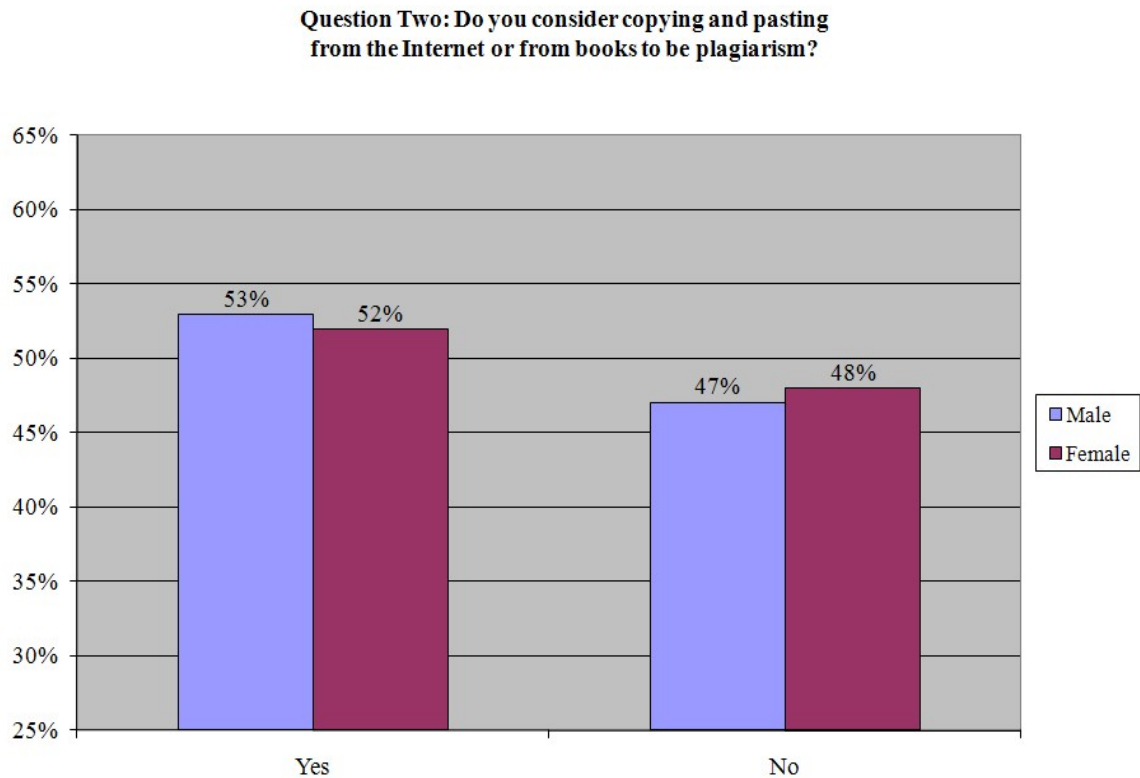
Figure 3: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Two

When asked to explain their answers, 43 of the 60 students who responded in the affirmative said that they consider copying and pasting from the Internet or from books to be plagiarism because they feel that they are stealing other people's information and effort. One female student responded, "because if I posted something I really worked hard on it I won't like anyone to take it and use it as if it's for them. It's just like stealing." The male students had similar responses; one of them wrote,

24

"because people work hard on them and we simply steal the research without even studying or changing the words, so we just steal the research." The remaining 17 students did not provide any explanation for their choices.

Several of the students who answered no differentiated between using information and stealing information. They said that they are "using" rather than "stealing," and they agreed that the information is posted online for them to use. One female noted, "Because the information is put to educate people or help people so its no problem if people use part of that information for a research." Another female student explained, "Because you are not steeling something to sell it or for the purpose of steeling, you are just using what others wrote because you think it's good." As discussed earlier in the literature review, many students find it difficult to distinguish between what information is considered as common knowledge and thus need not be cited, and what information should be cited. This finding highlights this difficulty.

In addition, several male students posed rhetorical questions that indicate that they did not really know the difference between using information from a source and plagiarizing. Some of these questions are listed below:

1. "Why did they provide the information online in the first place?"

2. "If we will not take them from the internet, from where will we take them?"

3. "Where else would we get the information from?"

4. "Because if it's on the Internet and you consider it stealing why did they upload it on the website?"

5. "Because the internet is made for us to take info from and if it was stealing then why did they put on the internet in the 1st place?"

25

Another female student suggested that the information should not be published online if the publisher does not want it to be stolen. "I consider it help. If they don't want us to steal it they shouldn't publish it online." One of the girls also agreed as she said, "because it is information for everybody, and because its public info, and if it was personal it would be unpublished." Another male respondent said, "Because that person added it for information and we needed it so we copied it." Finally, a female student expressed her opinion that people who post information on the Internet are allowing others to take it and use it without permission, and therefore it should not be called plagiarism.

Another reason was given by 11% of the participants that answered no to question two. These six students said that they believe they do not know anything about research and that the Internet is easy to obtain information from. One male student noted, "No because there is no other choice to make a research, because we don't know anything so I have to look on the internet." A female student also blamed lack of information for her plagiarism, as she said, "because if we don't know how to do our own homeworks we just ask for help from the internet." Another student said, "Because the information is the same, whether I got it from the Internet or anywhere else, I won't create anything new about that subject, it's just that internet is the shorter route." The remaining 22% of the respondents did not provide an explanation for their choice.

Concerning question three, "Did your English teacher explain to you what plagiarism means? If yes, what did he/she say?" 61 of the 115 students (53%) said their English teacher had explained to them what plagiarism means, while 54 of them (47%) said that he/she did not. However, as can be seen in Figure 4 a great difference can be found between the girls' answers and the boys' answers. 15% of the male

students and 88% of the female students said that their English teacher had explained to them what plagiarism means, while 85% of the male students and 12% of the female students ticked no.

Question Three: Did your English teacher explain to you what plagiarism means?
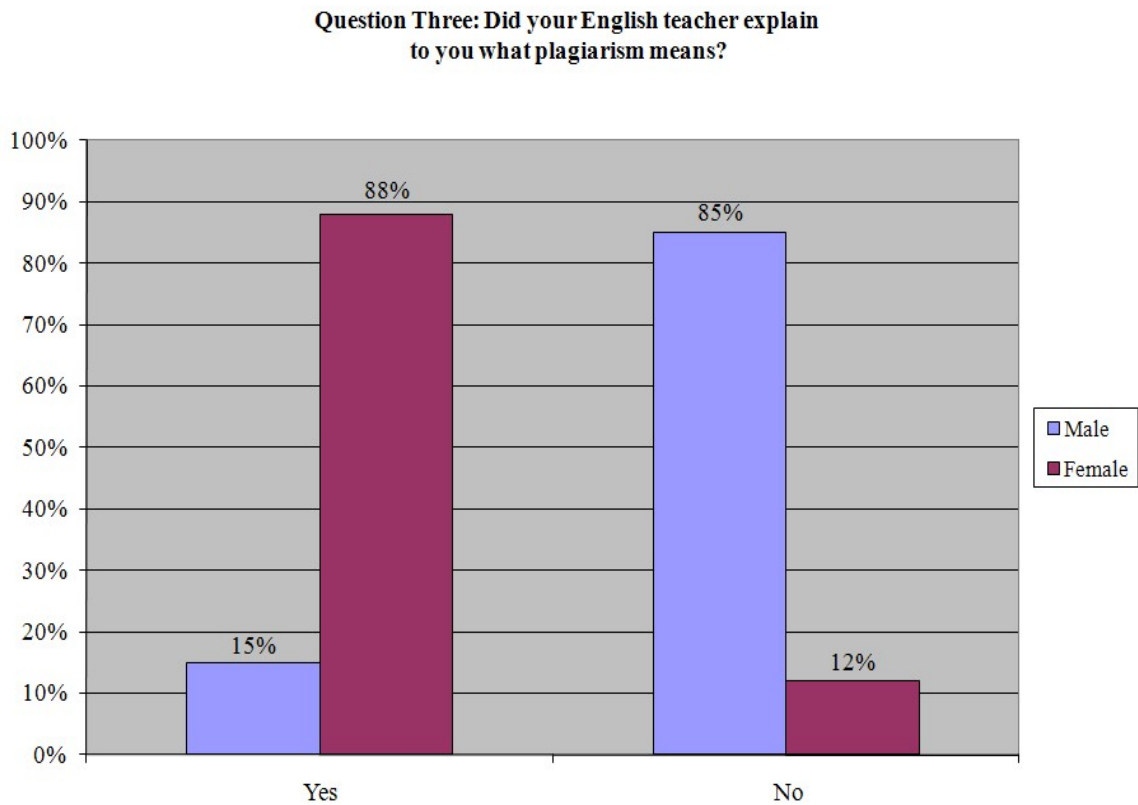

Figure 4: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Three

As for question four "Did you know that many people think that plagiarism is similar to stealing?" Figure 5 shows that 80% of the female students said that they know that many people think that plagiarism is similar to stealing. On the other hand, only 49% of the male students said that they know this.

Question Four: Did you know that many people think that plagiarism is similar to stealing?
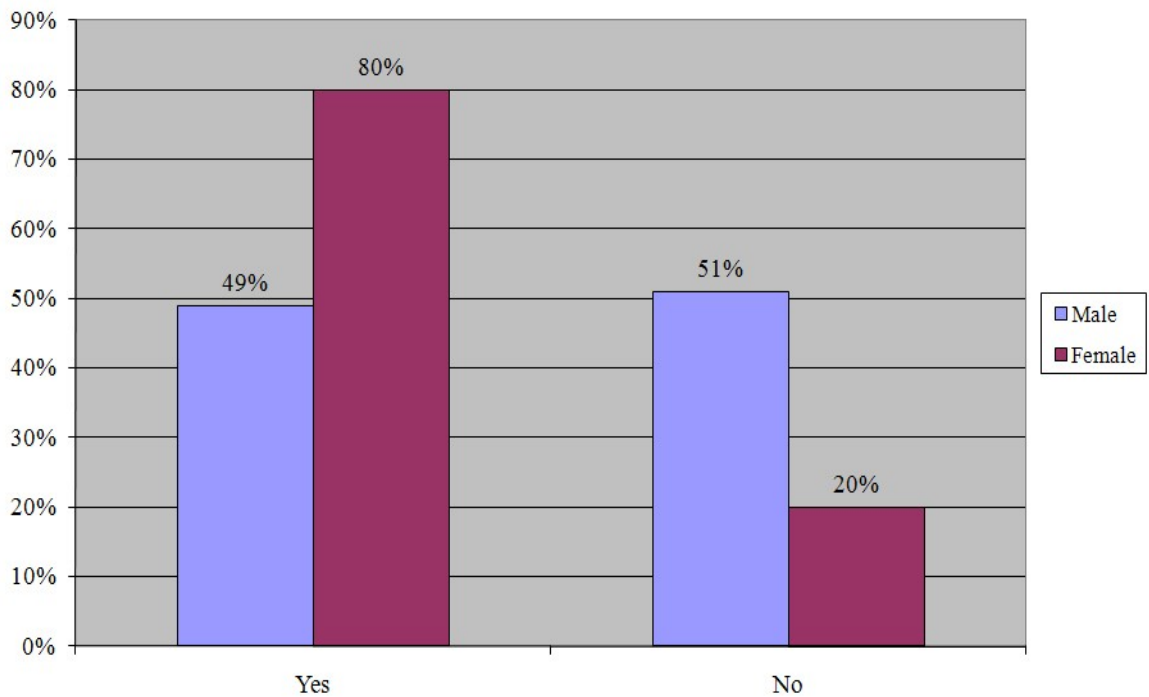
Figure 5: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Four

From the students' responses to section one of the survey, the answer to the first research question "Do students know what plagiarism is?" is that the female students were more aware of what plagiarism means than the male students, and more female than male students said that their English teacher had taught them about plagiarism. However, many students mistakenly thought that the information posted on the Internet is available for them to use, and using this information without giving credit to the original authors is acceptable.

Students' Research Skills

The purpose of the third section of the survey was to investigate students' familiarity with the skills required to write research papers. It included three fixed alternative (Yes/No) questions and one open-ended question.

In question five, students were asked to indicate if their English teacher had told them that it was wrong to copy/paste their research papers from the Internet and that this is called plagiarism. 87 of the 115 students (76%) said yes. As highlighted in Figure 6, another discrepancy was observed between the answers of the male students and those of the females. More students in the boys' sections than in the girls' section stated that they are not being told that it is wrong to plagiarize research papers. While 93% of the female students asserted that their English teachers had told them that it was wrong to copy their research papers off the Internet, only 56% of the male students said yes.

Question Five: Did your English teacher tell you that when you write a research paper, it is wrong to plagiarize?
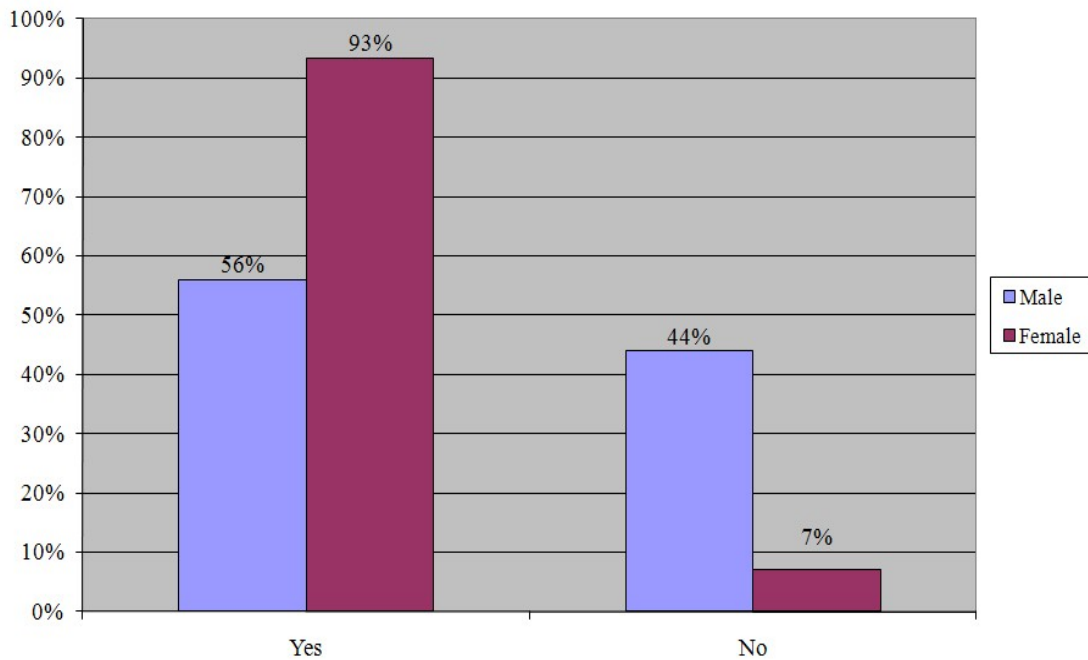
Figure 6: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Five

In question six, students were asked whether they were taught how to write research papers by their English teachers. 80 of the 115 students (70%) stated that they were taught. Unlike their responses to question six, the females' and males' responses were close in number, as 64% of the male respondents and 75% of the female respondents ticked yes. Combined with results from question five, 76% of the students said that they were asked not to plagiarize while 70% said that they were taught how to write research papers. This result indicates that, in some cases, students believed they are asked not to plagiarize yet they said they are not taught how to write research papers.

Question seven looked closely at three skills needed by the high school students to write original research papers. Participants were asked to specify whether

they were taught how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote by ticking either "yes," "no," or "I am not sure" next to each skill.

As shown in Figure 7, the major problem that the students' responses pointed at appeared in the third skill, which is quoting. While 78% of the students said that their English teachers had taught them how to summarize and 67% said they had been taught how to paraphrase, only 27% of the students said they had been taught how to quote. When asked in question eight of the survey if they have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free research paper this year, several students reported that they find it difficult to paraphrase, summarize, or to write in their own words. One student in fact said, "No because I don't know how to paraphrase the whole research into my own words." Another student noted, "No because I may need to take some phrases that I cannot paraphrase." These findings may suggest that when students find it difficult to summarize or paraphrase a certain sentence or paragraph, they plagiarize because they do not know how to quote. Even though many students said that they have been taught how to summarize or paraphrase, several of them said that they found it difficult to paraphrase. Therefore, there is an indication that students are taught how to summarize and how to paraphrase, but they are not taught how to use these skills when writing a research paper.

	Summarize	Paraphrase	Quote
Yes	78%	67%	27%
No	10%	10%	40%
Not sur	11%	23%	33%
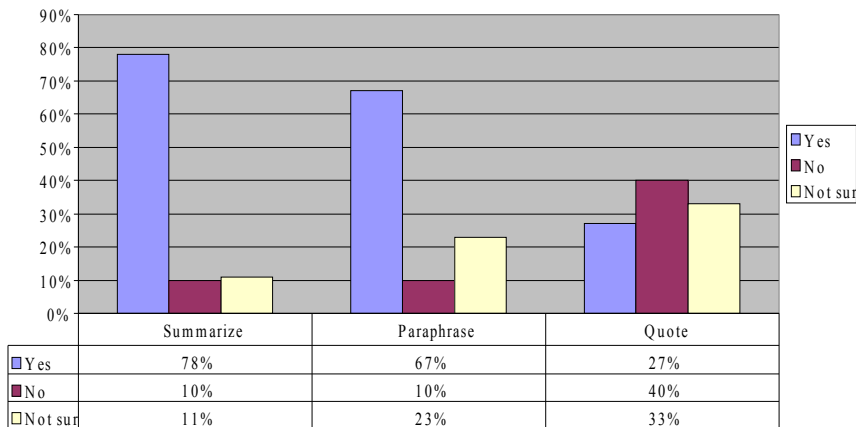
Figure 7: All Students' Responses to Question Seven

Surprisingly, when looking more specifically at gender differences in these

responses, more males than females said that they have been taught how to

summarize, paraphrase, and quote. Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 summarize both the

males' and the females' responses to question seven. Table 5 shows the percentages

of the male and female students who responded to question seven in the affirmative.

Table 6 shows the percentages of the male and female students who said that they

have not been taught how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote. Table 7 shows the

percentages of the male and female students who said they are not sure.

Table 5: Percentages of Students Who Answered Yes to Question Seven

Gender	Summarize	Paraphrase	Quote
Male	91%	71%	29%
Female	67%	63%	25%

Table 6: Percentages of Students Who Answered No to Question Seven

Gender	Summarize	Paraphrase	Quote
Male	0%	9%	36%
Female	20%	12%	43%

Table 7: Percentages of Students Who Answered "Not Sure" to Question Seven

Gender	Summarize	Paraphrase	Quote
Male	9%	20%	35%
Female	13%	25%	32%

In question eight, "Do you think that you have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free research paper this year? Why or why not?" the students' responses were divided almost equally into yes and no. 60 of the 115 students (52%) thought they had the skills to submit a plagiarism-free research paper that year. As outlined in Figure 8 below, 49% of the male students and 55% of the female students responded that they had the skills to write original research papers, while 51% of the males and 45% of the females said that they do not possess these skills.

Question Eight: Do you think that you have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free research paper this year?
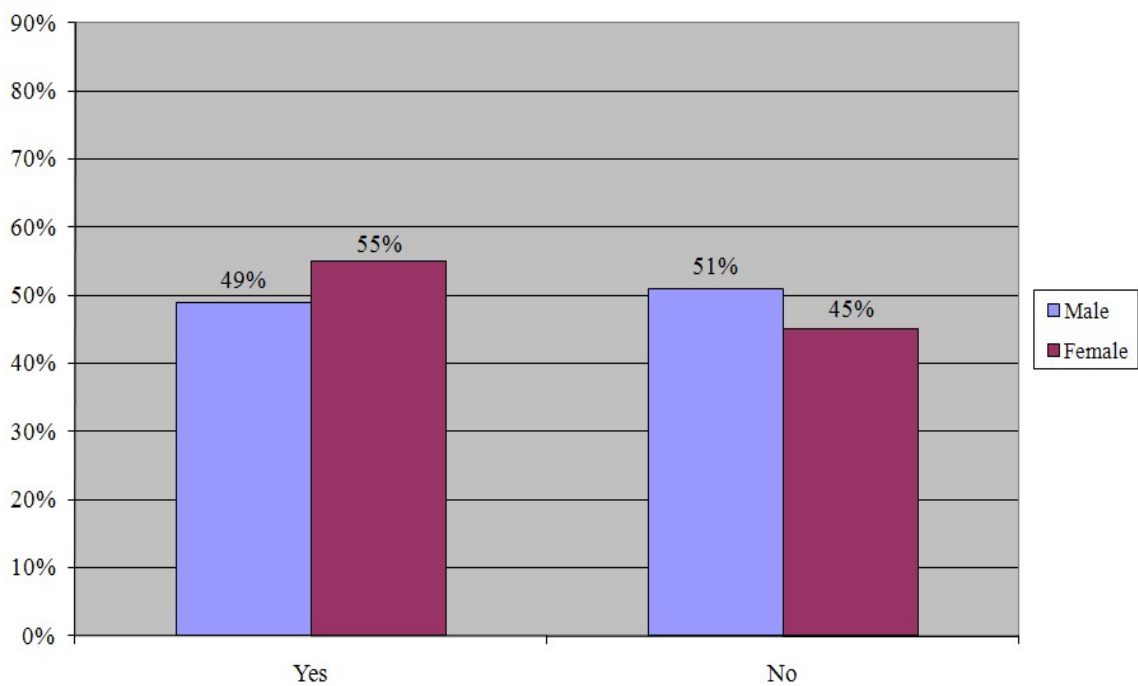
Figure 8: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Eight

In spite of answering yes to this question, one student said, "It doesn't hurt to try to write it plagiarism-free." Another student also said, "I will try my best to not plagiarize." Several male and female students who responded to question eight in the affirmative said that they are able to submit plagiarism-free research papers this year because they are able to use their "own words." One female student said, "Yes because I've done presentations previously using my own words." Another female also used the term "own words" in her response, as she said, "Yes because I can take the idea but write it all in my own words and the way I understand it." A male respondent also agreed as he said, "Yes it isn't that hard. Simply get information from the net, then type in your own words." Another male student also said that he can submit a plagiarism-free research paper "by collecting many information from many books and sites & presenting them in own words!"

As for the 55 students who mentioned that they do not have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free paper this year, several said that they do not know how to do it because it is difficult to paraphrase. One female student said, "It is hard to paraphrase the information I find on the internet." Another student also expressed the difficulty of paraphrasing, as she said, "Because it's hard to find information then paraphrase them. Copying and changing few words is much easier." In addition, one male student said that he does not have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free paper because he "didn't practice much." Another student said, "No because we haven't been taught to do a full proper research without copying-pasting most of it."

One female student admitted to having plagiarized her research paper one year before, as she said, "Well last year we had to do a research paper as well and I

plagiarismed everything." Another student also admitted that she "can just copy and paste the research." A total of 10 students seemed to believe that they do not have enough time to write an original research paper. One male student complained, "Because I don't have time BECAUSE of ALL the drop quizzes and H.W that we have every day." Another student also said, "Because with all the H.W we get it's hard enough doing it by copy-paste." Female students also had their share of blaming the time factor for their plagiarism. For example, one of the respondents said, "Because it takes too much effort and time and there's not time for that."

To answer my second research question, "What research skills do these students say their teachers teach them?" the data analysis of Section Three of the survey suggests that students state they have been taught how to summarize and how to paraphrase, but not how to quote, and this is affecting their ability to write original research papers. Only 27% of the students stated that they have been taught how to quote and many students said that they face difficulties paraphrasing. Therefore, when they face difficulties summarizing or paraphrasing, they plagiarize instead of quoting. In addition, most students believed they are taught the skills of summarizing and paraphrasing, but they are not taught how to use these skills effectively while writing research papers.

Plagiarism: Reasons and Circumstances

Question nine investigated students' probability of plagiarizing by asking them a direct question: "Do you ever see yourself in a situation where you would plagiarize?" 89 of the 115 students (77%) said that they see themselves in situations where they would plagiarize, while 26 of them said that they do not. Moreover, as outlined in Figure 9 below, 85% of the male students and 70% of the female students

35

agreed that they would plagiarize, whereas 15% of the male students and 30% of the female students said that they would not.

Question Nine: Do you ever see yourself in a situation where you would plagiarize?
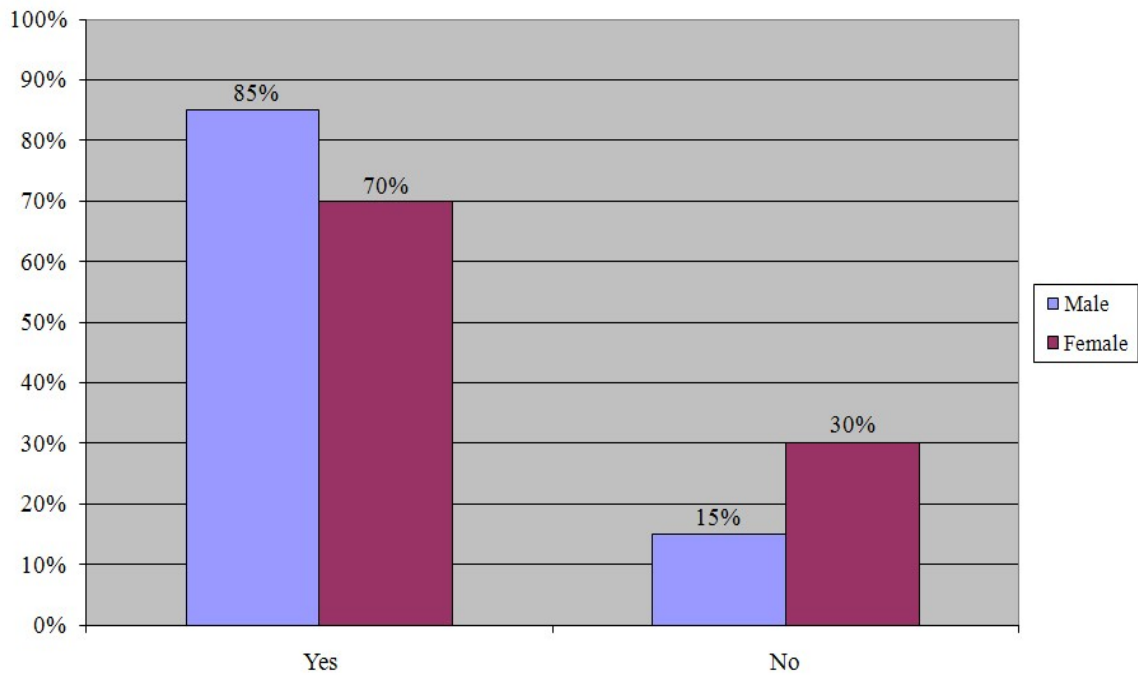
Figure 9: Male and Female Students' Responses to Question Nine

Several students stated they would plagiarize because they do not know how to write in their own words. One female student said, "Sometimes when I do not know how to explain a sentence in my own way." Another student said, "Yes when the paragraph or sentence is hard to summarize." Similar to the findings in question eight, the difficulty of re-writing appears also in students' responses to question nine. A female respondent also agreed with her classmates, as she said, "Only when a paragraph or a sentence is hard to summarize or write in my own words." In addition, a female student and four male students admitted that they do plagiarize. In fact, one male student declared, "I always plagiarize."

Other students attributed their plagiarism to time constraints, as they stated that they always have a lot of other assignments to complete. One male student said, "Always because our school does not provide time for us in order to teach us how not

to plagiarize." Another student noted, "If I am in a hurry to do a research you would need to plagiarize." Female students also stated that lack of time would cause them to plagiarize. One respondent said, "because sometimes I would be in a hurry and don't have time to write the information from my own word." Another female said that she is "not superwoman." She further explained, "I don't have time to write in my own words."

A few male and female students said that they would plagiarize when they do not have enough information about the topic that they need to write about. One female student said, "If the subject that I'm going to search about I have never heard about it." One male student also said, "Sometimes when I do not have enough information of a certain subject." Another student had a similar response, as he said, "When there is a topic I completely dislike or can't understand."

As for the 26 students who said that they do not see themselves in situations where they would plagiarize, it is worth noting that 18 were females and only eight were males. Some respondents said that they are able to read the information from different sources and write what they understand. Out of the eight students who said this, only one was male, and he said, "No because I always read what I am about to write and try to understand it." One female respondent said, "It's not hard for me to read and re-write in my own words." Another student said that "there's no need to because we can just read and write what we understand."

Other male and female respondents said that they would not plagiarize because plagiarism is similar to stealing. One male student noted that he would not plagiarize "because it's considered as stealing." One female wrote, "It is unfair to present someone's work as if it was mine. It is stealing in other words!" Moreover, one male student said, "In university you get expelled so it is better to get used to it

from now." Despite saying that she would not plagiarize, a female student mentioned that she "will change a few things to make it become [her] own work." Another female student said that she would not plagiarize because "most people plagiarize cause they are too lazy to paraphrase something so they just copy and paste."

In question ten, students were given 10 different circumstances, and they were asked to indicate whether they thought one of their classmates might plagiarize under each situation by circling either "Always," "Sometimes," or "Never." In addition, a blank was provided at the end of the question for the students to add more reasons that they believe might lead their classmates to plagiarize. For sake of simplifying the data analysis process, I combined students' responses of "Always" and "Sometimes" in Table 8 and used "Yes" and "No" instead in order to know under which circumstances students would plagiarize.

The students' responses for all circumstances (see Appendix C) reflect that they believed that their classmates might plagiarize under all circumstances, with some situations being more common than others. The participants' answers to question ten were consistent with answers to question nine, since the students thought that their classmates would plagiarize either "always" or "sometimes" more when they don't have enough information about the topic, when they don't have enough time to complete the task of writing research papers, and when they don't know how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote. In Table 8 below, students' responses are sorted in descending order from the largest percentage of students who answered yes to the statements in question ten to the smallest percentage.

39

Table 8: Students' Responses to Question Ten

Situation	My classmate might plagiarize:	Yes	No
1	When he/she doesn't have enough information about the topic	94%	6%
8	When he/she doesn't know how to summarize	94%	6%
9	When he/she doesn't know how to paraphrase	93%	7%
2	When he/she doesn't have enough time to finish the assignment	92%	8%
10	When he/she doesn't know how to quote	90%	10%
3	When he/she finds the topic to be uninteresting	83%	17%
5	When he/she knows that the teacher will not know that he/she plagiarized	83%	17%
4	When he/she knows that the teacher will not punish him/her	82%	18%
6	When his/her parents put him/her under pressure to get A's	82%	18%
7	When he/she is under pressure in the classroom to do better than his/her friends	79%	21%

94% of the students said that their classmates might plagiarize if they do not have information about the topic, and 92% of them said that lack of time was a factor that might influence their classmates to plagiarize. For situation 8, only 6% of the students believed that their classmates might *never* plagiarize even if they do not know how to summarize, whereas the remaining majority of the students said that their classmates might plagiarize in this situation. As for the 9th situation, 93% of the students said that if their classmates do not know how to paraphrase, they might plagiarize. As for situation 10, the results revealed that 90% of the participants

believed that their classmates might plagiarize if they lack the skill of quoting information from sources.

One female student added another situation to the list; she said her classmates might plagiarize "when the information needed for the topic are good and can't be paraphrased." Another female also gave a similar response, as she said one of her classmates might plagiarize "when he/she find the words very hard that they cant put them in their own way." Two female students said that they think one of their classmates might plagiarize when "he/she doesn't know what plagiarism is." Three female students added "laziness" to the list. As one female explained, "Most of the time they plagiarize just because they're too lazy or too not bothered to do it." Being under pressure was also a reason given by three respondents. As one girl noted, classmates might plagiarize "when no time and a lot of pressure from exams, tests, homeworks, and parents wanting us to get A+ and they don't want less."

Gender Differences in Answering Question Ten

As shown in Table 9 and Table 10, no major discrepancy exists between the male and the female students' responses to the last three statements in question 10, as both genders agreed that their classmates might plagiarize if they lack the three skills needed to write original research papers.

Table 9: Male Students' Responses to Statements 8, 9, and 10

My classmate might plagiarize…	Question Ten (Males)	
	Yes	No
When he/she doesn't know how to summarize	95%	5%
When he/she doesn't know how to paraphrase	93%	7%
When he/she doesn't know how to quote	91%	9%

Table 10: Female Students' Responses to Statements 8, 9, and 10

My classmate might plagiarize...	Question Ten (Females)	
	Yes	No
When he/she doesn't know how to summarize	93%	7%
When he/she doesn't know how to paraphrase	93%	7%
When he/she doesn't know how to quote	89%	11%

To answer my third research question, "Under what circumstances, if any, might students plagiarize?" findings from the data analysis of Section Four of the survey suggest that students believe that their classmates might plagiarize under several circumstances. They might be more likely to plagiarize, however, if they do not have enough information about the topic, if they do not have enough time to finish writing their papers, and if they do not know how to summarize, paraphrase, or quote.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section summarizes the key findings revealed in the study and the answers to the three research questions. The second section suggests implications for English teachers and administrators. The third section sheds light on gender differences deduced from the students' responses. Limitations of the study are discussed in the fourth section, while the last section concludes the thesis and presents some final thoughts.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to investigate whether students in a private school in Dubai know what plagiarism means as well as to find out what research skills they report that their English teachers are teaching them in their writing classrooms. Findings from the questionnaires contributed to understanding, from the students' points of view, the reasons and the circumstances that lead them to resort to plagiarism when having to complete a research assignment.

Results from Section Two of the survey were used to answer question one, "Do students know what plagiarism is?" The findings indicated that 70 of the 115 students (61%) said they are familiar with the definition of plagiarism. However, only 35 of them (30%) stated that they learned the definition in school. Even after learning the definition of plagiarism, 48% of the students still thought that copying and pasting from the Internet was not plagiarism. The major reason given by the students was their misconception of common knowledge, previously discussed in the literature review. Some students mistakenly seemed to believe that the information posted

online is there for anyone to use. Moreover, only 53% of the students said that their English teacher had explained to them what plagiarism means.

The purpose of Section Three of the survey was to find out what research skills these students said they are taught by their English teachers to answer my second research question. Most students say they have been taught how to summarize and paraphrase, but not how to quote. 76% of the students said that their English teachers told them that it is wrong to copy and paste from the Internet. However, as discussed earlier in the literature review, telling students that plagiarism is wrong is not enough. As Howard and Davies (2009) advise, "Teachers who wish to prevent plagiarism should devote extensive instruction to the component tasks of writing from sources" (p. 64). Based on the results from question seven, only 27% of the students said that they had been taught how to quote. Students' responses to questions eight and nine indicated that they plagiarize when they find it difficult to summarize or paraphrase. Only 52% of the students thought that they had the skills to submit a plagiarism-free research paper while the remaining 48% said that they did not.

Section Four of the survey revealed the answer to the third research question, "Under which circumstances, if any, would students plagiarize?" A total of 77% of the students admitted that they see themselves in situations where they would plagiarize, and several of them attributed the reason to lack of research skills. Question ten revealed the same result, with the addition of two more factors that also caused students to plagiarize. One factor is not having enough information about the topic, and the second is not having enough time to finish the assignment.

Implications

  With many students admitting that they have plagiarized before, or that they believe that they or their classmates might plagiarize at a certain time, serious action must be taken by both teachers and administrators. Teachers who expect their students to submit plagiarism-free research papers need a great deal of dedication to contribute in order to achieve this goal. Howard and Davies (2009) suggest that teachers need to "acknowledge that teaching students how to write from sources involves more than telling students that copying is a crime and handing them a pile of source citation cards" (p. 64). They need to equip their students with the skills needed and give them enough time to complete this challenging task. Since many students expressed difficulty in writing in their "own words", maybe the order of teaching the three skills, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting, should be changed. Instead of always starting with teaching students how to summarize, teachers may want to consider teaching students how to quote first, since it will help students avoid plagiarize and teach them how to put quotations before and after the sentences that they are not able to summarize or paraphrase.

  Teaching students how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote is necessary, but also giving students time to practice these skills is important too. One way of doing this is following the process approach. According to Lathrop and Foss (2005), "Grading the research *process* as well as the research *product*, or *paper*, is the most effective anti-plagiarism technique" (p. 164). By implementing the process approach, teachers can help students avoid procrastination and plagiarism. In addition, since students like to write about topics that are of interest to them, and some students said that lack of interest in the topic led them to plagiarize, teachers can allow students to choose their own research topics. However, to make sure that students do not write

about inappropriate topics, students can write a short proposal in which they state the topic, why they chose it, their focus or research question(s), and a list of three or four possible resources that they think they might use in their paper.

Moreover, when designing the syllabus, administrators and teachers need to devote enough time for the research assignment so that students do not feel that they are under pressure to complete the paper quickly. Administrators also need to make it clear to all teachers to follow the educational institutions' policy regarding plagiarism. Issuing a clear academic integrity policy and making it clear to teachers, students, and parents alike that violating this policy will result in serious measures to be taken against students is necessary. Administrators need to encourage teachers to explain to students what plagiarism means and how degrading it is for the students and for the educational institution's reputation to plagiarize.

Gender Differences

Based on the results from Section One, the female students were more aware of the definition of plagiarism than the male students, as there were extreme differences in the percentages that correspond to the females' and to the males' responses. Moreover, more females than males said that their English teachers taught them about plagiarism and told them that it is wrong to copy/paste from the Internet. I find this revelation to be a little surprising, since both the males' and the females' English teachers have to follow the same syllabus and weekly plans, yet the differences remain.

All the responses to the survey reveal that the females in grade 10 in this private school in Dubai were more aware of plagiarism than the males were. This could be due to the fact that there are usually more behavior problems in the male

classes than in the female classes. Moreover, it could also be that the male students have more negative attitudes towards writing than the female students so they need to be motivated more. Controlling classroom behavior problems and motivating students all require time from the class, which could be why teachers did not spend enough time explaining the different skills needed to write a plagiarism-free research paper. However, a future study involving teachers and students would give a more comprehensive overview of the plagiarism issue in schools.

Limitations of the Study

The participants of this study were students who are enrolled in one private school in Dubai; therefore, my study cannot be generalized. I have not included government schools where the language of instruction is Arabic. Moreover, acknowledging the rich and massive amounts of information a researcher can gather from interviews, I asked the school's administration for permission to interview some of the students. Unfortunately, the Head of the English Department refused to grant me permission for this, since it was against the school's policy. Therefore, I was restricted to collecting information from surveys only. However, because I had a large number of participants (115), both the qualitative and quantitative data I collected gave me a good idea of the participating students' attitudes towards plagiarism in the writing classroom.

Conclusion

To conclude, plagiarism is an act that not only impacts students' writing skills, but it also affects their personal and professional lives in the future. Therefore, teaching students the skills they need to help them avoid plagiarism is necessary.

Teachers cannot expect students to know how to summarize, paraphrase, or quote, so they have to teach them to avoid the increase of cases of plagiarism in schools. Results from this study revealed that students know what plagiarism means, yet they do not possess all the skills to avoid it. Some of them see plagiarism to be similar to stealing, while others feel that it is okay to copy and paste from sources like the Internet because the information is public and open for everyone to use. The students' confusion between using the information and copying it plays a role in their misconception of what exactly constitutes plagiarism. This misconception may make students plagiarize without knowing that they are doing an unethical act. Therefore, I believe that it is our role as educators to clear up this misconception as well as do all we can to help students learn to avoid plagiarism.

REFERENCES

Angelil-Carter, S. (2000). *Stolen language? Plagiarism in writing.* Harlow: Pearson

Education Limited.

Beers, K. & Odell, L. (2007). *Elements of literature.* Austin: Holt, Rinehart, and

Winston.

Blum, S. D. (2009). *My word! Plagiarism and college culture.* Ithaca: Cornell

University Press.

Bou-Mehdi, R. (2009). Originality in the writing classroom. In C. Gunn (Ed.), *TESOL*

practices in the Arabian Gulf (pp. 47-51). Dubai: TESOL Arabia.

Davis, S. J. (2000). Teaching practices that encourage or eliminate student plagiarism.

In A. Lathrop & K. Foss (Eds.), *Student cheating and plagiarism in the*

internet era: A wake-up call (pp. 182-187). Englewood: Libraries Unlimited,

Inc.

Devlin, M., & Gray, K. (2007). In their own words: A qualitative study of the reasons

Australian university students plagiarize. *Higher Education Research &*

Development. 26(2), 181-198. Retrieved December 22, 2009, from

EBSCOhost database.

Educational tips on plagiarism prevention. (n.d.). *Plagiarism.org.* Retrieved

December 23, 2009, from http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_

educational_ tips_on_plagiarism_ prevention.html

England, A. (2008). The dynamic nature of common knowledge. In C. Eisner & M.

Vicinus (Eds.), *Originality, imitation, and plagiarism: Teaching writing in the*

digital age (pp. 104-113). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Flowerdew, J, & Li, Y. (2007). Plagiarism and second language writing in an
electronic age. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 27*, 161-183. Retrieved
September 28, 2009, from ProQuest database.

Galles, G. M. (2005). Simple strategies for combating plagiarism. In A. Lathrop & K.
Foss (Eds.), *Guiding students from cheating and plagiarism to honesty and
integrity: Strategies for change* (pp. 167-168). Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Gatrell, C. (2006). *Managing part-time study: A guide for undergraduates and
postgraduates.* Berkshire: Open University Press. Retrieved December 23,
2009, from Google books: http://books.google.ae/books?id=3spnS-
2y4JAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=en&source=gbs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q
=&f=false

Granitz, N., & Loewy, D. (2007). Applying ethical theories: Interpreting and
responding to student plagiarism. *Journal of Business Ethics, 72*(3), 293-306.
Retrieved December 24, 2009, from ProQuest database.

Hayes, N., & Introna, L. D. (2005). Cultural values, plagiarism, and fairness: When
plagiarism gets in the way of learning. *Ethics & Behavior, 15*(3), 213-231.
Retrieved October 10, 2009, from EBSCOhost database.

Hobbs, Vacca, R., Irwin, Odell, L., & Warriner, J. E. (2007). *Elements of language.*
Austin: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Howard, R. M. (2002). Don't police plagiarism: Just TEACH! *The Chronicle of
Higher Education, 67*(5), 46-49. Retrieved October 25, 2009, from ProQuest
database.

Howard, R. M., & Davies, L. J. (2009). Plagiarism in the internet age. *Educational
Leadership, 66*(6), 64-67. Retrieved October 20, 2009, from EBSCOhost
database.

Jackson, L. A., Tway, E., & Frager, A. (2000). Dear teacher, Johnny copied. In A.

    Lathrop & K. Foss (Eds.), *Student cheating and plagiarism in the internet era:*

    A wake-up call (pp. 170-173). Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Lathrop, A., & Foss, K. (2000). *Student cheating and plagiarism in the internet era:*

    A wake-up call. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Lathrop, A., & Foss, K. (2005). *Guiding students from cheating and plagiarism to*

    honesty and integrity: Strategies for change. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Levin, P. (2006). Why the writing is on the wall for the plagiarism police. *Peter*

    Levin's Student Friendly Guides. Retrieved December 28, 2009, from

    http://www.student-friendly-guides.com/ plagiarism/writing_on_the_wall.pdf

Liddell, J., & Fong, V. (2008). Honesty, integrity, and plagiarism: The role of student

    values in prevention. *Plagiary: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Plagiarism,*

    Fabrication, and Falsification, *3(*1), 1-5. Retrieved December 22, 2009, from

    http://www.plagiary.org/ 2008/student-values.pdf

Ma, H. J., Wan, G., & Lu, E. Y. (2008). Digital cheating and plagiarism in schools.

    Theory into Practice, 47, 197-203. Retrieved December 20, 2009, from

    ProQuest database.

Marshall, S., & Garry, M. (2005). How well do students really understand plagiarism?

    Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education.

    Retrieved October 10, 2009, from http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/

    brisbane05/blogs/proceedings/52_Marshall.pdf

Marshall, S., & Garry, M. (2006). NESB and ESB students' attitudes and perceptions

    of plagiarism. *University of South Australia.* Retrieved October 10, 2009, from

    http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/ ijei/article/download/25/17

McCord, A. (2009). Detection and deterrence of plagiarism in online learning

environments. In P. Rogers, G. Beger, J. Boettecher, C. Howard, L. Justice, &

K. Schenk (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of distance learning* (2nd ed.) (pp. 604-615).

Hershey, PA: IGI Global. Retrieved December 23, 2009, from Google books:

http://books.google.ae/books?

id=sC9Le3jIwzIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=encyclopedia+of+distance+learni

ng&hl=en&cd=1

Murray, L. J. (2008). Plagiarism and copyright infringement. In C. Eisner & M.

Vicinus (Eds.), *Originality, imitation, and plagiarism: Teaching writing in the*

digital age (pp. 173-182). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Nadelson, S. (2007). Academic misconduct by university students: Faculty

perceptions and responses. *Plagiary: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in*

Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification, 2(2), 1-10. Retrieved December

22, 2009 from http://www.plagiary.org/ 2007/academic-misconduct.pdf

Pearson, G. (2005). What's a teacher or a librarian to do? In A. Lathrop & K. Foss

(Eds.), *Guiding students from cheating and plagiarism to honesty and*

integrity: Strategies for change (pp. 141-145). Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Pecorari, D. (2008). *Academic writing and plagiarism: A linguistic analysis*. New

York: Continuum.

Pickard, J. (2006). Staff and student attitudes to plagiarism at University College

Northampton. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 31*(2), 215-232.

Retrieved December 22, 2009, from Academic Search Premier.

Scanlon, P. M. (2003). Student online plagiarism: How do we respond? *College*

Teaching, 51(4), 161-165. Retrieved October 20, 2009, from JSTOR database.

Scanlon, P. M., & Neumann, D. R. (2002). Internet plagiarism among college

    students. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(3), 374-385. Retrieved

    October 10, 2009, from ProQuest database.

Senders, S. (2008). Academic plagiarism and the limits of theft. In In C. Eisner & M.

    Vicinus (Eds.), *Originality, imitation, and plagiarism: Teaching writing in the*

    digital age (pp. 195-207). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Sharkey, J. R., & Culp, F. B. (2005). Cyberplagiarism and the library: Issues and

    Solutions. In W. J. Frost (Ed.), *The reference collection: From the shelf to the*

    web (pp. 103-116). Binghamton: The Haworth University Press. Retrieved

    December 23, 2009, from Google books: http://books.google.ae/books?id=

    cO5yGUv_zyoC&hl=en&source=gbs_navlinks_s

Sisti, D. A. (2007). How do high school students justify Internet plagiarism? *Ethics &*

    Behavior, 17(3), 215-231. Retrieved October 10, 2009, from EBSCOhost

    database.

Sutherland-Smith, W. (2008). *Plagiarism, the Internet, and student learning:*

    Improving academic integrity. New York: Routledge.

Thompson, L. C., & Williams, P. G. (2000). But I changed three words! Plagiarism in

    the ESL classroom. In A. Lathrop & K. Foss (Eds.), *Student cheating and*

    plagiarism in the internet era: A wake-up call (pp. 127-128). Englewood:

    Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Whitaker, E. (1993). A pedagogy to address plagiarism. *College Composition and*

    Communication, 44(4), 509-514. Retrieved September 28, 2009, from JSTOR

    database.

Whitley, B. E., & Keith-Spiegel, P. (2002). Academic dishonesty: An educator's

    guide. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Wilhoit, S. (1994). Helping students avoid plagiarism. *College Teaching, 42*(4), 161-

164. Retrieved September 28, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.

Williams, J. B. (2002). The plagiarism problem: Are students entirely to blame?

Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education.

Retrieved October 10, 2009, from www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/

auckland02/proceedings/ papers/189.pdf

APPENDIX A: STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Investigating Students' Attitudes toward Plagiarism in English Writing Classrooms

Please note that this survey shall remain confidential so you do not have to write your name at any stage of this survey. The data collected will be analyzed to be used as part of my thesis in the Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) Program. I highly appreciate your taking the time to fill out this survey.

The survey is divided into four sections. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete it.

Section One: Background Information

- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

- Age: _____

- Nationality: _____

Section Two: Definition of Plagiarism

Please answer questions 1-9 with *Yes* or *No*. Kindly note that there is space after each question for your comments.

1.   Did you know that the definition of plagiarism is "copying or stealing

someone else's words or ideas and claiming or presenting them as if they were

your own"?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you already knew, how did you learn it?

_____

_____

2.   Now that you know the definition of the term plagiarism, do you

consider "copying and pasting" from the Internet or from books to fulfill a

research assignment to be plagiarism?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why or why not?

_____

_____

3.   Did your English teacher explain to you what plagiarism means?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, what did he/she say?

_____

_____

4.   Did you know that many people think that plagiarism is similar to stealing?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Section Three: Research Papers

5.   Did your English teacher tell you that when you write a research paper, it is wrong to copy/paste from the Internet (plagiarize)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

6.   Did your English teacher teach you how to write research papers?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

7.   Did your English teacher teach you how to:

- summarize?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ I am not sure
- paraphrase?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ I am not sure

- quote?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ I am not sure

8.   Do you think that you have the skills to submit a plagiarism-free

research paper this year?

          ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Why or why not?

_____

_____

Section Four: Reasons and Circumstances

9.   Do you ever see yourself in a situation where you would plagiarize?

          ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Why or why not?

_____

_____

For question #10, please read each statement and circle one appropriate answer.
Kindly note that there is space provided after the question for your comments.

10.   Under what circumstances do you think one of your classmates might

plagiarize?

- When he/she doesn't have enough information about the topic

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she doesn't have enough time to finish the assignment

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she finds the topic to be uninteresting

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she knows that the teacher will not punish him/her

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she knows that the teacher will not know that he/she plagiarized

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When his/her parents put him/her under pressure to get A's

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she is under pressure in the classroom to do better than his/her friends

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she doesn't know how to summarize

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she doesn't know how to paraphrase

Always   Sometimes   Never

- When he/she doesn't know how to quote

Always   Sometimes   Never

- Other (please specify):

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Parental Permission Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am Randa Bou-Mehdi, a student in the English department *(*TESOL*)* at The American University of Sharjah. I am conducting a research project on students' attitudes towards plagiarism in the English writing classroom. I request permission for your child to participate.

The study consists of distributing questionnaires to students. Your child will have to answer ten questions. The project will be explained in terms that your child can understand, and your child will participate only if he/she is willing to do so. Only I and my supervisor, Dr. Cindy Gunn, will have access to information from your child. At the conclusion of the study, children's responses will be reported anonymously as your child will not be asked to write his/her name on the paper.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect the services normally provided to your child by the school. Your child's participation in this study will not lead to the loss of any benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled. Even if you give your permission for your child to participate, your child is free to refuse to participate. If your child agrees to participate, he/she is free to end participation at any time. You and your child are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your child's participation in this research study.

Should you have any questions or desire further information, please call me or email me at 050-630-7073, g00005164@aus.edu. Or you can email my study supervisor, Dr. Cindy Gunn, at cgunn@aus.edu. Keep this letter after signing and completing the bottom portion and returning it back with your child.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Michigan Technological University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at 1400 Townsend Drive, Houghton, MI 49931, by phone at (908) 487-2902, or by e-mail at jpolzien@mtu.edu. This study (IRB #M000) was approved by the IRB on July1, 2004

Sincerely,
Randa Bou-Mehdi, American University of Sharjah

Please indicate whether or not you wish to allow your child to participate in this project by checking one of the statements below, signing your name and sending the signed letter back with your child. Sign both copies and keep one for your records.

_____   I grant permission for my child to participate in Randa's study on students' attitudes towards plagiarism in the writing classroom.

_____   I do not grant permission for my child to participate in Randa's study on students' attitudes towards plagiarism in the writing classroom.

Signature of Parent/Guardian   Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Printed Name of Child   Date

	Question Ten		
My classmate might plagiarize…	**Always**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
1. When he/she doesn't have enough information about the topic	38%	56%	6%
2. When he/she doesn't have enough time to finish the assignment	47%	45%	8%
3. When he/she finds the topic to be uninteresting	48%	36%	16%
4. When he/she knows that the teacher will not punish him/her	43%	38%	19%
5. When he/she knows that the teacher will not know that he/she plagiarized	45%	38%	17%
6. When his/her parents put him/her under pressure to get A's	33%	51%	16%
7. When he/she is under pressure in the classroom to do better than his/her friends	26%	53%	21%
8. When he/she doesn't know how to summarize	46%	49%	6%
9. When he/she doesn't know how to paraphrase	48%	45%	7%
10. When he/she doesn't know how to quote	43%	47%	10%

VITA

Randa Fayez Bou-Mehdi served as an English teacher at Al Mawakeb School in Dubai for three years. She has also taught creative writing courses at the International School of Arts and Sciences in Dubai. Her interests include teaching speaking and writing, integrating technology into ESL classrooms, and engaging students in critical pedagogy.