



A STUDY OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS PLAGIARISM AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Academic misconduct, especially plagiarism, has always been a critical academic issue in Thailand. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID crisis has also led to another kind of pandemic plagiarism. Due to the ongoing lockdown the use of the internet, digital platforms, and eLearning has dramatically increased. This sudden explosion in online learning has further exacerbated attitudes about plagiarism. Needless to say, the internet provides ample opportunities for Thai students to access a wealth of information without visiting their school, college, or university library. While this has led to a boom in searching for online information, it has also made it much easier for students to plagiarize content that they stumble upon. Since Thai students are very weak in English language proficiency there is always a temptation for copying from the internet. Although most Thai institutions have a policy to curb plagiarism and uphold academic integrity, they seem to have a very limited effect. This research is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which states that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls together shape the individual's intentions and behaviors. For the purpose of this study, an online survey was crafted using the variables pertinent to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). A modified conceptual framework based on TPB was utilized. The results show that Thai students lack proper knowledge and implications of plagiarism. This study also provides suggestions to curb plagiarism and improve the English proficiency of Thai students.

Keywords: English proficiency, internet, plagiarism, TPB, Thailand

1. Introduction

The proliferation of internet has revolutionized distribution and access to information in every part of the world. Consumer's data related to businesses, banking, medical and financial sectors have become integral part of modern eCommerce. Similarly, in

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education, huge strides have occurred by integrating various technologies for the purposes of teaching and learning. During the ongoing COVID crisis adoption of new technologies is on the rise. Now anyone with a portable or mobile device can have instant access to huge amount of information. For all academic purposes, cutting edge knowledge is freely available for faculty and students. For instance, faculty members can use access up-to-date information to prepare course materials for their students. It is become a routine that students will use internet-based resources to complete their assignments, write term papers, project reports, and dissertations. Easy and instant access to free information has also led to breaches of ethics by practices, such as, copying, cutting and pasting, inappropriate referencing, purloining (submitting an assignment that is substantially, or entirely, the work of another student with or without their knowledge), poor paraphrasing or verbatim copying without citing the source, thus presenting the material as one's own (Warn, 2006). Hence plagiarism has become a serious issue in countries where medium of instruction is not English.

Pick up any history or guidebook on Thailand and we will quickly read, often in the first paragraph, a statement that Thailand owes its unique culture to the fact that it was never colonized by European powers. Hence English or any other European language never found its place in Thai educational system. It is only in the last few decades many international educational institutions have adopted English as a Medium of Instruction (MoI).

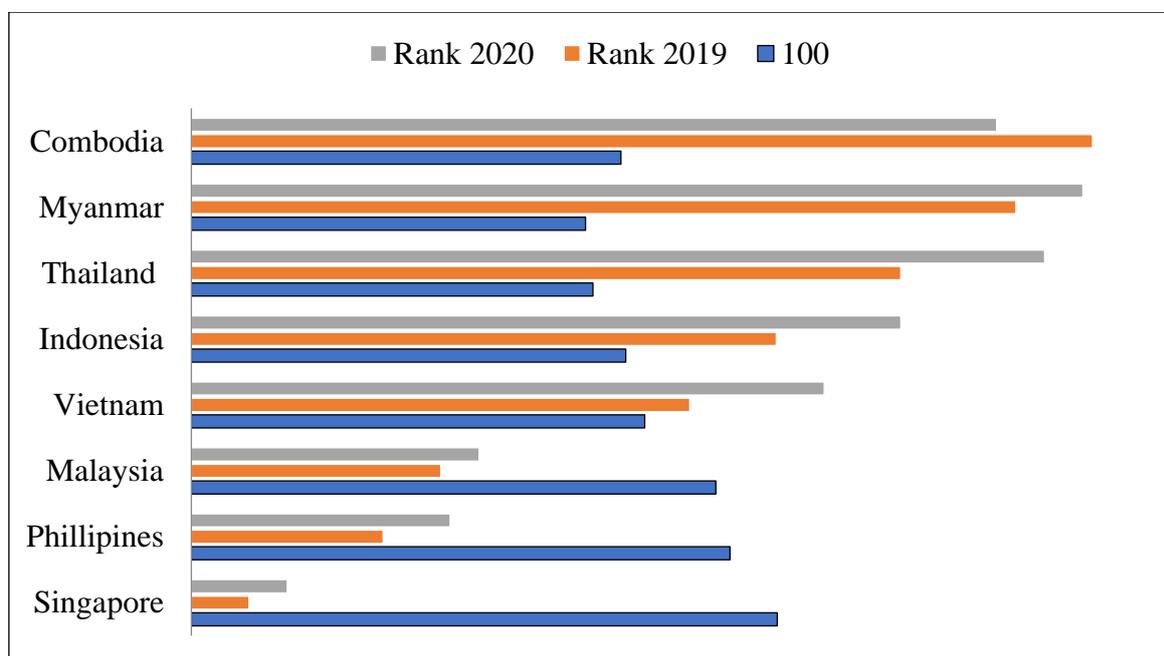


Figure 1: EF Ranking 2020

(Source: E. First. "EF English Proficiency Index." Education First. <https://www.ef.co.th/epi>)

Despite of rapid expansion of international educational institutions, proficiency of Thai students in English language remains very low. In the recent EF English Proficiency Index (2020) ranking of 100 countries and regions for English Skills, Thailand is ranked 89 with a score of 41.9, indicating very low proficiency. Thailand's ranking in 2020

dropped from 74 to 89 dipping 15 places and now it lies in the lowest ranks among 100 countries. Within the ASEAN block, Singapore, Philippines and Malaysia have better ranking. The same report also indicates that in Asia, Thailand has the worst English proficiency except for Cambodia and Myanmar. In Asia, Thailand's score (41.9) is also far behind South Korea (54.6), China (52.00) and Japan (48.7), which have been steadfastly working to help their citizens to improve proficiency and skills in English language.

1.1 Reasons for Rampant Plagiarism in Thai Academia

In the last two decades plagiarism has turned into a rising global issue in higher education. This study was conducted in 2020 to explore the knowledge and attitudes of Thai adults towards plagiarism. It involved quantitative research methodology using a survey during the COVID-19 lockdown. The survey consisted of 41 questions offered through Survey Monkey, a commercial portal for conducting research. Many questions in the survey were crafted to find their knowledge and attitudes about prevalence of plagiarism in Thai academia.

Most EFL/ESL instructor employed in Thailand encounters regular instances of plagiarism stemming from the following type of problems.

- 1) Students do not understand what constitutes plagiarism (Maxwell et al. 2008).
- 2) Students' English language proficiency and writing skills are poor (Hu, 2011).
- 3) Students seem to think they will never be caught plagiarizing (Hosny & Fatima, 2014).
- 4) Students claim they are too pressed for time to complete the assignment up to standards (Pollock & Tolone, 2020).
- 5) Students fall prey to peer and social pressure for better grades (Granitz & Loewy, 2007).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The major purpose of this study is to discover the reasons of plagiarism, especially among EFL/ESL students and to provide a reliable solution to mitigate this phenomenon. This study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What extent of knowledge Thai students have about academic plagiarism?
- 2) How Thai student's attitudes towards plagiarism affect their academic practices?
- 3) What steps can be taken to improve academic skills to thwart plagiarism?

1.3 Significance of the Study

In the last few decades, many studies about plagiarism have been conducted in countries where English is not the native language. The mainstream view of plagiarism in Thailand is nothing more than a transgressive act. The alternative understandings of the underlying cultural issues of plagiarism in EFL/ESL students have been largely ignored. Academic plagiarism deserves more attention in Thailand, especially, at tertiary level because the number of students plagiarizing is on the rise. This study aims to raising awareness about academic plagiarism and provide some strategies and solutions to be on the safe side. In addition, the findings of this research will help in altering the modes

of instruction and reduce the possibilities for plagiarism for Thai students. On the basis of this background the current study aims to find out the attitude of Thai students towards plagiarism. Is the habit of plagiarizing a cultural problem or it is because of the inadequate control measures? Are Thai school, colleges, and universities have strong policies for deterring plagiarism practices? This paper is an attempt to analyze these issues.

2. Literature Review

Academic misconduct is not a new phenomenon but there has never been a systematic record of the extent of plagiarism in Thai academia. One of the studies conducted at university level examined how Thai students and teachers perceived plagiarism (Sasima, 2015). This study indicated implications for ethical behavior, as it pointed out multiple reasons behind plagiarism, which go beyond dishonesty. It recognized other causes, such as lack of proficiency in English language, poor teaching practices and policies.

In a case announced in 2008, a doctoral thesis was found to show 80% plagiarism (Fernquest and Mala, 2008). Thereafter, plagiarism has been in the forefront attention of Thai academia. Although, some universities had attempted to address this problem, still the problem exists widely among Thai students (Cadigan, 2015). Many other studies also reveal that Thai students could neither understand the concept of plagiarism nor how to do proper citations and most of them lack critical thinking and academic writing skills (Ehrich et al. (2015) & Techamanee (2016).

It is quite clear from the EF World Ranking that in every part of the world the EFL students' ability to attain proficiency in English language remains an uphill task (EF Ranking 2020). Although mastering the anti-plagiarism rules is critical to their ability to compete in most international universities and in their chosen disciplines but the question is whether or not these students have the knowledge and writing skills necessary to comply with the anti-plagiarism rules or whether or not the plagiarism rules should be modified to accommodate their limitations

With the expansion of internet and easy access to online repositories and databases, the issues of plagiarism in all its forms have been studied in many parts of the world. According to Pecorari and Petrić (2014) plagiarism is often treated as a very old, broad, and multidisciplinary field of study. According to these researcher's exploration of this topic goes back to the mid-1980s when internet penetration was limited. This study also emphasizes the need for terminological distinctions; a concern with EFL students and teachers with very differing understanding of issues related to plagiarism.

A very recent multiple case study conducted by (Ronai, 2020) examined seven institutional documents from universities in four countries (Australia, China, Finland and Germany) with the aim of determining how plagiarism is defined in institutional contexts. This work revealed the need for further research in how institutions construct official definitions of plagiarism.

In a study conducted by Sutherland-Smith (2005) in Australia found that the EFL teachers regarded cyberspace as a limitless environment for 'cut and paste' plagiarism in

students' writings. This study indicated that EFL students considered the internet a 'free zone' and is not governed by legal proprietary copyright laws. Such conflicting views relate to differing notions of authorship and attribution. This research highlighted the need to reformulate plagiarism policies considering global and technological perspectives of authorship and lack of proficiency in English language.

There has been continuous research into issues of plagiarism among ESL students and instructors pointing to a need for long term socially situated discourse necessary to grasp and reach generally agreed-upon definitions of, and beliefs and attitudes toward, such complex academic issues as plagiarism. According to Lei (2014), over the years, Chinese university students' perceptions of plagiarism have been extensively investigated. But those of their teachers have been surprisingly under-researched. Their study found that the teachers reported varying knowledge of different types of transgressive writing practices and variegated perceptions about the different causes of plagiarism. But for some reason, these studies demonstrated punitive attitudes towards plagiarism. Their study also revealed significant differences between teachers with and without overseas academic experience in their knowledge as well as opinions about plagiarism. Their findings highlight the complexity of plagiarism as an intertextuality phenomenon and point to the important role of cultural and academic practices in shaping their perceptions.

Another study conducted in China by Guangwei Hu and Xiaoya Sun (2016) analyzed the popular, yet over-simplistic, view that Chinese EFL students and teachers are tolerant of plagiarism and pointed to academic and teaching experience as influences on their perceptions and attitudes concerning plagiarism.

Another study conducted in 2018 by for students enrolled in EFL courses in Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia found that in terms of knowledge, the students only understood plagiarism as an attempt to copy and paste. Students claimed that they never got caught doing plagiarism even though they had engaged in it many times. They also expected the teachers and universities to have a clear instruction on what to do and what to avoid while writing (Permana & Santosa, 2018).

A similar study conducted in Kuwait found that the students plagiarized in writing just to get good grades and pass the course. Their main source for plagiarizing was the internet. However, through the journal writing practice, the policy of free choice of topics evoked divided reactions from Kuwaiti students (Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016).

Jennifer Teeter (2015) conducted a study in Japan to address the imbalances in English-language analyses on plagiarism which ignores Japanese-language sources and studies. Her study indicated complex awareness of the educational and societal issues influencing occurrences of plagiarism and a desire of students to receive effective training in academic writing techniques.

In U.K., Stella-Maris Izegbua Orim (2017) conducted an extensive study on Nigerian students and found that they struggle with the right perception of plagiarism. This study also suggested that the higher education institutions need to monitor and evaluate plagiarism data and adapt measures in the institutional context. The author

concluded that there is need for more empirical studies to be carried out in Nigeria and other African higher education institutions.

Bahadori et al. (2016), in their study in Iran, concluded that the excessive stress on detection of plagiarism has made for the development of database systems (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, IEEE Explore., etc.) in recent years, but they are not effective, and even if they are, they are not the best solutions for mitigating plagiarism.

In their study, Phanlapa et al. found that in Thailand students have low awareness of plagiarism in every aspect of it, especially ghost writing, copying, and pasting from several sources without citation. They also concluded that Thai students plagiarize both intentionally and unintentionally due to their lack confidence in academic writing. In this decade, both autonomous and self-access learning have also been emphasized in the Thai Teaching Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQFHE, 2013). Evidence reveal that a substantial number of Thai students did not understand the concepts of plagiarism and lacked the skills of paraphrasing and summarizing. Most of the Thai students lack academic writing skills because of their examinations are largely conducted in the multiple-choice mode. Rote memorization has become an integral part of academia. As a result, the reading and \ writing skills in English language is not developed.

Another study conducted in Thailand with a sample of 129 international high school students indicated that male students find academic dishonesty more acceptable than female students. The study also found that older students agree less with academic dishonesty than younger students. This study also indicated that the relationship between academic dishonesty and achievement emotions is weak. However, the relationship is moderate for class level and gender (Darrin Thomas, 2017).

2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Since its introduction, the “Theory of Planned Behavior” (TPB) as proposed by Icek Ajzen (1985) has been extensively used in psychological and social studies. The original theory (Figure 2) is based on three core components- attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, which together shape an individual's behavioral intentions. According to this theory behavioral intention is the most proximal determinant of human social behavior. In the last 35 years this theory has undergone several changes.

As early as 1998, Conner and Armitage proposed the expansion of the TPB. They proposed the possibility of review of TPB dual-process model of attitude-behavior relationships. They also proposed expansion of the TPB to include consideration of the human volitional processes to determine how goal intentions may lead to goal achievements.

Very recently, Jin, Su, and Chen (2021) constructed a hypothesized model based on the TPB and incorporated pedagogical beliefs, personal innovativeness, peer influence, and facilitating conditions to predict teachers’ perceptions regarding the perceived implementation of creative pedagogy in structural equation modeling course. This study found that pedagogical beliefs and personal innovativeness had a significant impact on their attitudes, while peer influence exerted a significant influence on subjective norm.

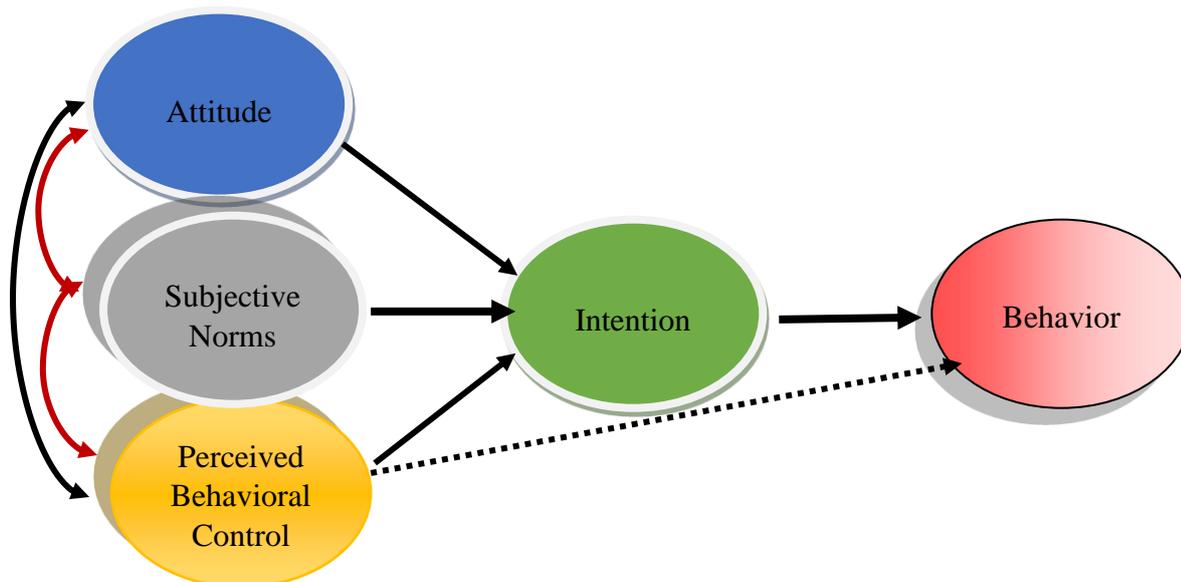


Figure 2: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
(Derived from https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Theory_of_planned_behavior)

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In a recent paper Phanlapa et al. (2020) investigated how Thai students actualize plagiarism within an undergraduate program. This study used the TPB as a lens through which the issues about plagiarism were interpreted and explored. Their findings not only exposed the inadequacy of students’ understanding of the complex issues of plagiarism but also their motivations for engaging in plagiarism. which mainly centered upon lack of control and confidence in their academic abilities and endeavors. This study uses its own model “Mediated-moderated Regression Model’ which is derived from TPB. The proposed model uses the Conceptual Framework illustrated and in Figure 3 given below on page 16.

3. Material and Methods

The study proposes a model which is called 'Mediated-moderated Regression Model'. In the proposed model (Figure 3) Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism (PAP) is the independent (X) variable and Behavioral Intention towards Plagiarism (BIP) is the dependent (Y) variable which is mediated through an intervening variable (M) Subjective Norms towards Plagiarism (SNP). The effect of PAP on SNP is moderated through another moderating variable (W) Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism (NAP). The model measures the direct and the indirect effects of X on Y. The data were analyzed by using a 'Process' developed by Andrew F. Hayes (2012) and Model No.7 was used for the analysis.

3.1 Statistical Analysis Method

The statistical form of the model is explained in the following equations:

Moderation analysis is used when one is interested in testing whether the magnitude of a variable's effect on some outcome variable of interest depends on some third variable or set of variables. Here the effect of PAP on SNP is moderated through NAP. The statistical model takes the form of a linear equation in which SNP (M) is estimated as a weighted function of X, W, and the product of X and W, as in equation 1:

$$\hat{Y} = \alpha + b_1X + b_2W + b_3XW + e_Y \quad (1)$$

where, \hat{Y} is the estimated value of outcome variable SNP, α is the Y-intercept, b_1 , b_2 , and b_3 are the unstandardized coefficients of X, W, and XW respectively, and e_Y is the error term.

The regression effect of the independent variables SNP (M) and PAP (X) on the outcome variable BIP (Y) is measured in equation 2:

$$\hat{Y} = \alpha + c_1X + c_2M + e_Y \quad (2)$$

where, \hat{Y} is the estimated value of outcome variable BIP, α is the Y-intercept, c_1 , and c_2 are the unstandardized coefficients of X, and M respectively, and e_Y is the error term.

The data were collected from the students of 7 universities in Thailand from September 2020 through November 2020 by an online survey of a validated questionnaire (Appendix A) instrument. The questionnaire was made available both in English and Thai languages. A total of 428 cases were collected from the students of the above 7 universities and the raw data were subjected to the editing process. There were no missing data in the collected data set, however, there were cases of 'Long Strings' and 'Insufficient Effort Responding (IER)'. The average response time is estimated to be 4 minutes to complete the survey. Therefore, cases which are identified for using less than 4 minutes are removed from the data set. There were 45 cases of Long String and IER. The number of cases which are detected as outliers by box-plot method was 36, they are also removed. Therefore, the total number of cases left in the final data set was 347.

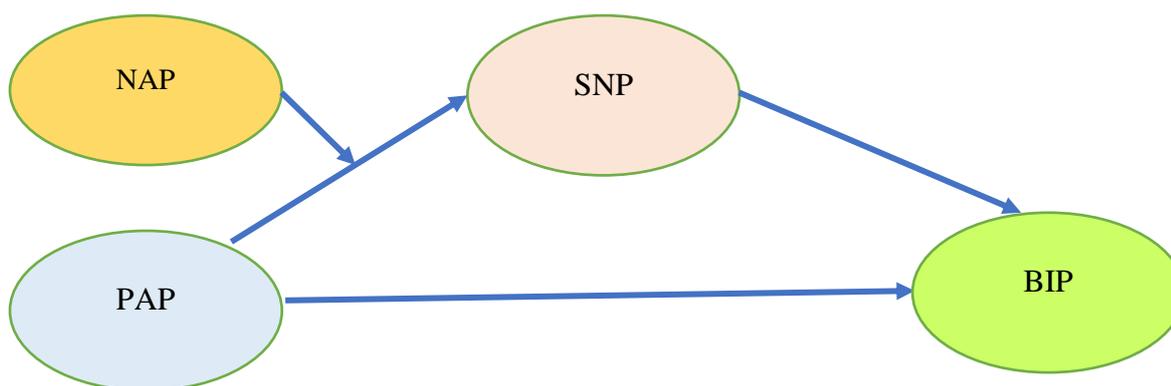


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Legend: Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism = NAP, Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism = PAP, Subjective Norms towards Plagiarism = SNP, Behavioral Intention towards Plagiarism = BIP.

The proposed conceptual framework leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism of the students in Thai universities has a significant direct effect on Behavioral intention to do plagiarism in their project works or research reports.

H2: Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism of the students in Thai universities has a significant indirect effect on Behavioral intention towards plagiarism through the mediating variable subjective norms towards plagiarism in their project works or research reports.

H3: Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism of the students in Thai universities has a significant effect on Subjective Norms towards plagiarism in their project works or research reports.

H4: Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism of the students in Thai universities has a significant effect on Subjective Norms towards Plagiarism in their project works or research reports.

H5: The interaction between Positive and Negative Attitudes towards Plagiarism has a significant effect on Subjective Norms of the students in Thai Universities.

4. Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the students in the sample group (Table 1) reveals that 68 percent are Females and 32 percent are Males, this is due to the fact that a high female proportion in the demographic ratio of Thailand, 91 percent are Thai students, and 76 percent in the sample belongs to the age group of 18 to 34 years of age. Seventy-eight percent of the students in the sample are enrolled in their Bachelor program and 16 percent in Master and the remaining 6 percent in the Doctoral Program. Regarding the disciplines in which the students are doing their programs, the majority (71%) belongs to Social Science, Humanities, and Language studies.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Sample Group

Classification	Sub-class	n	Percent
Gender	Female	235	67.7
	Male	112	32.3
	Total	347	100.0
Age group (yrs)	18 – 24	214	61.7
	25 – 34	49	14.1
	35 – 44	47	13.5
	45 – 54	30	8.6
	55 – 64	6	1.7
	65 – 74	1	0.3
	Total	347	100.0
Nativity	Thai	316	91.1
	Non-Thai	31	8.9
	Total	347	100.0
Study program	Bachelor	272	78.4
	Master	55	15.9
	Doctoral	20	5.8
	Total	347	100.0
Discipline of study	Natural Science	22	6.3
	Physical Science	13	3.7
	Math /Engg	66	19.0
	Social Science	56	16.1
	Humanities	75	21.6
	Others	115	33.1
	Total	347	100.0

The Regression Results of the mediation-moderation regression model is displayed in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Regression Results (Process written by Andrew F. Hayes -Model No.7) Part-1

n = 347	R = 0.64
F (3, 343) = 80.05	R-sq = 0.41
p = 0.000	MSE = 0.16

Subjective Norms to Plagiarism (Y)	Coeff.	S.Er.	t-value	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.29	0.42	3.06	0.00	0.46	2.11
Positive attitude to Plagiarism (X)	0.41	0.15	2.80	0.01	0.12	0.70
Negative attitude to Plagiarism (W)	0.09	0.19	0.48	0.63	-0.28	0.46
Interaction (PAP x NAP)	0.03	0.06	0.44	0.66	-0.09	0.15

Table 3 shows the regression results of the moderating part of the model which is to prove hypotheses No. 3, 4, and 5. Since the F-value (3, 343) = 80.05, p = 0.000, the model is significant at less than 1 percent level, there is high degree of positive correlation (R=0.64) between Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism and Subjective Norms. The variation in the predicted variable is explained to the extent of 41 percent (R-sq = 0.41) by the predictor variable. Since the b-value (b=0.41) of Positive Attitude towards Plagiarism on Subjective Norms is significant (p=0.01) the direct effect is significant at 1 percent level. Therefore, H03 (Null hypothesis) is not acceptable. In other words, positive attitude towards

plagiarism has significant effect on subjective norms towards plagiarism of students in Thai Universities. Negative Attitude towards Plagiarism has no significant direct effect on Subjective Norms as the p-value = 0.63 which is greater than 0.01 level of significance, hence, the Null hypothesis H04 is accepted. The interaction between Positive attitude and Negative attitude on Subjective Norms (moderation effect) is also not significant as the p-value = 0.66 which is greater than 0.01 level of significance, hence the Null hypothesis H05 is accepted.

The final outcome variable is the Behavioral Intention towards Plagiarism and the direct effect of Positive attitude towards Plagiarism on Behavioral Intention is significant at less than 0.01 level of significance (p-value =0.00) and, there the Null Hypothesis H01 is not accepted. In other words, for every one-unit increase or decrease in positive attitude the intention to plagiarism will increase or decrease by 0.7 unit. Subjective Norms has a direct effect on Behavioral Intention as the p-value is less than 0.01 level of significance (p-value = 0.00).

Table 3: Regression Results (Process written by Andrew F. Hayes -Model No.7) Part-2

n = 347 R = 0.77
 F (2, 344) = 254.32 R-sq = 0.60
 p = 0.000 MSE= 0.23

Behavioral Intention to Plagiarism (Y)	Coeff.	S.Er.	t-value	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-1.07	0.16	-6.75	0.00	-1.38	-0.76
Positive attitude to Plagiarism (X)	0.70	0.06	11.96	0.00	0.58	0.81
Subjective Norms to Plagiarism (M)	0.48	0.06	7.61	0.00	0.36	0.61

However, the mediation effect of Subjective norms is not significant as the results shows (Table 4) very little variation in the effect size. Therefore, the null hypothesis H02 is accepted, or in other words there is no mediation effect of positive attitude on behavioral intention through the mediator subjective norms.

Table 4: Indirect effect of Positive Attitude to Behavioral Intention through Subjective Norms

Negative Attitude (W)	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
1.80	0.22	0.04	0.15	0.30
2.40	0.23	0.04	0.16	0.31
3.00	0.24	0.05	0.15	0.34

Here the mediated moderated regression model is not significant in this case since the index of Boot LLCI = - 0.05 and Boot ULCI = 0.09 which lies in between zero. As per Table 4 the indirect effect is very low at the incremental level of W from 1.80 to 3.00 and hence there is no indirect effect of positive attitude on behavioral intention through the mediator subjective norms.

5. Recommendations

This reassert was conducted by randomly selecting seven universities out of more than the 70 operating in Thailand. Although the sample size of 347 university students involved in this study is adequate but involving 20% of the universities as well as a larger student population covering suburban regions of Thailand will provide a better insight into the issues of academic dishonesty and plagiarism across the country. Adding qualitative data collected from one-to-one interviews and surveys involving university administrators and policy makers will enhance the validity and usefulness of this study

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to find out whether Thai university students have adequate understanding of academic malpractices, especially their attitude about plagiarism. As is evident from the analysis given above, most Thai students frequently engage in plagiarism without worrying about the consequences. This study indicates the cumulative effect of positive and negative attitudes, and subjective norms on the attitudes towards plagiarism. In the pursuit of an answer to the question of why Thai students' plagiarize the researchers found that the students who do so from time to time justified their actions by alluding to lack of time, busy schedules, and weak English proficiency, which sometimes urge them to take other's ideas without due acknowledgement. Hence NAP combined with PAP mold their Subjective Norms towards Plagiarism (SNP) which in turn drives their Behavioral Intentions towards Plagiarism (BIP). The degree to which NAP and PAP are cultivated partially rooted in lack of proper teaching and learning practices. What is most telling about these findings is that behavioral intentions resulted from their weak academic skills rather than lack of adequate policies. This point would also confirm that, despite often conflicting research results found in the existing literature, the attitudes toward plagiarism seem to be, to some extent, determined by personal attitudes- NAP & PAP. This conclusion is supported by the fact that there is high degree of positive correlation ($R=0.64$) between PAP and NAP and Subjective Norms.

While this research has furthered the knowledge and understanding of the student's attitudes, it cannot be used to generalize the academic flaws of all Thai institutions. Hence this study provides enough incentive for further qualitative studies. To conclude, the best way to reduce plagiarism in Thailand is by shifting the entire responsibility from the students alone to a shared responsibility that involves EFL teachers, curriculum, teaching practices, assessment techniques and institutional policies.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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