

“It Just Messes Your Mind”: U.S. International Students’ Perspectives of and Experiences with Academic Text Sourcing

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ABSTRACT

This critical case study explored how six international students enrolled in two U.S. universities perceived and understood the concept of plagiarism. Through our participants’ stories, we challenged a system that insists on international students’ conformity, without adequate knowledge or training, to a U.S. or Western system of text borrowing and sourcing that may be different from what the students have learned in their home countries. Our study calls for educational rather than punitive means of addressing international students’ problems with crediting sources.

Keywords: academic integrity, international students, plagiarism, text sourcing

Western universities are accepting increasing numbers of international students into both graduate and undergraduate programs. In the United States, for example, a record 1,043,839 international students were studying at U.S. universities in 2015–2016, up 7% over the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2016). This influx of international students has created new challenges for U.S. universities, among them assuring that

international students adhere to U.S. ideas of academic integrity. Plagiarism is considered a significant violation of academic integrity (Bretag, 2013). Yet plagiarism is a persistent problem in academia, impacting “academic and professional settings globally regardless of size, scope, or mission” (Doss et al., 2016, p. 543). International students, in a strange environment, are burdened already with psychological, social, and academic pressures and hence at a greater risk of not adhering to the strict policy and guidelines of a U.S. academic honor code (Amsberry, 2010; Bista, 2011). In fact, one study found “academic misconduct and plagiarism [were] prevalent among international students” (Bista, 2011, p. 167). Yet multiple researchers have noted that simply labeling the problem as plagiarism, and thus as a violation of academic integrity, overlooks the complexity of the issue (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Duff, Rogers, & Harris, 2006). Most scholars would agree that some outright cheating does occur, but at times students are blamed and problematized without considering other possibilities (Duff et al., 2006). In our critical case study, we explored how six international students enrolled in two U.S. universities perceived and understood the concept of plagiarism. Our study questions systems that insist on international students’ conformity without their adequate knowledge of or training in a U.S. or Western system of text borrowing and sourcing that may be different from what the students have learned in another culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some scholars argue that international students arriving in the United States from non-western countries such as Thailand, India, or Saudi Arabia may bring with them different understandings of ways of knowing and ways of using information in their academic writing (Amsberry, 2010; Bista, 2011; Divan, Bowman, & Seabourne, 2015; Pennycook, 1996; Velliaris & Breen, 2016; Zimmerman, 2012). Evering and Moorman (2012) contend “the concept of plagiarism is based on a capitalist view of property and ownership” (p. 35); Western culture reasons that people retain ownership of what they create, including their ideas, their knowledge, and their artwork. Yet in some cultures, society, not individuals, own “ideas and concepts” (Mundava & Chaudhuri, 2007, p. 171), leading to very different ways of learning. For example, students in Asian countries typically receive high grades for memorizing exact words, text, or ideas since memorization is an essential measure of the learning process (Madray, 2013). Bista (2011), in a survey at a southern U.S. university, found that 93% of 300 international students

from 19 countries indicated they “primarily memorized information” (p. 164) to learn and to prepare for tests in their homeland. Divan et al. (2015) found that international students in a biological sciences program in the United Kingdom had “strikingly different” (p. 371) academic experiences from U.K. students, particularly concerning writing and evaluation. In their study of ESL graduate students at a Canadian university, Abasi et al. (2006) discovered that the way the less-experienced students thought about and understood text sourcing was influenced strongly by the way they learned in their own cultures, particularly their perception that “their roles as writers was one of reproducing or transmitting” (p. 114) existing knowledge. By contrast, the more experienced writers in the study knew what was expected of them as academic writers, specifying that their writing should represent themselves as authors (Abasi et al., 2006).

In contrast to the idea that international students have limited or different understandings of plagiarism or intellectual property, Datig and Russell (2015), in a survey of all undergraduate students at New York University Abu Dhabi, observed that international students had “a point of view on intellectual property and copyright that is similar to the Western definitions” (p. 826). Another recent study, using surveys of 178 students taking courses in the College of Business at a Southeast U.S. university, noticed domestic and international students’ attitudes about plagiarism were similar to each other (Doss et al., 2016). And a survey of graduate STEM students’ perceptions on academic misconduct and plagiarism found “no consistent pattern of differences between those whose undergraduate degree was earned in or outside the United States” (Leonard, Schwieder, Buhler, Bennett, & Royster, 2015, p. 1593).

Other researchers, however, have noted that while some international students have a general understanding of the term *plagiarism*, the students may not realize plagiarism’s significance in U.S. academic writing since plagiarism may not be perceived in the same way in their home countries (Amsberry, 2010; Madray, 2013; Pecorari, 2001). Consequently, realization for many international students comes when their work is marked as plagiarism and they are accused of academic misconduct. In an online survey of students attending six Australian universities, researchers found that international students “were less likely [to] claim to have a knowledge of academic integrity” (Bretag et al., 2014, p. 1158) and were less confident than other students in their ability to avoid a violation of academic integrity. Furthermore, the study concluded that international students,

“. . . compared to domestic students reported proportionally three times as many notifications about an academic integrity issue that needed to be investigated, twice as many meetings with a member of university staff about an academic integrity breach, and more than twice as many incidents of receiving a penalty.” (Bretag et al., 2014, p. 1166)

Similarly, Beasley (2016) found in a study of international undergraduates that the students were “much more likely to get reported for academic dishonesty than were domestic students” (p. 55). On the other hand, Martin, Rao, and Sloan (2011), in a study that examined 158 papers uploaded to the Turnitin.com evaluation system, noted that students (61%) plagiarized “irrespective of ethnic culture” (p. 92) and, more specifically, that Asian students did not plagiarize more than other students. The researchers concluded that acculturation was a better predictor of plagiarism than ethnicity since students who are becoming more familiar with their new environment in the United States are more likely to learn about academic requirements and expectations.

International students also may have different experiences and knowledge about text sourcing. Duff et al. (2006), who studied a cohort of international engineering students in Australia, found that a “taken-for-granted assumption that all students were conversant with using scholarly sources and applying the author-date system of referencing” (p. 674) was incorrect. These different ways of text usage and borrowing can result in confusion for international students who are new to Western academic programs. Common problems that the authors of this paper observed in international students’ academic writing included lack of acknowledgement of sources in the text, inadequate paraphrasing, and inappropriate or missing references. While many universities have now implemented text-matching software to detect these types of problems, literature shows the importance of educational workshops as part of the early prevention process (Abasi et al., 2006; Divan et al., 2015; Gunnarsson, Kulesza, & Pettersson, 2014). A study involving international engineering master’s students in Sweden focused on teaching students correct sourcing techniques rather than on learning how to avoid plagiarism (Gunnarsson et al., 2014). The researchers learned that the cohort needed “basic education on how to cite and reference properly” (p. 416), particularly paraphrasing. A mixed-methods analysis of an embedded writing program involving international biology master’s students in the United Kingdom found “early pedagogical response reduced plagiarism levels amongst international students” (Divan et al., 2015, p. 358). In addition to different ways of learning and different experiences with

text sourcing, international students often encountered linguistic problems in their academic writing, such as difficulties understanding instruction (Kuo, 2011; McLean & Ransom, 2005; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000), and difficulties learning new styles of writing (McLean & Ransom, 2005; Velliaris & Breen, 2016). Although English is not the first language of many international students studying in the U.S., international students are expected both to speak well in a language in which they may not be fluent and to write well in that language to meet the academic standards of Western universities (Amsberry, 2010; McLean & Ransom, 2005). Because U.S. universities use long-established entry-level assessments such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL), and Test for Writing English (TWE), university faculty may assume and expect that international students are prepared for English-only studies. Kuo (2011) argued that while many international students receive high scores on such tests, the exams are ineffective at identifying the specific needs of students beginning academic studies in a different language and culture, and an unfortunate and flawed general perception, when international students struggle with language, is that “poor English is associated with low intelligence” (p. 40) when in fact these students are likely among their countries’ highest achievers.

Complicating an already complex problem for international students are challenges to the idea of authorship attributed to postmodern thought (Pennycook, 1996) and to the saturation of the Internet and social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. The Internet is now “redefining how students—who came of age with music sharing, Wikipedia and Web-linking—understand the concept of authorship and the singularity of any text of image” (Gabriel, 2010, p. 11). And as Pennycook (1996) noted 20 years ago, “within contemporary academic writing practices, with layers of citations, e-mail, cutting and pasting, and so on, the adherence to supposed norms of authoriality are becoming increasingly hazy” (p. 216). Since then, advances in technology have continued to make access to information easier, eliminating barriers and unlocking opportunities, both bad and good; technology and the Internet have made it easier to copy and paste and thus easier to commit a violation of academic integrity, but also have made it easier to detect copying and pasting.

Markedly, a growing body of discussion and research (Abasi et al., 2006; Baird & Dooley, 2014; Bretag, 2013; Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Duff et al., 2006; Gunnarsson et al., 2014; Haitch, 2016; Pecorari, 2013; Pecorari & Petric, 2014; Pennycook, 1996) challenges the use of punitive rather than educational responses when violations of academic integrity, such as

plagiarism, are detected. International students need time to adjust to Western expectations, which must be made clear (Abasi et al., 2006; Duff et al., 2006). Bretag et al. (2014) recommend that universities “take a holistic approach, rather than regarding students as the only stakeholders with the responsibility to uphold academic integrity” (p. 1166) and suggested universities move beyond just giving students information. Haitch (2016) further suggests that issues of plagiarism among international students should be considered

“ . . . a gift to institutions, an opportunity to reflect on the basis of their rules, the extent to which these rules are rooted in specific cultural values and social norms, and the extent to which these values and norms are shifting in an age of communal information and communal creativity.” (p. 265)

The outcomes of such reflection could be beneficial to both domestic and international students.

In the discussion that follows, we share our interpretation of the perceptions of our participants, one undergraduate and five graduate international students studying in the United States. We invited them to voice their experiences, problems, concerns, and fears about plagiarism and ways to avoid it. By studying the problem of plagiarism from their perspectives, we aim to contribute understanding that could guide educators and policymakers as they work to ensure the success of an escalating population of international students in the United States. This qualitative, multi-case study is situated at two ethnically diverse U.S. universities, one in the western United States and the other is in the Southeast. As a teacher of research and literacy courses, one author sometimes serves international students in her graduate courses and has observed their unique challenges as learners in English classrooms. As librarians, two authors have been offering workshops on avoiding plagiarism for several years now for both international and domestic students to introduce them to the Western concept of plagiarism, writing methods and practices, and citation styles for different disciplines. As educators, we understand that, whether intentional or unintentional, any inappropriate use of information not only can damage students’ academic pride and self-esteem, but also can be detrimental to their academic success and even to their careers. Although this discussion focuses on international students, we strongly refute any notion that plagiarism is a problem only among international students. As Pecorari (2013) noted, “producing academic writing is part of entering academic culture, and plagiarism can be one of the consequences of this ‘culture class’

for any novice academic writer” (p. 116). Further, McLean and Ransom (2005) observed, international students’ academic skills “are not necessarily ‘wrong’ . . . they are just different” (p. 16).

RESEARCH METHOD

Our research is critical in that we challenge an academic system that “privileges some at the expenses of others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21) and we seek to “disrupt and challenge the status quo” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 433). We sought to provide a platform for the voices of international students, studying at two U.S. universities, in order to insert new perspectives into traditional thinking on problems with academic text sourcing. As interviewers, we assumed “that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit” (Patton, 2015, p. 426). Our participants represented a triangulation of nationalities and fields of study on two distinct campuses, and use of a triangulation of researchers inserted multiple perspectives into our analysis.

We initiated our study after meeting at a conference, where two of the authors were presenting their work on international students’ experiences with text sourcing. Together, in a new study, we sought to understand (a) how international students studying at our respective universities interpreted and understood the concept of plagiarism and (b) what information, interactions, and experiences shaped international students’ thinking about plagiarism. We developed interview questions based on our knowledge of existing literature and on our own experiences with international students. After Institutional Review Board approval granted through a cooperative agreement between our universities, we field-tested the interviews on each campus with an international student with whom we were acquainted, and minor adjustments were made to the interview questions.

Setting

Our study was situated on two distinct U.S. campuses. One is a southern regional U.S. university that enrolled about 11,000 students at the time of the study. Information from the university’s website indicated the student population was predominately White, but 960 non-U.S. citizens (excluding students classified as “resident aliens”) were enrolled at the university in 2015, representing nearly 9% of the student body. The second site of our study was a western, regional, U.S. university with a highly

diverse student population of more than 24,000 in 2015, including many first-generation college students and more than 1,400 international students.

Participants

International students were recruited for the study on each campus using a form of purposeful sampling, which seeks “in-depth understanding of specific cases: *information-rich cases*” (Patton, 2105, p. 53, emphasis in original). In particular, the researchers used snowball sampling (Patton, 2015), in which the researchers used their contacts with graduate students and international students who then suggested potential participants from amongst their own acquaintances. Two participants, Shiva and Raju, came to the United States from India; Shiva was seeking a master’s degree, and Raju was pursuing a doctorate. One other participant, Ayman from Saudi Arabia, was a doctoral student. Fatima, who was working on a master’s degree, was from Bangladesh, and Sunil, the lone undergraduate student, was from Sri Lanka. The sixth participant, Anton, came from Russia to the United States. The various majors of these students included engineering, computer science, political science, and pre-law. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research team utilized an interview guide approach (Patton, 2015) to ensure the same series of questions were asked for each participant on both campuses, while researchers were “free to explore, probe, and ask questions” (p. 439) during the interview process. Participants were interviewed individually, with interviews ranging from 45 to 90 min, and the interviews were then transcribed verbatim. Participants reviewed the written transcript to correct errors or misunderstandings and to provide further clarification if they felt the need.

Individually, researchers read and re-read the transcripts line-by-line, using a form of constant comparison to look for significant, meaningful explanations based on the research questions. Codes from all researchers were then combined, broad categories were assigned based on the common codes, codes were compared to the data to be certain of their fit, and overarching themes were then developed in order to share the participants’ stories, as interpreted from the data. Researchers used emails and conference telephone calls to communicate at each stage of analysis.

Researchers' Roles

The first author is an associate professor who teaches graduate research and literacy courses. She acknowledges respect and admiration for individuals from other nations who are studying in U.S. graduate schools, recognizing them as competent intellectuals and courageous individuals who likely have overcome significant hurdles to take their seats in U.S. university classrooms. She also acknowledges that she has not always been so accepting of international students, counting herself as once among those who espouse a deficit view—that international students who want to earn a U.S. degree should bring to class the same skills as U.S. students. Her thinking changed as she worked side-by-side with international graduate students in research, recognizing that their unique backgrounds and experiences, not level of intelligence, shaped the way international graduate students approached their studies and responded to her teaching. The first author proposed the study, after meeting the second and third authors, in an effort to increase her own and others' understanding of the phenomenon of international education in U.S. universities and to challenge misconceptions about the students.

The second author is a librarian and assistant professor who offers library literacy courses in addition to subject-specific bibliographic instructions. She began her academic journey as an international graduate student, when she was first exposed to the Western concept of text usage and borrowing. She gained a clearer understanding of the depth of this problem when she started offering workshops for avoiding plagiarism. Through her close work with international students from several different countries she acquired a deeper insight of the factors that influence this form of academic dishonesty. She is motivated to continue her work with both international and domestic students, yet she is particularly concerned that international students are still struggling with text sourcing.

The third author is a librarian and professor who, in addition to serving as a liaison librarian to students and faculty in social work, public health, nursing, and the Honors College, teaches information literacy to undergraduate students in the School of Nursing. Through her close work with international students both at the graduate and undergraduate levels in the classroom and in the university library, she has developed a clearer understanding of the obstacles and stresses international students endure in studying in another country and in a language that may not be their first language. As a specialist in using the American Psychological Association (APA) citation style, the third author meets one-on-one with students

writing research papers and master's theses. Within these consultation sessions, she realized that many international students did not wholly understand the U.S. concern for attribution of sources.

RESULTS

International Students' Understandings of Plagiarism

While each of the participants demonstrated in the course of our discussions that they understood the U.S. way of thinking about plagiarism, their own definitions and explanations varied more than we expected. Raju and Shiva, both from India but studying at different U.S. universities, gave similar answers when asked to define plagiarism. According to Raju, "any kind of cheating during the exams or . . . when you are doing some assignment or homework, it's plagiarism." Shiva defined plagiarism by giving this example:

"When in the classroom, if a professor or instructor, when he gave the assignment maybe that is take-home online quizzes, so we should not copy from somebody else . . . like anyone in the class, we should not copy directly and also we should not ask . . . [for] help in the assignments."

In other words, if you cheated on a test, you were taking someone else's answer and not giving your own answer, so that, in Shiva's thinking, was plagiarism.

In the United States, discussions of plagiarism commonly refer to text sourcing and borrowing in academic writing, particularly formal papers; it less often involves a discussion of cheating on exams, considered another form of academic misconduct. While our participants from India spoke initially of exams when defining plagiarism, the other participants in our study all described plagiarism in the context that is most often referenced in the United States, that is, in relation to text borrowing and sourcing. In defining plagiarism, Fatima mentioned copying from a published paper. "It can be a statement, a word, or whatever it is, but it's not mine. I have copied it from somewhere else." She understood that the concept of plagiarism includes the assumption that copying without sourcing is the same as claiming the work as one's own work. For Ayman, plagiarism meant "taking somebody's else work without appropriately citing them." The action became "taking" and inappropriate because no citation was given. Like Shiva did in his discussion of plagiarizing on exams, Sunil used a scenario

to define plagiarism, explaining that if he found a relevant article for his paper on the Internet,

“ . . . you’re not supposed to copy straight from the computer . . . because the professor does not like to see the same thing—what is written by somebody else—to be copied . . . He wants it in our own words, paraphrase it or whatever and write in a different format than is on the Internet.”

Perhaps Anton had the broadest definition of plagiarism. His definition went beyond words and text to incorporate the plagiarism of ideas:

“ . . . Plagiarism is something—when you take the idea and not only the idea but also the way that the researcher or some other person described that idea and literally copy, paste it, and say that it’s your work. So you don’t represent that person, you just literally say that ‘this is my work, this is my idea’.”

Again, the participant demonstrated an understanding that plagiarism was an act of appropriating text that belonged to someone else. Eventually in our discussions, both participants from India also addressed plagiarism as it relates to academic writing, thus demonstrating that they, too, understood the idea of plagiarism as inappropriate use or inadequate citation of someone else’s work.

International Students’ Obstacles and Difficulties with Academic Writing

These understandings of plagiarism by international students were developed in different ways, depending on their academic and cultural backgrounds, which differed significantly. Both participants from India said they first became aware of the concept of plagiarism during undergraduate studies in India, and Anton became aware of plagiarism in undergraduate studies in Russia. Ayman learned about plagiarism even earlier, in his pre-college studies in Saudi Arabia.

Fatima said she first learned the definition of plagiarism in her undergraduate studies in Bangladesh, but only because she needed to answer a question correctly on an exam. “So it was that—just a concept for me,” she said, and she had no real understanding of or concern for avoiding plagiarism. “What could be the depth of it? I wasn’t aware . . . It was just a definition of a concept. I just wanted to memorize that so that I could pass

my course.” Only Sunil said he had no prior knowledge of plagiarism before beginning studies in the United States.

Regardless of participants’ sources or levels of knowledge about plagiarism, all participants indicated that the U.S. university community has a limited or inaccurate perception of how much international students’ know and can do when it comes to text sourcing in academic writing. The participants, discussing their own experiences as well as their observations of other international students’ experiences, said professors often assume incorrectly that international students not only understand plagiarism but also are equipped with skills, such as paraphrasing or managing citations and references. Even after learning the meaning of plagiarism, participants said, international students still struggle to grasp the significance of the concept as it is understood and used in the United States because of cultural differences. “Some of our graduate students, especially international ones, they don’t know about it, so they do plagiarize without realizing that they plagiarize,” Anton said. He continued:

“So then the teacher explains that this was plagiarized, and they say, ‘Oh! I didn’t know that.’ Well the teacher thinks that they did it intentionally, but the student may not do it intentionally because that’s how they do it in—back in their country.”

One cultural difference noted by participants was that the United States assigns more rigor to academic writing and text sourcing than many other countries. In fact, five of the six participants said academic policies and procedures for text sourcing and borrowing are more rigorous in the United States than they were in participants’ own countries, thus their understanding when they began studies in U.S. classrooms was not the same as that of U.S. students. In Russia, for example, Anton said students could “copy and paste” without rewriting a text as long as the author’s name or a link was listed parenthetically at the end of the pasted material; use of quotation marks or paraphrasing, a U.S. requirement, was not necessary in his academic work in Russia, Anton said. And professors in Russia did not monitor students’ text sourcing as closely as professors do in the United States, he said. Fatima said citation of sources did not garner the level of significance in Bangladesh that it requires in the United States. “If I do it in my country, then I won’t be, frankly speaking, I won’t be that much serious about that. But if I do it here, then I have to [cite] because it’s reflecting my grade.” In Saudi Arabia, Ayman said, students learn about plagiarism “but it’s not emphasized, I think, enough to be considered seriously.”

Another cultural difference noted by some participants was their own countries' expectations for students to memorize large chunks of text in order to reproduce it word-for-word in their writing. Ayman explained that when religion is an integral part of studies, as it is in Saudi Arabia, students memorize and reproduce sacred texts, the source of which is unquestioned and thus never cited because a sacred text is "not something you can invent." Text replication in Saudi Arabia also is a means of learning from exemplary models of writing and is a way of improving handwriting, Ayman said.

One challenge that international students must confront when attempting to meet U.S. guidelines for text sourcing involves their learning in a language other than their first language. While their language improves with time, international students who are new to the university likely will be struggling still with language acquisition and thus need more time than U.S. students to write papers. Compared to their U.S. counterparts, international students may be doing twice the work since many students have to first translate texts into their own language to rewrite, and then rewrite the texts again in English, participants noted. To avoid plagiarism, Fatima said, she must "work hard. I have to read more, I have to learn more" than U.S. students. Ayman complained that universities unfairly "accept international students with poor English and then leave them to survive by their own." He said the university's engineering program "is not an easy school, and as we see from time to time international students suffer great pressure, and are having problems" because of their limited language skills.

Rephrasing in a different language can be time consuming, and international students feeling the pressure to complete an assignment may be tempted, just like U.S. students may be tempted, to look for short cuts or skimp on requirements for the sake of completing an assignment on time. Anton noted that one such coping strategy he observed international students using involved copying and pasting a text, then replacing as many words as possible with synonyms. But such a strategy was problematic due to the nuances of language; Anton laughed as he recalled the way synonyms sometimes changed the meaning of sentences. The strategy became more problematic when students wrote papers that used lots of technical or scientific terms since fewer synonyms exist for such words, he noted. Another strategy that students developed to save time involved trying to make certain all but a very small percentage of citations were correct. Ayman said students believed that professors who used Turnitin.com, a plagiarism detection software, established an allowable percentage of matched texts for student papers and only flagged student papers for manual

review if the percentage of matched text went above the allowable percentage of matches.

Participants in the study also noted that international students often developed knowledge about plagiarism from their peers. Raju stated that “most of the student I know, in undergrad also, they usually learn by their experience or asking by friends” and recalled helping fellow international students when he recognized their citation errors. Fatima recalled talking with an international student from a Middle Eastern country about what she had learned about plagiarism. “So she was just really shocked and tells to me, ‘What are you saying? How is possible to mention every single citation?’” Ayman said students who cannot find support from the university often establish their own support system: “They search for a classmate who may accept to review their work and take notes from in case they miss any.”

Some participants pointed out that just as students in the United States sometimes cheat deliberately, some international students they observed plagiarized deliberately, but participants said most international students simply needed to be taught the academic writing skills needed to avoid plagiarism. Their discussions of the way U.S. universities delivered information included a few examples of meaningful instruction, but more often participants described what they said were failed or inadequate attempts at helping international students succeed in academic writing that required citing others’ works.

How Universities Deliver Plagiarism Information

Participants’ discussions of international students’ experiences in U.S. classrooms indicated that professors at both universities delivered information about plagiarism in brief discussions, often in an orientation or introductory course. In some cases, participants said, professors addressed plagiarism only after it became an issue, and many professors never discussed plagiarism. During his studies in U.S. university classrooms, Shiva said, information on text sourcing, if provided at all, was brief, was early in the program, and involved a list of *don'ts*:

“The training was not there in my entire . . . program. But starting of the class, some professors talk—talk like ‘You should not copy from, don’t copy directly from the Internet. Don’t use any sources directly. Don’t copy from friends.’ This kind of talk was like two minutes. Two minutes per professor.”

But “talk” was not instruction in the skills needed to prepare students for the rigor of academic writing, Shiva noted, and even such brief directives were not shared by every professor. Sunil also noted that “only a very few professors” talked about text sourcing and about avoiding the pitfalls of plagiarism. He speculated that professors “probably think the students already know, and so they probably don’t want to talk about [plagiarism] unless there’s a situation where somebody has done it. I noticed that a lot of people, they don’t talk about it at all.”

Other participants mentioned brief discussions that occurred early in their studies. Raju recalled being cautioned about proper sourcing during a group meeting for new students with his academic advisor. Anton said plagiarism was addressed in a one-hour introductory course for students in his field of study, and Ayman recalled plagiarism being mentioned only in introductory courses. Ayman contended such an approach was flawed: when professors deliver information about plagiarism so soon after international students begin their studies in the United States, students have limited success at internalizing that information because they likely are experiencing culture shock and information overload. “They just came from a different country, they dropped to completely American way of thinking, of talking, and all that accent . . . It is just so hard to focus,” said Ayman. The stress that comes with learning in another culture and another language is especially significant in the beginning, when students still think in their first language and have to move back and forth between languages to process information, he said. “It just messes your mind.”

Ayman explained why he thinks he was able to succeed in academic writing despite limited instruction in appropriate ways of crediting sources. The instructor in an introductory English class on essay writing made it clear that plagiarism was “prohibited,” Ayman said, so he sought out more information: “I just learned it on my own.” Ayman said he is:

“. . . really curious to know what I am expected to do and know. So maybe to someone else, covering the subject of plagiarism as a part of writing an essay is not enough, especially when the English is a second language to that person . . . [who] has many other things to worry about, including finding good verbs, expressive adjectives, proper descriptive adverbs, correct grammar, to name a few.”

In other words, some international students who are self-motivated, like Ayman, may not need much help, but many others may need more than a cursory explanation of plagiarism in an introductory course.

Requiring students to read lengthy policies and guidelines also was problematic, Anton said, regardless of how long the students had been studying in the United States. Anton recalled completing required online training for ethics in research that included a section on plagiarism. The course instructed students to read lengthy texts and then answer questions about what they had read, he said. By the time of the training, Anton had been studying in the United States 3 years and had written many papers, yet he found the reading difficult.

“At the beginning I tried to read the things. I already knew it because I’ve been here three years, and just logically I could answer the questions. But I just had to try to read it, and it was too much information.”

He eventually skipped ahead to the questions without reading the texts, and he said other international students did the same thing because the reading was too difficult and time consuming.

University’s Punitive, Rather Than Educational, Response to Plagiarism

Some international students only learned about plagiarism when they were accused and threatened with penalties. Being accused of wrongdoing was upsetting, according to participants in our study. Fatima learned about plagiarism when her grade was reduced. “I was just shocked what happened,” she recalled. “I did a good job and I really worked hard . . . because I needed to pull up my GPA.” When she inquired about her grade, she was told that she plagiarized. “Then I explain to her why: I don’t understand the whole thing, I didn’t have any idea about the concept.” Fatima said she was able to convince the professor to remove the penalty, but she was warned such an error would not be overlooked again. Ayman also was accused of plagiarism, and he felt his work was discounted because of a simple error. “I was very upset. I put a lot of work into that report—a lot of work.” He explained how he made the mistake:

“I accidentally copied several sentences and never came back to them, you know, in the rush—it was final exam week. I thought I did take care of them . . . I missed the quotations only; the rest of the citation requirements were there. It was maybe two sentences or three without quotations.”

He was dismayed that his academic work might be compromised by what he considered a minor error, so dismayed that he subscribed to and was still using at the time of the study an online service that checked his papers for plagiarism before he submitted them for evaluation or publication.

In both of the previous cases, professors appeared to be considerate; Fatima's professor gave her a second chance, and Ayman earned an A for the course after all. But participants said professors were not always so accommodating. Anton said students' grades were reduced for plagiarism "a lot," and Shiva referred to grade reduction for plagiarism as "a bad thing" that can be detrimental to an international student's future. Participants said universities should place more attention on teaching international students skills and strategies for proper academic citation and less attention on punitive measures that feel threatening. "Penalty is not sufficient to improve one's writing" Fatima noted. Ayman recalled that when an international student's work was questioned, "It would be investigated, period. Or yeah, it's like having a trial: 'I will check' and 'I will do this and that'." Anton said he first learned about the concept of a lawsuit when he learned about plagiarism:

"When I came here . . . then people explained to me that you should be very careful what you say, where you say, what you use. So I thought, 'Oh, how that suing thing works against you'! . . . That's not a threat in Russia at all."

At least two participants recalled specific teaching about writing skills that would help them avoid plagiarism. Raju remembered being taught such skills in a master-level introductory course that focused on writing as craft and on academic publishing. By the time he enrolled in the course, Raju had published already and had learned enough about text sourcing to succeed, yet he still had uncertainties. The course taught him about software that could assist with citations, he said, and "cleared up all my doubts" about text sourcing. He recalled suggesting to his advisor that undergraduate international students take a similar course. "You have to tell the students" how to avoid plagiarism, he said, and then they need to learn the strategies for writing and the online tools available to assist with citing. Those tools make citations easy, he said. Yet many international students still think they must manually place every period, every comma in a citation, he said; they don't know that there are tools that do the work for you. Fatima said a professor once helped her to learn academic writing skills, particularly skills that would help her avoid plagiarism, because Fatima was planning to publish and wanted to be a good representative for her country.

How International Students Would Change the System

Participants in our study said international students at U.S. universities need more consistent, more effective, and more frequent instruction on Western ways of citing sources in academic writing. Shiva said information about appropriate ways of citing sources was delivered inconsistently. “The university should take the responsibility” to effectively teach international students correct text borrowing and sourcing skills, he said. The participants said training should be conducted more often and in more classes, not just during introductory coursework. Participants also asked for shorter assigned readings but more examples and practice in such skills as paraphrasing. Ayman said more supplemental instruction in individual classes for international students “could help students to be more clear about what was going on and then have their time to be spent on actual homework as opposed to actually figuring out what’s going on.” He said the university needs “system level thinking” that looks at the needs of international students and establishes parameters. He recalled a program at another university he attended in which international students were given written copies of lecture notes so they did not have to seek help from students, who might or might not have been supportive. “You have, instead, a system and policy,” he said. “You would not have the problem of waiting until the last minute, where plagiarism may occur due to a rushing work.” Another potential support program suggested by Ayman would involve establishing peer networks:

“If a professor say, “Okay, I would give bonus points to those who help their peers in proofreading their work,” for example. This way you have students can write in much less pressure, because they know someone would check if it make sense, and you have students practicing their leadership and teaching skills and getting bonus points in the class. And an instructor does not have to worry much about issues such as plagiarism and cheating. And so you end up having a very positive and smart academic environment with lesser problems, hopefully. And it’s a beautifully collective-effort program and win-win situation.”

He added that the university “may need, instead, to increase their English proficiency scores if they don’t want to support the supplemental instructions.”

DISCUSSION

Regardless of prior knowledge about text sourcing, our participants' knowledge of the concept of plagiarism and of what is deemed appropriate for text sourcing in academic writing appeared to be strongly influenced by their time and experience in U.S. classrooms. Only one participant was an undergraduate, and all participants had been in the United States for a number of years. We suspect that, similar to the finding of Abasi et al. (2006), our participants had been in the United States long enough to learn the rules governing text sourcing in the United States and had been developing their identities as researchers and writers in English. Research that explored the perspectives of international students sooner in their studies at U.S. universities might provide additional information about their understandings regarding text sourcing and plagiarism.

The international students in our study clearly considered U.S. requirements for text sourcing both challenging and problematic for international students; however, data also clearly showed that these students felt the onus for resolving the problems belonged to the university, which by both its actions and inactions has failed to adequately teach an often unknowing population about U.S. requirements for proper text borrowing and sourcing in academic writing. Furthermore, participants indicated that the university community's lack of support to assist international students with the hurdles and challenges they faced when they took on academic work in a second language or in a different country intensified the students' problems. Our data indicated that the university's assumption that international students understand plagiarism, the brief amount of class time devoted to understanding text sourcing, and the use of punitive rather than instructional responses to plagiarism all are symptomatic of the university's failure to address the real challenges that international students face when they attempt to become part of the U.S. academic community. This lack of support on the part of the university and faculty in turn can lead to frustration, stress, and misunderstanding on the part of international students, and at times such frustrations may make unacceptable ways of text borrowing seem more attractive options.

We also believe faculty attitudes and lack of attention to this dilemma could send a message to international students that proper sourcing is not important or that faculty are not concerned with international students' success. Our study confirmed what Pecorari (2001) found, that "some students do indeed need . . . an explanation" of plagiarism. But a simple explanation is not enough. As our participants and other researchers (Duff et

al., 2006; McLean & Ransom, 2005; Vellairis & Been, 2016) have observed, international students need assistance both with language and with academic skills. Comprehensible training should include examples and opportunities to practice the craft of academic writing, including the skills that help international students avoid plagiarism. Appropriate ways of crediting sources should be discussed more often, both at the beginning of an international student's academic career and continuing throughout the student's training, so that plagiarism becomes not a looming threat but part of an ongoing academic discussion. We also note that the problem of plagiarism may vary by discipline, since students are required to write more in some subjects than in others. Universities should explore additional, discipline-specific workshops, especially for graduate students.

Finally, following the work of other researchers (Abasi et al., 2006; Chandrasoma et al., 2004), we suggest that training is needed not just for international students, but also for the faculty who teach them. We believe training which helps faculty to understand the significance of language and culture on international students' learning could lead to increased understanding of the academic needs of international students and could result in a shift in thinking from judicial and penal policies and decisions to developmental and mentoring policies and decisions that recognize the international student as a valuable learner in an academic community. The university's support of opportunities for faculty's professional development in the area of international students' learning about text sourcing and academic writing is essential in an age that has made international studies in English-speaking countries more popular than ever.

At the same time, we recognize that faculty members can be challenged to find the time needed to work with international students. Many institutions have established collaborations between faculty and librarians. Perhaps a more structured and proactive approach that focuses on international students' needs can be mutually beneficial to both stakeholders. Additionally, university campuses should utilize centers for international education, which could play a vital role in integrating different campus support systems.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Our study included a diverse but small number of international students in two distinct university settings. Our aim was to complicate the plagiarism discourse by bringing in the multiple perspectives of these students, who represent five different countries and five different fields of study, in hopes

of increasing the depths of our understanding about the phenomenon being studied. While some commonalities or similarities with other international students are possible, each of our participants shared a story unique to his or her experiences in a specific “social, historical, and temporal context” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 252) and thus their stories should not be generalized to those of other students or settings.

CONCLUSIONS

As scholars and researchers, we feel obligated to question and think critically about our teaching and learning. Through this research process, we have increased our own—and we hope others'—understandings of international students' perceptions and experiences while studying at two distinct U.S. universities. Bringing international students into the conversation about academic integrity and ways to avoid violations such as plagiarism should be part of every university's response to its international student population. We believe that what we learn in such conversations can be used to improve not just our interactions with international students but also our interactions with all students who look to us for guidance and direction in their academic pursuits.

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