

# PLAGIARISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE THESES IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** This article argues that plagiarism in Indonesia exists due to some reasons. The reasons range from the requirements on the part of the students to adhere to uniformity in terms of thesis format to failure on the part of the government to effectively enforce a regulation dealing with plagiarism. Anecdotal observations as a student in one Indonesian university will give color to the discussion throughout this article. A recommendation to subdue plagiarism in Indonesia will conclude the article.

**Keywords:** English language, plagiarism, punishment.

A piece of my recollection goes back to a point about a student who went to see a lecturer for consultation about his thesis proposal. While bending her head to the student's proposal, the lecturer said, "You should look at other theses available in the library and follow the pattern exactly like them because those theses have been standardized with the regular standard of this campus' rule on the organization of thesis writing." This kind of utterances is often reported by students who are writing theses. They have to follow the previous pattern done by other students who have completed their theses. The content of theses found in the Indonesia's university library is like a series of ID cards in which the pattern of the writing organization is mostly the same. The difference is only stated on the name of the writer, and the name of the instrument and the data, the location of the sample being taken and other specific information just like the year of the thesis and the name of the place where the thesis is conducted. These kinds of phenomena are not without reasons. This article highlights the reasons behind the uniformity of theses written by Indonesian students, and especially English language students, and the ease to find out indications of plagiarism in the theses. This article also provides some recommendations to avoid plagiarism in thesis writing.

## FALSE ASSUMPTION ABOUT STANDARDIZATION

One possibility attributable to the uniformity of thesis organization is that, in Indonesia, lecturers tend to ask the students to write thesis with standard-

ized form of thesis organization. They may, even, receive the book of the standardization of thesis and other form of academic writing guidance from the university which show their path in producing their academic writing. To give an example, in one university in East Java, the students are required to comply with *Pedoman Penulisan Karya Ilmiah* (Guidebook for Academic Writing) when writing thesis. To some extent, this guidebook will be useful for the students to understand the overall organization of a thesis. However, this guidance might also prevent the students from creating something new.

This reason is a potential aspect where we would find that many theses in Indonesia are written with almost similar organization and even similar content since the writer is not brave enough to make something different from the standard guidance of writing. Writing thesis in a different organization will not yield in a creative impression but in a rebellion impression which results in the disqualification since the students do not conform to the exact pattern of the thesis guidance.

## LACK OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The second possibility is that critical analysis has not been widely championed as a norm in the university life. What the students do might be only trying to find resources as many as possible without any attempt to criticize previous researchers. Students tend to show "respectful" assumption that those writings must have been approved in terms of correctness, validity and reliability. Possibly, students have

not been encouraged to criticize other scholars. Whatever the previous scholars have said and write is believed as something true since they think that those writing could not be published unless they are good and correct pieces of writing.

In addition, the cultural value of rote learning might also give a big contribution to this lack of critical analysis. Rote learning is still highly appreciated and, thus, still used in testing the students' competence about certain subjects. In this case, the students are asked to memorize the content and then prove how good their memorization is by answering the questions in their test. The more they memorize, the bigger chance they will have in getting a good mark no matter how shallow their understanding, let alone, their critical analysis is about the material being tested. The teachers will be very satisfied and they think that their job is done when they have checked from the students' final test sheet that the students can transfer the information, that is, what the teacher has said and wrote in front of the class, into their answer sheet (Ryosaeba, 2007). This kind of test can drag the students into a perception that memorization or rote learning is the key to their success in academic achievement than critical analysis competence which is not referred to in the final test. Since the students are used to transferring the knowledge from the book or from their teacher's notes without any acknowledgement, they think that quoting someone else's work is legal.

This situation is also proved by a study which shows that students who grow up in rote learning academic environment assume that using other's writing without due acknowledgment is acceptable (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002).

### **WRITING IS NOT A HABIT**

The third potential cause of plagiarism in Indonesia is that the students are not encouraged to write from the early level of education. Suwarna (2006) states that there is a mistake occurring in the elementary, secondary and tertiary education system in which the atmosphere of writing has not been adequately cultivated. Even though some writing has been practiced by students, the referencing ethic has not been widely practiced in their writing process.

This is one of the basic causes for the students' difficulties when they have to start to conduct their thesis since they have not been adequately familiar with writing, especially a kind of writing where referencing ethic must be met. Sometimes the students do not know the importance of referencing. Some-

times, they know about it but they keep paying no heed to it since they are not really aware of the consequences of their deed in the world of research, especially in thesis writing. In this case, the students just quote what she or he reads from any kinds of literature with an assumption that whatever they quote will strengthen their thesis and make their thesis a "true" writing, being unaware that to quote those sources without due analysis (and acknowledgement), on the contrary, will weaken their thesis.

### **EMPHASIS ON RESULTS OVER PROCESS**

The fourth possible cause of plagiarism is the spread of emphasis on the result rather than on the process. For example, on the basis of my recollection, there was a teacher who gave assignment to the students to make an essay in English about their ideals. As a foreign language, English would be a difficult medium in which the students wrote. There was a student who tried to tell about her ideals to be an astronaut in her future. She wrote her essay with her limited English with a lot of grammatical errors and lack of vocabulary stock to express her enthusiasm and unlimited imagination about her ideals. After she submitted her work, the teacher gave her work back and said, "There are too many grammatical errors in your paragraph. Just write something simple. The more you write the more grammatical errors you will make."

This girl was so disappointed. The appraisal about her ideals that she was looking forward to did not come from her teacher's mouth. Subsequent to this upsetting event, every time the teacher gave another assignment about writing in English, she just took some writing in certain magazine or newspaper and submitted it to the teacher. She never wanted to write her own story in English since she knew that the teacher only paid attention to the final result of her writing but never knew how hard she finished her writing. The appreciation only came when the work was right or marvelous. It was not based on how hard the students worked to produce it under the condition that each student has different level of competence in achieving something. This situation, I believe, is yet another strong factor that triggers plagiarism in Indonesia.

### **ACCESS TO CYBER INFORMATION**

The fifth possible factor is the availability of cyber facilities which enable the students to freely find any kinds of information. What they have to do is just to sit, turn on their computer, browse any

kinds of writing they want to find out as if they were in a supermarket where they can get whatever they need. When they find something interesting from the Internet, they just copy and paste it into their writing exactly like taking some products from the supermarket into their trolley. While the original writing needs lots of time to find suitable words to express certain messages, these plagiarists also need lots of time in choosing which expression they want to use for their writing since there are so many choices available in the Internet.

In this situation, I would assume that when the theses must be written in English, the act of “plagiarism shopping” becomes more severe. This is because lots of choices all over the world which are mostly written in English make the number of choices for plagiarism in English writing extremely tremendous.

Related to the foregoing discussion about the big chances of plagiarism from the Internet, there is also another form of plagiarism which has become the public secret in the academic society where the students are accustomed to buying the “ready-to-submit” theses from certain “theses services”. I call it as public secret since these formally forbidden activities are still widely done by students. In addition, this plagiarism has been “legalized” by the existence of many websites which facilitate the service for any students who wants to “buy” a certain thesis (Yudistira, 2006). What they need to do is only telling what kind of field they want to study and how they want to conduct their research. The “advisor” from this certain website will they take care of the rest of it and deliver the final finished thesis which has never been initiated by the student. For the compensation, the student just pays for about 2-5 million rupiahs for that thesis. This relatively affordable transaction has made the phenomenon of plagiarism grow unbearably quickly in Indonesia.

## LACK OF PUNISHMENT

The sixth reason is that the punishment for plagiarism has not been adequately enforced. The paralyzed control from the Indonesian government over this academic crime make the process of plagiarism run smoothly, easily and safely since the doer does not have to worry about the consequences of their academic crime.

Besed on my anecdotal observations, many students come to the teacher or lecturer with someone’s work which has been downloaded from an article in the Internet. Many titles of thesis are, at a glance, exactly the same except for the name of the

place where the thesis is being conducted, the name of the research data and the year indicating the time of making the thesis. The title on the cover of the thesis is almost similar and the content of it is not different from previous thesis.

Sometimes, the students take other people’s opinion in their writing and claim them as their own opinions. This is indicated by the absence of references referred to. The worse thing is they do not only take other’s opinions but also the words by quoting exact words from other resources into their thesis. They believe that by quoting exactly from other resources, they can free themselves from grammatical errors. Unfortunately, this practice seems to be welcomed by the teacher or lecturer since they only focus the evaluation of the students’ writing on the standardized form of writing and the grammatical correctness of the writing.

The unfortunate thing is that the regulation of punishment for plagiarism is not strictly implemented. Western countries, such as the United States and Australia, with their strict control of plagiarism, have made plagiarism intolerable crime resulting in penalty for the doer that he or she will be exiled from the university (Rush, in Yudistira, 2006). Cahyono (2005a; 2005b) also reports a similar situation.

Cahyono (2005a) states that Australian students have better understanding of plagiarism and more awareness about plagiarism policy. The research finding also shows that Indonesian students, on the other hand, have less awareness about plagiarism policy. Furthermore, the Indonesian students are not sure whether their universities also have a regulation dealing with plagiarism. One of the reasons for the difference in the the Australian and Indonesian university students’ understanding of plagiarism is that Australian universities, unlike Indonesian universities, have clear policies on plagiarism and how to avoid it (Cahyono, 2005b).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The point discussed above are some of the potential factors underpinning the vivid actions of plagiarism in Indonesia. The persistence of this condition, I believe, will make Indonesia “paradise” for plagiarism which, sooner or later, will paralyze the people’s creativity in making something new in the Indonesian research world.

However, even though plagiarism in Indonesia is not without reasons, this serious problem is not without solutions. Based on those reasons among many other reasons which can be found, I believe that there is still hope to prevent the fatal effect of

plagiarism in the future time. I do hope that there will be unflagging law enforcement which results in strict punishment for plagiarism. I am sure that applying the policy on plagiarism in academic environment and reforming the education system about

respecting other people's work from the early level of education will change Indonesian academic environment, from being the "paradise" of plagiarism to be the paradise of brilliant and creative people who keep creating novel discoveries and inventions.

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