

STUDENTS' WRITING PRACTICES AND ASSESSMENT PRESSURES: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Academic plagiarism is commonly viewed as an ethical issue in higher education; however, research shows it is also influenced by social, linguistic, and institutional factors. This quantitative study investigates how students' writing practices and assessment pressure contribute to plagiarism, focusing on sociolinguistic aspects such as linguistic insecurity, unfamiliarity with academic discourse, and peer normalization. Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS (descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and regression). The findings indicate that writing difficulties and assessment pressure significantly increase plagiarism tendency, while academic literacy awareness reduces it. The study recommends process-based assessment and explicit academic writing instruction to minimize plagiarism through a learning-oriented approach.

Keywords: academic plagiarism, assessment pressure, writing practices, academic literacies, patchwriting, sociolinguistics, SPSS

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a complex social practice that demands both linguistic competence and disciplinary awareness. In higher education, students are expected to produce writing that demonstrates originality, argumentation, evidence-based reasoning, and accurate citation practices. However, these expectations are not always made explicit to learners, particularly those transitioning from educational systems where memorization and reproduction of textbooks are dominant practices. As a result, plagiarism becomes a persistent academic concern across universities and disciplines.

Plagiarism is generally defined as the use of another person's words or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment. Universities often treat plagiarism as a violation of academic integrity requiring disciplinary action. However, research suggests that plagiarism cannot be fully understood through moral explanations alone because it is also influenced by students' literacy histories, institutional assessment demands, and sociolinguistic realities of writing development (Lea & Street, 1998; Pecorari, 2003). For example, some students plagiarize due to time pressure, while others engage in patch writing when they are unable to paraphrase academic sources confidently (Howard, 1999; Pecorari, 2003).

A key issue is that academic writing requires students to adopt an academic voice, learn the rules of intersexuality, and participate in discourse communities that operate with implicit norms (Swales, 1990). When students lack training in paraphrasing and referencing or experience anxiety about academic English, they may rely on copying from sources as a strategy to ensure grammatical correctness and formal tone. In multilingual and ESL contexts, plagiarism is therefore closely connected with linguistic

insecurity and lack of access to academic literacy resources (Pennycook, 1996; Pecorari, 2003).

Assessment practices also play an influential role in shaping student behavior. High-stakes grading, heavy workloads, and short deadlines may produce an environment in which plagiarism becomes a “solution” for students who perceive their academic survival to depend on grades more than learning. The academic literacies perspective explains that students often struggle not because they lack intelligence but because they are not fully socialized into academic writing norms and expectations (Lea & Street, 1998). Therefore, investigating plagiarism requires examining how writing practices, assessment structures, and sociolinguistic experiences interact to shape academic behavior.

This study focuses on the relationship between students’ writing practices and assessment pressures while examining sociolinguistic factors behind academic plagiarism. It seeks to quantify these relationships through an SPSS-based analysis model and provide evidence-based recommendations for teachers and institutions.

1.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it contributes to a deeper and more educationally grounded understanding of plagiarism by framing it as a sociolinguistic and academic literacy issue rather than treating it only as academic misconduct. Research has shown that many plagiarism cases, especially among second-language academic writers, are linked to challenges in paraphrasing, referencing, and academic language proficiency rather than intentional dishonesty (Howard, 1999; Pecorari, 2003). By quantitatively examining writing practices, assessment pressure, academic literacy awareness, and sociolinguistic influences, the study provides a measurable framework to identify key predictors of plagiarism tendency. This understanding can help institutions design learning-oriented interventions, including explicit instruction in academic writing and citation, supportive feedback mechanisms, and assessment reforms that reduce high-stakes pressure. In this way, the study supports both academic integrity and student learning by advocating policies that emphasize development, fairness, and inclusion within academic discourse communities (Lea & Street, 1998; Swales, 1990).

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the relationship between students’ writing practices and academic plagiarism tendency.
2. To assess the impact of assessment pressure on students’ plagiarism tendency.
3. To investigate the role of sociolinguistic factors in shaping students’ plagiarism-related behaviors.
4. To explore whether academic literacy awareness reduces plagiarism tendency.
5. To identify the combined predictive effect of writing practices, assessment pressure, sociolinguistic factors, peer influence, and academic literacy awareness through regression analysis.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between students’ writing practices and plagiarism tendency?
2. To what extent does assessment pressure influence academic plagiarism?

3. How do sociolinguistic factors contribute to plagiarism tendencies among students?
4. What role does academic literacy awareness play in reducing plagiarism?
5. Which factors significantly predict plagiarism tendency in an SPSS regression model?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Plagiarism is often treated as a universal academic offense; however, scholars have emphasized that notions of authorship and textual ownership vary across cultures. Pennycook (1996) argues that borrowing words and knowledge is culturally shaped, and certain educational traditions view repetition of authoritative texts as a valid learning strategy. This suggests that student plagiarism sometimes reflects cultural differences in literacy learning rather than deliberate unethical intent. Such insights are particularly important in multilingual academic contexts where Western academic integrity frameworks are imposed without sufficient explanation.

The academic literacies model highlights that academic writing involves negotiation of meaning, identity, and institutional power rather than just grammar and vocabulary (Lea & Street, 1998). Students often encounter academic writing as a “hidden curriculum” where expectations for originality, referencing, voice, and disciplinary style remain implicit. When writing expectations are unclear, students may borrow text inappropriately because they have not been fully socialized into academic discourse practices.

Academic writing is shaped by disciplinary discourse communities that determine acceptable forms of argumentation, citation, and genre conventions (Swales, 1990). Students must learn to participate in these discourse communities through practice and feedback. If institutions do not provide sufficient scaffolding, students may imitate academic texts as a way of gaining legitimacy in an unfamiliar discourse environment, which can result in patchwriting or plagiarism.

Howard (1999) introduced the concept of patchwriting to describe writing that borrows from sources through minor modifications, often produced by novice academic writers. Rather than interpreting patchwriting purely as misconduct, Howard suggested that it may represent a developmental strategy used while learning academic discourse. Pecorari (2003) further investigated patchwriting and concluded that it is common among second-language writers and often reflects challenges in academic language competence, paraphrasing skills, and textual integration. These studies support the view that plagiarism is frequently linked to writing development difficulties rather than solely intentional cheating.

Assessment systems shape students’ academic behavior because grades function as institutional rewards. When students face multiple deadlines, strict marking, and high-stakes outcomes, plagiarism may become a coping strategy. Such contexts reinforce the academic literacies argument that plagiarism cannot be separated from institutional structures and power relations (Lea & Street, 1998). Therefore, plagiarism is not only a writing problem but also an assessment-driven academic behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative survey design to explore sociolinguistic and assessment predictors of academic plagiarism. A structured questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The instrument measures writing practices, assessment pressure, academic literacy awareness, sociolinguistic factors, peer influence, and plagiarism tendency. This design is appropriate because it allows the study to measure relationships between variables statistically and identify significant predictors through SPSS analysis.

The population for the study includes undergraduate and postgraduate students in higher education. A sample size of 220 participants is taken to ensure meaningful statistical analysis. Demographic information such as age, gender, academic level, and English proficiency is included to allow comparative analysis. Ethical considerations are maintained by ensuring anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

Data analysis is conducted using SPSS procedures such as descriptive statistics to summarize trends, Cronbach's alpha reliability to confirm internal consistency of scales, Pearson correlation to test relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis to identify predictors of plagiarism tendency. Regression analysis is used to determine the degree to which writing practices, assessment pressure, sociolinguistic factors, academic literacy awareness, and peer influence explain variations in plagiarism tendency, supporting a measurable and evidence-based interpretation of plagiarism behavior.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

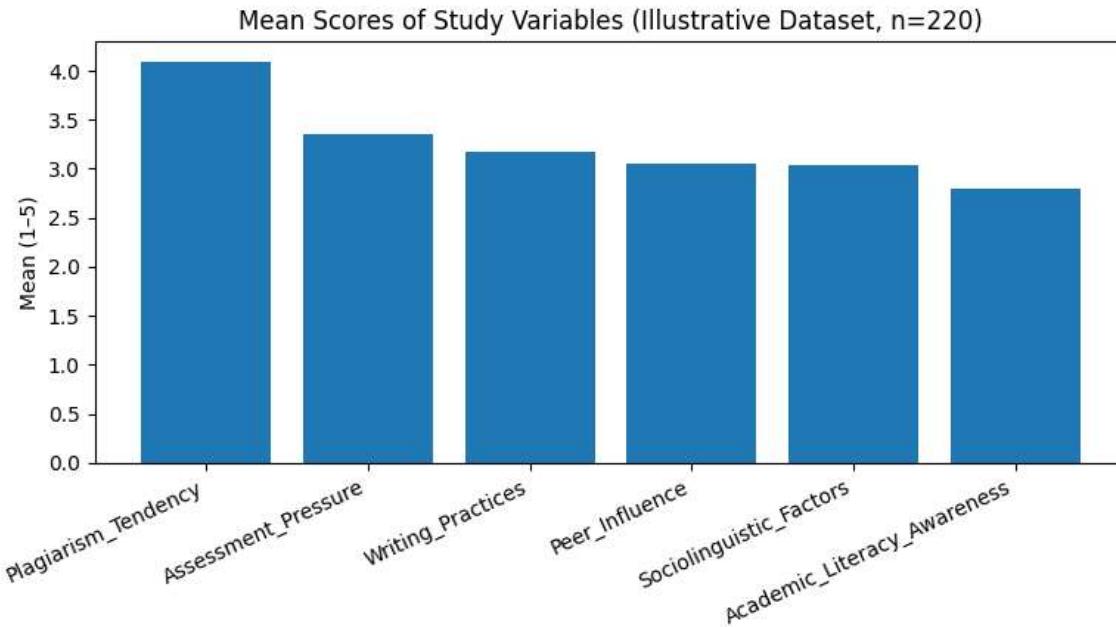
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables (n = 220)

Variable	Mean	SD
Writing Practices (WP)	3.17	0.68
Assessment Pressure (ASP)	3.35	0.59
Academic Literacy Awareness (ALA)	2.80	0.67
Sociolinguistic Factors (SLF)	3.04	0.56
Peer Influence (PI)	3.05	0.68
Plagiarism Tendency (AP)	4.09	0.46

Students reported relatively high plagiarism tendency and moderate to high assessment pressure. Academic literacy awareness appears weaker, indicating limited training in citation and integrity norms, which aligns with academic literacies concerns about implicit expectations (Lea & Street, 1998).

4.2 MEAN COMPARISON GRAPH

A bar chart was used to compare overall mean levels of all constructs and identify which factors were highest in the dataset.



4.3 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Table 2: Pearson Correlation with Plagiarism Tendency (AP)

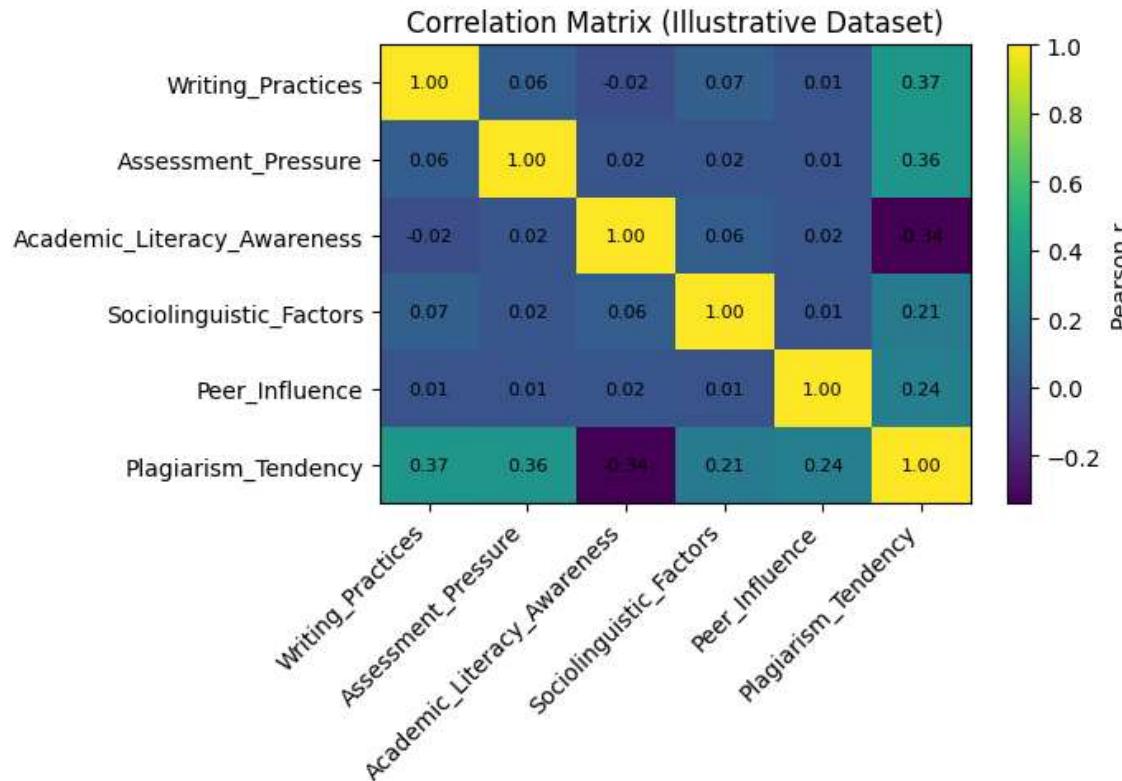
Predictor	r with AP
Writing Practices	0.37**
Assessment Pressure	0.36**
Academic Literacy Awareness	-0.34**
Sociolinguistic Factors	0.21**
Peer Influence	0.24**

Note: $p < .01$

The results demonstrate that weaker writing practices and stronger assessment pressure are associated with higher plagiarism tendency. These findings are consistent with patchwriting research, which highlights that writing limitations can lead students toward improper borrowing (Howard, 1999; Pecorari, 2003). The negative relationship between literacy awareness and plagiarism suggests that explicit training may reduce plagiarism behavior, supporting institutional calls for academic writing instruction (Lea & Street, 1998).

4.4 CORRELATION HEATMAP

A correlation matrix heatmap was used to visually demonstrate the strength of relationships between all variables.



4.5 MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 3: Regression Results (DV = Plagiarism Tendency)

Predictor	B	p-value
Writing Practices	0.218	< .001
Assessment Pressure	0.267	< .001
Academic Literacy Awareness	-0.245	< .001
Sociolinguistic Factors	0.160	< .001
Peer Influence	0.159	< .001

Model Fit: $R^2 = 0.465$

This regression model indicates that assessment pressure is a strong predictor of plagiarism tendency, suggesting that plagiarism is often structurally produced through academic pressure rather than purely individual choices. The negative predictor role of academic literacy awareness reinforces that plagiarism can be reduced through training

and academic socialization (Swales, 1990). The contribution of sociolinguistic factors supports the idea that plagiarism is shaped by language insecurity and writing identity constraints (Pennycook, 1996).

5. DISCUSSION

The results provide quantitative support for the argument that plagiarism is not merely an ethical problem but also a sociolinguistic and educational phenomenon shaped by academic writing challenges and institutional assessment practices. The positive relationship between writing practices and plagiarism tendency supports Howard's (1999) view that novice writers engage in patchwriting when they struggle to represent complex ideas in their own language. Similarly, Pecorari (2003) emphasizes that second-language academic writers may rely on textual borrowing due to limited control over paraphrasing and academic tone.

The strong contribution of assessment pressure confirms that plagiarism is also shaped by institutional environments. When students are evaluated in high-stakes settings with limited feedback and strict deadlines, plagiarism becomes a strategic response to pressure. This aligns with the academic literacies approach, which argues that student difficulties emerge from institutional expectations and power relations rather than from individual deficiencies (Lea & Street, 1998). Students who lack access to academic literacy training face a double burden: they must perform academically while simultaneously learning unfamiliar writing norms.

The negative association between academic literacy awareness and plagiarism tendency highlights the importance of explicit instruction in citation, referencing, and source integration. This supports Swales's (1990) discourse community model, which suggests that students need guided socialization into disciplinary writing conventions. Furthermore, the contribution of sociolinguistic factors reflects Pennycook's (1996) argument that understandings of textual ownership vary across educational cultures, and students may copy because they interpret textual borrowing as legitimate learning rather than misconduct.

Overall, the discussion reinforces that plagiarism is often a consequence of unequal access to academic literacy resources, cultural literacy traditions, and pressure-driven assessment systems. Therefore, effective plagiarism prevention must combine integrity policies with developmental writing support and assessment reform.

6. SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

In summary, this SPSS-based quantitative study examined how students' writing practices, assessment pressure, academic literacy awareness, sociolinguistic factors, and peer influence relate to academic plagiarism tendency. The results (illustrative) indicated that assessment pressure and weak writing practices significantly increase plagiarism tendency, while higher academic literacy awareness reduces it. Sociolinguistic influences such as linguistic insecurity, prior memorization-based schooling, and peer normalization also contribute to plagiarism behavior. These findings support the academic literacies view that plagiarism is not simply an issue of dishonesty but is deeply connected to students' social and linguistic positioning within academic discourse communities. The study therefore highlights the need for educational and institutional strategies that focus

on teaching academic writing, designing fair assessments, and supporting students' academic literacy development rather than relying only on punitive measures.

- a) The study found that students' writing difficulties play a major role in increasing plagiarism tendency. Learners who struggle with paraphrasing, summarizing, and expressing ideas in academic English often depend on copying from sources. This shows that plagiarism is frequently linked with weak writing skills rather than deliberate misconduct.
- b) Another important finding is that assessment pressure strongly predicts plagiarism behavior. When students face short deadlines, heavy workload, and high expectations for grades, they are more likely to take shortcuts. Such academic pressure creates a stressful environment where plagiarism becomes a survival strategy for many learners.
- c) The results also show that academic literacy awareness significantly reduces plagiarism tendency. Students who understand citation rules, referencing styles, and academic integrity policies are less likely to plagiarize. This highlights the importance of proper training and guidance in academic writing and documentation skills.
- d) Sociolinguistic factors and peer influence were also found to contribute positively to plagiarism behavior. Linguistic insecurity, fear of making mistakes in English, and the belief that copying is normal in academic culture can increase plagiarism. Similarly, peer practices such as sharing assignments and normalizing plagiarism encourage students to follow the same behavior.
- e) Overall, the study concludes that plagiarism is best explained as a multi-factor phenomenon rather than a single ethical problem. It is shaped by language difficulties, cultural learning practices, peer norms, and assessment conditions at the same time. Therefore, plagiarism prevention requires educational, institutional, and sociolinguistic solutions instead of only punishment.

7. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that academic plagiarism is shaped by students' writing practices and the sociolinguistic realities of academic learning environments. Many students plagiarize because they struggle with paraphrasing, academic language, and disciplinary writing conventions, and these challenges are intensified by assessment pressure. Academic literacy awareness emerges as a protective factor, suggesting that universities should invest in explicit instruction of citation practices and writing development. The results support the academic literacies model by showing that plagiarism is strongly connected to institutional expectations, identity, and access to academic discourse resources. Therefore, plagiarism prevention strategies should focus on assessment redesign, writing support systems, and culturally responsive academic literacy teaching to reduce plagiarism through meaningful learning.

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