

**What do academics know and do about plagiarism?
An interview study with Chinese university teachers of English**

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Abstract

Previous research on plagiarism has increased awareness and knowledge of the various aspects of this issue, such as contributing factors to plagiarism, students' and teachers' perceptions of plagiarism, and institutional policies and regulations on plagiarism. Yet much of this research, especially on the latter two aspects, has been conducted in Anglo-American contexts or English-as-a-second-language (ESL) settings (where English is an official or important language in the larger societal context), while the diversity of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts (where English as a foreign language is largely used only in the language classroom) remains relatively under-researched. Of those studies that did focus on EFL contexts, the majority were based on survey data that were limited in the depth of information collected. To address this relative lack of in-depth understanding of how plagiarism is understood and acted against in EFL contexts, this paper reports on an interview study with 13 EFL teachers from 12 universities in mainland China. The study focused on the teachers' knowledge and attitudes concerning plagiarism, plagiarism-related pedagogical practices, as well as perceived stances and expectations of their institutions in plagiarism prevention. Its findings contribute to the current knowledge base of EFL academics' views and practices regarding plagiarism, add to our understanding of EFL teachers' experiences concerning plagiarism in specific educational settings, and inform institutions' efforts to develop and improve strategies and policies for preventing plagiarism.

Keywords: plagiarism, institutional policies, English as a foreign language (EFL), Chinese EFL teachers

Introduction

Drawing on words and ideas from previous work is a central process of knowledge making (Jalilifar, Soltani, & Shooshtari, 2018; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014; Pecorari & Shaw, 2012). This is a delicate, convention-governed process (Bloch, 2001; Pecorari, 2001), in which certain expectations must be met and established practices complied with in order to steer clear of plagiarism (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2005). In the Oxford Dictionary, plagiarism is defined as “the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own.” Straightforward definitions such as this are helpful for establishing a preliminary understanding but fail to capture the diverse practices, conceptualizations, and perceptions that plagiarism as a complex notion might entail. Over the past few decades, plagiarism has been pervasive and increasing on an international scale (Pickard, 2006; Zhang, Yin, & Zheng, 2018), owing in part to a readily available wealth of Internet sources that could be easily plagiarized (Liu, Lu, Lin, & Hsu, 2018; Wu, 2018). This trend is particularly worrisome for institutions of higher education, as unchecked plagiarism poses a threat to institutional reputation and compromises students’ educational experience (Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006). Accordingly, plagiarism has engendered increasing concern and continued research attention in academia. A substantial and growing body of research has been conducted, covering a wide range of issues related to plagiarism, including contributing factors to plagiarism (e.g., Bennett, 2005; James, Miller, & Wyckoff, 2019), students’ and teachers’ perceptions of plagiarism (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Wilkinson, 2009), and institutional policies and regulations on plagiarism (e.g., Hu & Sun, 2017; Yamada, 2003).

The currently dominant understanding of plagiarism is deeply rooted in such Western values and concepts as copyright, ownership, and intellectual property (Pennycook, 1996; Sapp, 2002), which may not be shared by other cultural milieus with their own time-honored cultural and literacy practices (Chandrasegaran, 2000; Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Matalene, 1985). China, as an active exporter of a rapidly growing number of international students to institutions of higher education all over the world (Zhang et al., 2018), has often been singled out as a prototypical example. Previous research has looked into Chinese students’ knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism (e.g., Deckert, 1993; Hu & Lei, 2012; Shi, 2006), as well as their writing or textual borrowing practices (e.g., Currie, 1998; Li & Casanave, 2012; Pennycook, 1996). Several explanations have been offered for these students’ difficulties in adjusting themselves to the Anglophone academic conventions of source use. These include marked differences between China and the West in what is perceived to require authorship acknowledgements (Ison, 2018), China’s long history of encouraging learning practices involving the imitation of experts and incorporation of unattributed well-known words from classics into one’s own writing (Bikowski & Gui, 2018; James et al., 2019), and a lack of training in academic writing and instruction in source attribution at the undergraduate level (Hu & Lei, 2015). However, the bulk of previous research on plagiarism has been situated in Anglo- American contexts

or English-as-a-second-language (ESL) settings, where English is not the mother tongue of the learners concerned but an official or important language in the larger societal context (Li, 2015). The small number of studies that did investigate English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts, where English is largely found only in the classroom, focused mostly on students' perceptions of plagiarism (e.g., Deckert, 1993; Ehrich, Howard, Mu, & Bokosmaty, 2016; James et al., 2019). Teachers' perspectives have received insufficient scholarly attention (Pecorari & Shaw, 2012), despite the pivotal role that teachers can play in pre-empting student plagiarism through educating students about plagiarism and teaching them legitimate intertextual practices (Hu & Lei, 2016).¹ A research focus on teachers' plagiarism-related beliefs and practices in a context like China is warranted, because in an era of globalization, literacy practices in non-Anglophone contexts, China included, are increasingly influenced by the dominant English discourse conventions (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Furthermore, the growing policy attention to plagiarism and academic integrity at national and institutional levels in China also makes it meaningful to investigate how plagiarism is understood by those who are involved. Thus, both the lack of plagiarism research on teacher perspectives and the aforementioned developing trends accentuate the need to investigate what Chinese university teachers know and do about plagiarism.

The present study aims to address this need by focusing on a sample of Chinese teachers of English from multiple universities in mainland China. It investigates these teachers' knowledge of plagiarism and professional experience with plagiarism, such as their handling of student plagiarism, their pedagogical practices for pre-empting and combating plagiarism, as well as their understandings of the institution's role in plagiarism prevention. This study adds to the existing literature on plagiarism by presenting contextualized and in-depth information on the perspectives of EFL teachers, an area that remains under-investigated. Its findings are expected to provide input for institutional efforts to establish guidelines and policies on academic integrity, and yield pedagogical implications that can inform staff development activities to curb plagiarism (Flint et al., 2006; Husain, Al-Shaibani, & Mahfoodh, 2017).

Institutional Responsibility for Curbing Plagiarism

The effective prevention and minimization of unacceptable intertextual behaviors requires a holistic approach involving efforts, resources, and commitment from students, staff and the institution (Mirris & Carroll, 2016). Cogdell and Aidulis (2008) describe the quest for reducing plagiarism as "a four-pronged attack" (p. 41) that calls for a consistent institutional approach, the elimination of opportunities for plagiarism, the education of students, and the promotion of ethical behavior.

¹ In this paper, "intertextual practices" and "intertextual behaviors" are used interchangeably to refer to ways in which external sources are integrated into one's own writing. They can be either transgressive (plagiaristic) or legitimate, depending on the exact manner of such integration.

Similarly, Dick, Sheard, and Hasen (2008) propose a quadripartite model for addressing cheating and plagiarism that includes education, prevention, detection and consequence. As the main sites where plagiarism takes place and is dealt with, institutions of higher education are key stakeholders in promoting academic ethics. Their policies and practices concerning plagiarism have direct bearing on what their academic staff and students know and do about plagiarism. Institutional approaches to preventing plagiarism discussed in previous work (e.g., Larkham & Manns, 2002; Macdonald & Carroll, 2006; Park, 2004; Sutherland-Smith, 2011) can be roughly categorized as disciplinary and educative.

In a disciplinary or regulatory approach, the institution needs to develop, improve and enforce policies and disciplinary mechanisms deterring, detecting and responding to cases of plagiarism (Brown & Howell, 2001; Ellery, 2008; Park, 2003; Pecorari, 2013). Exposure to institutional guidelines, even as simple and brief as a carefully worded statement about plagiarism, has been found to influence students' perceptions of the issue (Brown & Howell, 2001). Researchers therefore argue that institutions should provide specific definitions of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, along with clear classifications of such misconduct (Husain et al., 2017), so that administrators, teachers and students will be "on the same page" (Chen & Chou, 2017, p. 53) and share common understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. In addition to and on the basis of these definitions and classifications, policies can then institute sound and unambiguous procedures for detecting plagiarism, as well as a uniform and transparent system for dealing with it (de Jager & Brown, 2010; Park, 2004) to ensure fair and consistent handling of instances of plagiarism. However, certain complicating factors may work against the disciplinary approach or, at least, mitigate its potential effects. First, plagiarism is a complex phenomenon with multifarious manifestations and different interpretations. In addition to the more traditional forms of unacknowledged copying or unattributed paraphrasing, it could also take less blatant forms, such as sloppy and insufficient paraphrase with proper attribution, which may be interpreted by some as earnest attempts to integrate external sources. The goals of "specific definitions" and "clear classifications" therefore appear to be over- simplistic and idealistic. Second, policies, however sound and clear on paper, may be disregarded altogether or enforced inconsistently (de Jager & Brown, 2010; Mirris & Carroll, 2016). Glendinning (2014) conducted a large-scale study on the effectiveness of institutional academic integrity policies in a number of European countries, and her findings indicated that although institutions had policies in place, they were not necessarily implemented consistently.

An educative approach underscores the education of both teachers and students (Dick et al., 2008). It has been proposed that institutions should make academic staff development an important part of their response to plagiarism (Leask, 2006), so that all teachers are equipped with an adequate knowledge of plagiarism and the necessary skills for helping students avoid plagiarism (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006;

Pecorari, 2008, 2013). More importantly, there should be institutional measures to ensure that teachers dutifully design and engage in relevant, just-in-time, and effective instruction that can pass on their knowledge and skills to students and encourage appropriate source use behaviors among students (Dick et al., 2008). Previous studies have reported successful efforts to educate students about plagiarism. Cogdell and Aidulis (2008) investigated the effectiveness of various strategies for minimising the incidence of plagiarism at a UK university and found that improving students' writing skills and educating them about the nature of plagiarism could help reduce plagiarism. Ellery (2008) explored the possibility of addressing undergraduate plagiarism in a South African university by incorporating plagiarism-related issues in a tutorial module on academic writing. Her findings suggested that this approach was pedagogically sound and beneficial to the participating students. Wilson and Ippolito (2008) evaluated the success in addressing the problem of plagiarism of a collaborative approach involving academic staff, student support professionals, and the students' union at a UK university. Wette's (2010) action research at a university in New Zealand confirmed that an instructional intervention was effective in improving a group of ESL students' awareness, knowledge, and skills concerning source-based writing. Empirical studies such as these boost confidence in not only the feasibility but the potential value of an educative perspective on plagiarism.

Teacher Perceptions of Plagiarism

Teachers are at the core of an educative approach to addressing plagiarism. They are the most likely observers of plagiarism in student writing (Park, 2004; Pecorari, 2008) and are primarily responsible for deciding upon the most appropriate response when unacceptable intertextual practices are identified (Pecorari, 2013). They are also tasked with introducing to their students legitimate intertextual practices, so that the latter could effectively avoid plagiarism (Lei & Hu, 2014; Park, 2003). Teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward plagiarism can influence their students' emergent understandings of plagiarism and plagiarizing behaviors (Chen & Chou, 2017; Husain et al., 2017). Investigations into how teachers perceive plagiarism could yield insights that can be drawn on to assist their efforts to communicate norms of legitimate intertextuality to students (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997), and that can inform universities' quest for the promotion of appropriate source use practices and a culture of honesty (Pecorari & Shaw, 2012). Previous research, most of which was conducted in Anglophone or ESL contexts, has reported inconsistencies and inadequacies in teachers' understanding of plagiarism, their limited knowledge of institutional policies on plagiarism (Husain et al., 2017), and their general lack of preparedness to engage in anti-plagiarism pedagogy. In a survey on student academic misconduct conducted at four major Australian universities, Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005) found that staff tended to underestimate the prevalence of such misconduct considerably. Eriksson and Sullivan (2008) examined the knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism held by lecturers at a Swedish university, how they passed their knowledge on to students, and what they knew about disciplinary procedures. These lecturers were

found to be unsure of their definitions of plagiarism, hold varied attitudes toward different types of plagiarism, and fail to effectively teach how to work with a text to avoid plagiarism. de Jager and Brown (2010) examined a South African university's records of disciplinary cases involving plagiarism and conducted a survey among academic staff. Their findings revealed a reluctance on the part of academic staff to take instances of potential plagiarism through official institutional procedures, although the researchers did not elaborate further on possible source(s) of this reluctance. In one of the very few studies on Chinese teachers' perceptions of plagiarism, Lei and Hu (2014) examined university English lecturers' knowledge of and stance on two inappropriate intertextual practices, i.e., unacknowledged copying and unattributed paraphrasing, and found divergent and ambivalent understandings of unattributed paraphrasing. In an EFL context such as China, teachers, especially English language teachers, are directly engaged in the endeavor to improve students' educational preparedness for academic integrity (Zhang et al., 2018). It is necessary to have a better understanding of how these teachers understand and respond to the issue of plagiarism, and to what extent they are prepared to teach their students about plagiarism avoidance.

In view of the relative lack of research on teachers' perspectives on plagiarism in general and the paucity of research on Chinese EFL teachers' knowledge and attitudes concerning plagiarism in particular, this study aims to uncover Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions of plagiarism, pedagogical practices regarding plagiarism, and knowledge of institutional policies on plagiarism. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How do Chinese English-language teachers understand plagiarism?
2. What attitudes do they hold toward student plagiarism?
3. What are their pedagogical practices for addressing student plagiarism?
4. What roles do they perceive or expect their institutions to play in plagiarism prevention?

Method

This study draws on the qualitative data collected for a larger, mixed-methods research project designed to understand Chinese university English teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and professional experience concerning plagiarism (see Hu & Sun, 2016 for a report on the quantitative data from this larger study). The project consists of two components and has utilized three instruments (i.e., a textual judgment task, a paraphrasing practices survey, and semi-structured interviews) to collect data from 108 English teachers working in a diversity of universities in mainland China. The data collected with the judgement task and the paraphrasing practices survey constitute the first, largely quantitative component of the project. The textual judgment task was designed to determine whether the participating teachers could recognize insufficient paraphrase as plagiarism and what attitudes (e.g., punitive or lenient) they held toward instances that they found to have been plagiarized. The survey asked respondents to paraphrase a given paragraph in a way that they believed would not constitute

plagiarism. These authentic writing samples served as a gauge of the respondents' paraphrasing practices. Based on the textual judgment and survey data, a subgroup of the respondents was purposively selected for participation in the second, qualitative component of the larger project, i.e., semi-structured follow-up interviews. These interviews were conducted to triangulate the quantitative data and explore in greater depth the respondents' understandings of plagiarism and experiences of plagiarism as university teachers.

With the quantitative data reported elsewhere (Hu & Sun, 2016), this paper focuses on the qualitative interview study conducted within the methodological framework of phenomenology.

Phenomenological research aims to describe "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). For data collection, phenomenological studies typically employ in-depth interviews with a group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Liamputtong, 2012). In this study, the phenomenon of interest is plagiarism, while the individuals with experience of the phenomenon are Chinese university teachers who have dealt with plagiarism or otherwise encountered it in their work life.

Participants

From the aforementioned 108 participants, a subgroup was selected with a purposive sampling strategy to obtain a sample that captured the diversity in four variables: gender, overseas academic experience, teaching experience, and previous scholarly publication. Gender has been found to have some influence on students' decisions regarding academic integrity (Simon et al., 2004; Tibbetts, 1999) and might have a similar effect on teachers. Overseas academic experience was included as an indication of a respondent's exposure to the Anglo-American notions of plagiarism. This variable was found to be linked to understandings of plagiarism in the first component of the larger research project and in another previous study of Chinese university teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism (Hu & Lei, 2016). Years of teaching experience was included as a proxy for a respondent's enculturation in China's higher education system and exposure to its conventions and regulations. Previous studies (e.g., Chandrasegaran, 2000; Deckert, 1993) found such enculturation influencing knowledge of plagiarism. Scholarly publishing experiences, as indicated by the number of publications, could have an impact on one's knowledge of and attitude toward plagiarism, as a more extensive publication record may signify a greater familiarity with conventions of citation and source use. Given this set of selection criteria, 16 interviewees (2 [male vs. female] x 2 [overseas academic experience vs. no overseas academic experience] x 2 [many years of teaching vs. few years of teaching] x 2 [extensive scholarly publication vs. limited scholarly publication]) would be required to represent each type of variation. However, only 13 participants from 12 universities located in different parts of China were interviewed, due to the infrequent combinations of certain variables in the larger sample and the unavailability of some qualified participants. This sample size was adequate

in view of the number of participants (i.e., 5–25) recommended by Polkinghorne (1989) for a phenomenological study. Furthermore, these interviewees had received their higher education at an additional 11 Chinese universities, and this relatively wide coverage of Chinese universities enhanced the sample’s representativeness of the target population. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of these interviewees.

TABLE 1
Demographic Information of Participants

| Teacher | Gender | Overseas experience | Years of teaching | Scholarly publications |
|---------|--------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| P1 | F | Yes | 9 | 10 |
| P2 | M | Yes | 13 | 1 |
| P3 | F | Yes | 3 | 3 |
| P4 | M | Yes | 3 | 6 |
| P5 | F | Yes | 5 | 8 |
| P6 | F | Yes | 12 | 0 |
| P7 | F | No | 3 | 4 |
| P8 | M | Yes | 6 | 0 |
| P9 | F | No | 3 | 2 |
| P10 | F | No | 11 | 3 |
| P11 | M | No | 6 | 1 |
| P12 | F | No | 10 | 8 |
| P13 | M | No | 20 | 10 |

Notes: 1. P1-P13 = Participant 1 to Participant 13;
2. F = Female; M = Male.

Semi-structured interviews

The interview as a research method is particularly suitable for investigating self-reported perceptions or attitudes, and its interactive nature facilitates the elicitation of additional information (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003; Mackey & Gass, 2005). It is also a most frequently used method in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). Its use in the present study allowed for a more extensive articulation of opinions and therefore the collection of richer data than it would be possible with a questionnaire survey, the method of data collection adopted in most previous studies on teacher perceptions of plagiarism (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; de Jager & Brown, 2010; Lei & Hu, 2014). Following the phenomenological tradition, the interviews were used both to gather experiential material and “to explore interpretive meaning aspects of lived experience material” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 618). The semi-structured format was chosen for its flexibility: it involved a series of regularly structured questions, thereby permitting comparisons across the interviews, and left room for topics initiated by the interviewees, thus acknowledging the value of individuality (Berg & Lune, 2012; Pickard, 2006). The interview guide consisted of 16 core, open-ended questions on participants’ plagiarism-related perceptions and attitudes, as well as their professional experience of plagiarism. These questions were designed to (1) capture the respondents’

understandings of what constitutes plagiarism, (2) find out their attitudes toward plagiarism, (3) discover whether and how they taught their students about plagiarism in order to deter plagiaristic behaviors, and (4) elicit their perceptions and expectations of institutional actions concerning student plagiarism. Besides the pre-designed generic questions, questions which arose naturally from individual interviewees' responses were also asked to follow up on issues of relevance.

All interviews were conducted by the first author in Mandarin - the first language that she shared with the participants - to facilitate smooth communication and in-depth conversation. The interviews were carried out either face-to-face or via an online communication platform with participants who were geographically distant. Duration of the interviews ranged from around 20 to 35 minutes, with an average of approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in the original interview language, with slight editing to remove repetitions, slips of the tongue, and unnecessary details. Unless otherwise indicated, selected excerpts were translated into English by the first author, keeping maximally close to the original in meaning. The translated excerpts were then checked for accuracy by the second author.

Data analysis

A deductive content analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts. This analytic approach involved moving from general categories established on the basis of previous work to the more specific ones emerging in the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Mayring, 2000). The four research questions served as the overarching categories (Ezzy, 2002), namely Knowledge of Plagiarism, Attitudes Toward Plagiarism, Plagiarism-Related Pedagogical Practices, and Perceived and Expected Institutional Roles in Plagiarism Prevention. Working down from these categories, subcategories were then identified. For example, subcategories under Plagiarism-Related Pedagogical Practices included "Proposed effective pedagogical practices" and "Lack of action". Each subcategory was substantiated with authentic citations from the interview transcripts in a way that best represented the interviewees' perspectives and experiences. Our analysis achieved a satisfactory level of theoretical saturation, as evidenced in the fact that the analysis of the last three interviews did not yield new subcategories but merely instances of those subcategories identified earlier (Creswell, 2013). Both within- and cross-case analyses were carried out for a holistic understanding of individual participants and the sample as a group (Yin, 2018).

Results and Discussion

In this section, findings will be reported and discussed in the order of the four research questions. Participants' voices are kept through the frequent use of examples in both summary accounts and quotations.

Knowledge of plagiarism

Answers to questions related to knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism indicated that the participants' conceptions of plagiarism were similar to those widely discussed in Anglophone academia. When asked for their own definitions of plagiarism, some participants gave short statements of one or two sentences, while the rest offered lengthy answers, explaining how they understood plagiarism and giving examples of what they thought constituted plagiarism. Differences in the length and wording of these answers aside, three key commonalities could be identified across most of these definitions/explanations: (1) using another person' language or ideas, in (2) one's own writing, (3) without giving credit to the original author. While (1) and (3) were often explicitly included, (2) was only implied in most cases. These common components are roughly equal to the first five elements of Pecorari's (2001) six-element definition of plagiarism: "(1) material that has been (2) taken from (3) some source by (4) someone, (5) without acknowledgment and (6) with/without intention to deceive" (p. 235). The only two participants who mentioned the sixth element of intent in their definition/explanation, P3 and P4, both had overseas academic experiences. Other than this, no distinct pattern was detected of how one's academic background might affect how s/he defined plagiarism. Table 2 presents the interviewees' definitions, with the three elements highlighted by bolding, italicizing and underlining, respectively.

TABLE 2
Definitions/Explanations of Plagiarism

| No. | Definition/explanation |
|-----------------|---|
| P1 | Illegally using other people’s language or research results without the author’s permission. |
| P2 | Some people use others’ thoughts without crediting the source or copy others’ words without attribution. Some might mention the original author by name but fail to provide further information on the work cited. I think all these count as plagiarism. |
| P3 ^a | There is intentional and unintentional (plagiarism). If you unknowingly plagiarize, there can be many reasons. Perhaps you don’t know about the rules, or you happen to use similar wording as someone else, or you fail to paraphrase sufficiently enough. And then there is intentional plagiarism, which is undoubtedly punishable. |
| P4 | Plagiarism is using other sources <i>in your own writing</i> without properly acknowledging the sources. There are two types of plagiarism. One is intentional, that is when someone irresponsibly copy-pastes others’ words , or only makes minor changes. The other is unintentional, because you don’t have the necessary training and knowledge. |
| P5 ^b | I think you need to use other sources or knowledge in a proper manner, by pointing out who first proposed this idea, to give credit. |
| P6 | For example, when you quote someone directly without using quotation marks and giving the page number, this is plagiarism. If you quote indirectly , you have to paraphrase sufficiently. The reference list must reflect every source that you have cited. If you use someone else’s ideas, you also need to acknowledge (the source). |
| P7 ^c | The stealing and publication of other author’s language, ideas, thoughts, and maybe expressions , something like that. |
| P8 | If you take more than 80% of the original author’s ideas without any changes or your own interpretation, this counts as plagiarism. If you take other’s ideas and use different words to express them, this doesn’t change the fact that it is still other people’s ideas. This is also plagiarism. On the other hand, if on the basis of other’s ideas, you have some new discovery or new interpretation, then it’s not plagiarism. |
| P9 | The so-called plagiarism is if <i>in your paper</i> you don’t use quotation marks to identify other’s words and provide the source. If you don’t paraphrase something in your own words, it’s also plagiarism. |
| P10 | Using words and ideas in other people’s paper without acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism. |
| P11 | I can only give you a definition based on my own major and experience in writing papers. I majored in contemporary British novels. I think as long as the topic you choose, for example, a certain novelist and one of his/her works, the perspective you adopt in your paper, and the theoretical framework you use for your critique, overlap with someone’s earlier work, then it’s basically plagiarism. Two other examples are, first, some people just use others’ interpretations of an original source without going to the source himself. Second, translating sources in other languages into Chinese and <i>publishing it as your own</i> . |
| P12 | Plagiarism is presenting other people’s research results or opinions <i>as your own</i> , without specifying the source. |
| P13 | Personally, I think plagiarism refers to the complete duplication of others’ words . |

^a P3’s answer was neither a definition nor an explanation of plagiarism, but rather a description of how she understood intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

^b Instead of giving a definition, P5 explained what she thought needed to be done in order to avoid plagiarism.

^c This definition was originally in English, as P7 was recalling the definition given by a former “foreign teacher”, i.e., an Anglo-American expatriate living and teaching in China.

Compared with participants in Li’s (2015) interview study of academic staff’s perceptions of plagiarism, who unanimously gave one-sentence definitions of plagiarism which covered the first five of the six elements in Pecorari’s (2001) extended definition, participants in the present study gave definitions that seemed much less “neat”. This divergence could be attributed to background differences between participants in the two studies: Li’s study was conducted at an English-medium university in Hong Kong, with half of her participants being expatriates from the UK and North

America, and the other half having had extensive education/work experience in Anglo-American contexts. The present study, by contrast, involved Chinese-medium universities in mainland China, with all participants being Chinese natives. Although half of these participants had had some form of overseas academic experience, the duration of such experience was significantly shorter, ranging from 10 to 22 months. Presumably, these participants had received less exposure to Anglo-American notions of plagiarism. Without further information on the definitions collected in Li's study, it is impossible to make a direct comparison and determine whether this difference was a case of ambiguous versus clear understanding or complex versus categorical conceptions. It can, however, be argued that although consistent one-sentence definitions indicate a consensual understanding of plagiarism, they also run the risk of failing to capture the complexity of plagiarism and the existence of multiple interpretations. The "messy" definitions in the present study, though containing some misconceptions (e.g., P8's adoption of a similarity score of 80% as the cut-off point for plagiarism and P13's definition of plagiarism as the complete duplication of words), provided a more nuanced picture of the participants' understandings of plagiarism, by identifying multiple sources of plagiarism such as insufficient paraphrasing (P3, P4, P6 and P9) and unfamiliarity with referencing conventions (P2 and P6), pointing to the existence of discipline-specific conventions of legitimate intertextual practices (P11), acknowledging the complex relationship between originality of ideas and that of language (P8), and recognizing translating as a potential tool for plagiarism (P11).

The results reported above indicate that the Chinese university teachers had a more nuanced knowledge of plagiarism than reported in previous research (e.g., Hu & Lei, 2016) or implied by culture-based interpretations of plagiarism that people from backgrounds other than Anglo-American ones simply hold different perceptions of authorship and textual borrowing (Pennycook, 1996; Shi, 2006). This difference could have stemmed from the different means of data collection adopted (i.e., surveys vs. interviews) in the studies. It may also have resulted from Chinese university teachers' growing knowledge of Anglo-American notions of plagiarism with the passage of time between previous studies and the present one.

Attitudes toward plagiarism

As the interviews moved on to attitudes toward plagiarism, the participants' expressed opinions appeared more nuanced and ambivalent. Some participants seemed overly lenient with plagiarism and even regarded students' copying behavior as a learning strategy. P7 said that "in general writing, copying a few sentences from sample essays does not constitute plagiarism." When probed further about where she drew the line between some "harmless" copying and plagiarism, she explained that "as long as the copied part takes up no more than 40% of the whole piece (it's not plagiarism)." Her answers here stood in contrast with the clear and succinct definition of plagiarism that she had promptly given earlier. A possible explanation lies in P7's educational background: despite having

had no overseas academic experience, P7 had been introduced to Anglo-American notions of plagiarism in an undergraduate writing course taught by an expatriate teacher. The co-existence of a course-based knowledge about Anglo-American intertextual conventions and her long-term enculturation in the Chinese educational setting could have led to this ambivalence. P13, a home-trained veteran teacher who had been in the profession for as long as 20 years, confided that the emphasis placed on issues around plagiarism was “too much hustle”, especially regarding plagiarism in undergraduate essays:

For freshmen and sophomores, the so-called ‘plagiarism’ is acceptable. Their English language proficiency is limited, and they cannot write good essays on their own. For these students, memorizing sample essays and using well-written sentences from these essays can make their writing better. This is a learning process and should be encouraged.

Such beliefs show that the literacy practice of memorizing and imitating model texts is still very much alive in China, with teachers tacitly or openly encouraging students to “borrow good sentences” from exemplary texts to embellish and sophisticate their own writing (Mu, 2010). This approach to language learning and teaching, though not without its merits, could contribute to textual borrowing practices among students that conflict with Anglo-American intertextual conventions, which prevail in the academic world (James et al., 2019). P5, who had had about 20 months of training in an overseas university, expressed her concerns about this practice: “Some teaching practices in the Chinese classroom, such as providing model essays for students to memorize, may lead to student plagiarism. They give students the impression that it is okay to borrow another’s language in their own writing, since the teacher allows it.” This finding has a two- fold significance. On the one hand, Chinese teachers (and, for that matter, teachers in educational contexts that encourage or allow similar writing practices) need to help their students distinguish copying as a learning strategy and as a source of potential plagiarism (Chen & Chou, 2017). On the other hand, universities in the West should refrain from indiscriminately equating copying to plagiarism and take into account the educational upbringing of their non-native students in dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism (Introna & Hayes, 2008).

All participants sounded a punitive note when describing their attitudes toward plagiarism in general, some calling plagiarism “as bad as stealing” (P5) and seeing plagiarized papers as “valueless” (P1). This self-reported low tolerance resonates with the attitudes held by teachers in Hu and Sun (2016). Yet the interviewees’ attitudes became much less clear-cut when it comes to handling specific cases of plagiarism. Six of the seven participants who had overseas academic experience (with the exception of P6) and P7 regarded intent as a key consideration in deciding what action to take on cases of potential plagiarism. It was important for them to ascertain whether a particular case was an intentional act of cheating, a product of ignorance, or an outcome of limited language ability. For

example, P4 found it “understandable” if students “make mistakes in source use” because they “just have no knowledge of it”. P2 elaborated on his viewpoint:

Whether I punish students (for plagiarizing) depends on whether I have told them about plagiarism beforehand. The first scenario is: I have told the students from day one about the rules, but they still choose to break the rules; then they must face the consequences. In the second scenario, the students have no prior knowledge because we never told them about it; then we shouldn't jump to punishments but allow them a second chance.

The linking of intent to the severity of punishment for plagiarism has also been reported in previous research. Many professors in Sutherland-Smith's (2005) study believed that only deliberate or deceptive copying, as opposed to mistakes made in the absence of intent, would constitute punishable plagiarism. A majority of responses to de Jager and Brown's (2010) survey questions suggested the possibility of ignorance or incompetence, rather than the intention to cheat. In Pecorari and Shaw's (2012) interview study, participants also offered explanations of inappropriate intertextuality other than intentional deception. By acknowledging the possibility of unintentional plagiarism and viewing unintentional acts as not or less punishable, the Chinese teachers in our study, like their Anglophone counterparts in the literature, saw a role of education in pre-empting or reducing the incidence of at least unintentional plagiarism (Zhang et al., 2018). The issue at stake therefore became pedagogical, rather than disciplinary (de Jager & Brown, 2010). In view of the positive effects of anti-plagiarism instruction found in previous studies (e.g., Ellery, 2008; Wette, 2010), an educative rather than punitive approach to the use of sources is recommendable and feasible, especially with Chinese students, who have been found to have limited knowledge of legitimate inter-textual practices in Anglo-American contexts (Hu & Lei, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). Thus, our findings suggest that an apparent lack of action against plagiarism should not be simply interpreted as a result of greater tolerance of such behaviors. Instead, more complex factors and considerations could be at work, such as the acknowledgement of the existence of unintentional misuse of sources as well as the recognition of the need for an overall educative approach to the issue.

Plagiarism-related pedagogical practices

In general, the interviewees acknowledged teachers' essential role in preventing plagiarism and suggested pedagogical practices that they believed would deter student plagiarism. However, they also admitted that they did not engage in anti-plagiarism pedagogy. All interviewees either explicitly or implicitly expressed the belief that teachers should share the responsibility in educating students about plagiarism. With the exceptions of P4, P9 and P13, most interviewees had similar views of the best pedagogical practices for pre-empting plagiarism. They agreed that plagiarism prevention should not merely rely on presenting students with declarative facts about plagiarism, such as statements and definitions of academic misconduct, or a simple matter-of-fact warning against it. Instead, a more effective measure was to provide students with authentic examples of plagiarized and legitimate

passages for them to read and compare, and to see for themselves what makes appropriate citation and what constitutes plagiarism. Another strategy was experiential learning, as students need to experience source-based writing first-hand and receive teachers' feedback on the appropriacy of their source use to better understand the conventions and be made aware of their own illegitimate textual borrowing (Ellery, 2008). Table 3 summarizes the pedagogical practices suggested by the interviewees.

TABLE 3
Proposed Pedagogical Practices

| Proposed practice | No. of advocates | Representative quote(s) |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Using authentic examples | 8 (P1, P2, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, and P12) | "I think using examples is most straightforward. We can show our students examples that are deemed to have been plagiarized for different reasons and let them discuss among themselves. In this way, they can understand more profoundly and comprehensively what constitutes plagiarism and will have the awareness to avoid doing similar things in their own writing." (P12) |
| Experiential learning | 3 (P3, P7 and P11) | For this purpose, students can be asked to "write a literature review" (P3), "paraphrase a given paragraph" (P7), or "write a short essay" (P11). |

These suggestions, including giving examples and creating opportunities of source use, resonate with Landau et al.'s (2002) observation that "placing a nonspecific directive to 'avoid plagiarism' on a syllabus or making a similarly vague statement in class is not as effective as providing students with performance feedback or examples of plagiarized passages" (p. 115). They are also consistent with Pecorari and Petrić's (2014) advice that plagiarism education should "go beyond general advice and engage students in tasks and discussions that will lead to a deeper understanding of what constitutes plagiarism," and provide students with "ample opportunities for practice in a supportive learning environment" (p. 288). Notably, of the ten participants who proposed potentially effective pedagogical practices, six had overseas academic experience, P7 had taken a thesis writing course taught by an Anglo-American teacher, and P10 received her master's degree from a China-based joint program between a Chinese University and a British university, where many of the courses were delivered and assessed by teachers from the British university. This shared prior exposure to Anglo-American intertextual conventions may have contributed to the congruence between these teachers' suggestions and those in previous research.

Most interviewees, however, admitted that they did not devote much time to teaching students about plagiarism. Their reasons included not seeing themselves as being in the right position or adequately resourced to do so. P10 explained that although she "may have mentioned the concept a few times," she never actually taught her students exactly how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism, because she

was not entirely sure about it herself. As P13 said, “I agree that it is necessary to teach students about plagiarism, but this is not the responsibility of teachers of general English courses. It’s the job of the subject teachers.” Given Mu’s (2010) earlier finding that in Chinese universities, few teachers advise students of the academic requirements of written course work, this finding is not surprising, but nonetheless worrisome. With the entrenched Englishization of international communication, Anglo-American notions of plagiarism and academic integrity are widely adopted in the global academic world (Lillis & Curry, 2010). To prepare students in EFL contexts for this trend, EFL teachers need to not only acquire a good understanding of these notions, but more importantly allocate time and space to teach about them, so that their students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and strategies to follow the internationally prevalent norms of intertextual practices (Hu & Lei, 2016; Li, 2015).

Due to a paucity of previous research on Chinese teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and practices regarding plagiarism, little has been known about what they do in their classrooms about plagiarism and what considerations motivate their practices. Our study bridges the gap by showing our participants’ abilities to propose potentially effective teaching strategies on the one hand and revealing their lack of confidence and action to adopt these strategies, on the other, to steer their students away from plagiarism.

Perceived and expected institutional roles in plagiarism prevention

Most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their institutions’ lack of commitment to plagiarism prevention. According to them, many of the institutions involved seemed to adopt a punitive approach to plagiarism, stipulating sometimes very harsh punishment for convicted cases of plagiarism but providing little or no support to help students avoid plagiarism. According to P11:

There can be severe punishment if plagiarism is found and confirmed in students’ writing. These measures are taken to prevent students from plagiarizing. But in the meantime, no resources or explicit teaching are provided to guide them through the process.

Similarly, P13 remarked that “as far as I know, the university does pay a lot of attention to academic integrity, but not through providing training or teaching on how to cite, only by way of punishment.” Such a largely “catch and punish” (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006, p. 236) approach by the institution is also reported in Hu and Sun’s (2017) study of the institutional plagiarism policies of eight Chinese universities, which found the majority of the policy texts dominated by a strong punitive approach and closely aligned with a discourse of moralism. However, taking punitive measures alone can hardly put an end to plagiarism-related problems. Solutions for the problem of plagiarism lie in education, rather than mere punishment (Bacha & Bahous, 2010; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014).

Many interviewees were under the impression that their institutions’ policies and procedures for handling plagiarism targeted graduation theses, not assignments or coursework essays. When asked

how much they knew about institutional policies and regulations on plagiarism and academic integrity, many expressed uncertainties. P1 wondered out loud about the very existence of such policies: “I think there is (some document on plagiarism). There must be. Something about the rules you need to follow when writing graduation theses.” P12 admitted that he knew very little of institutional rules on plagiarism: “The only thing I know is this regulation that for your graduation thesis, you have three chances to pass plagiarism checking, and there will be punishment if you fail all of them.” With this belief about where plagiarism should be dealt with, teachers who did not supervise thesis writing or teach related courses felt that they had no option but to handle suspected cases of plagiarism informally and on a case-by-case basis. Their approaches included “talking to the student in person” (P2), “giving the plagiarized work a low mark or even a zero” (P10), and “asking the student to rewrite and re-submit” (P5). Taking things into their own hands may allow teachers to better evaluate the nature of individual cases (Bloch, 2001), but with teachers effectively serving as “judge, jury and executioner” at the same time (Sutherland-Smith, 2005, p. 92), similar acts of student plagiarism may receive inconsistent responses from different teachers. This (perceived) absence of formal regulations on plagiarism in assignments has been reported to be a blind spot typical of most Chinese institutions (Zhang et al., 2018). In order for educational institutions to decrease and discourage plagiarism among students, a more comprehensive and concerted system should be established to provide explicit policy guidance regarding unacceptable behaviors in not just graduation theses, but also assignments, term papers, and other forms of student writing (Husain et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). Our finding about the disconnect between institutional policy documents’ intended scope of application and teachers’ perceived scope highlights the need for institutions not only to formulate their policies but also to effectively communicate these policies to teachers and students alike.

Teachers’ expectations of their institutions largely overlapped with suggestions in Pecorari (2013) on how university administration can act to prevent plagiarism, including establishing and implementing regulations and policies, installing procedures for detecting and handling plagiarism, supporting staff to teach source use, and providing students with necessary resources to learn about writing and source use. Many of the interviewees (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P11 and P12), mostly those with overseas academic experience, hoped for more administrative support from their institutions to assist both teachers and students in learning about plagiarism. P6 emphasized the need to train the trainers (Wilson & Ippolito, 2008), as some teachers also “experience confusion about source use themselves.” P1 suggested the possibility of “testing knowledge on plagiarism in teacher qualification examinations,” which are a prerequisite for all those who wish to become school or university teachers in China. In terms of supporting students, P3 suggested including education on plagiarism as part of students’ orientation program. P11 also gave detailed suggestions:

Teaching of academic writing conventions should become an integral part of relevant courses, especially courses that assess students by way of term papers. The university can also offer special courses to improve students' knowledge of academic conventions, or set up writing centres, so that students have somewhere to turn to when they have questions or doubts.

The adoption of text-matching tools was recommended by several participants (P2, P3, P6, P7 and P10) to deter students from plagiarizing and to help teachers identify plagiarism in student writing. Of these participants, P2, P3 and P6 first learned about text-matching tools during their overseas training and were impressed by what such tools could do. P7 and P10 used these tools for screening their master's theses. The absence of text-matching tools was believed to "make it possible for students to get away with plagiarism, because you don't have an effective monitoring system" (P2), while their adoption can "compel students and teachers alike to attach more importance to the issue" (P7).

Notably, there seemed to be a common misunderstanding about the function of these tools as one of detecting plagiarism. As the name suggests, what text-matching tools do is to locate matching text in a piece of writing with other available sources, not to identify plagiarism per se. As such, although they are useful in instantly flagging similarities in language and, therefore, can have a deterrent effect on students' tendency to plagiarize (Liu, Lin, Kou, & Wang, 2016), their adoption should only be complementary to pedagogical actions. While their educational potential for student development is not to be ignored (Mphahlele & McKenna, 2019), their use should not obviate the need for pedagogical interventions to induct students into appropriate source use in academic writing. Our participants' perceptions that the sole function of text matching tools was to catch and deter plagiarism serve as a precaution to institutions that when they adopt such tools and promote their use among teachers, it is necessary to make sure that teachers are well aware of what the tools can and cannot do and how they can be used.

Implications and Conclusion

This study contributes to the current understanding of plagiarism by reporting several findings that either are different from those previously reported or concern issues that have hitherto received little research attention. These findings reveal jarring disparities between what the participating teachers knew and did about student plagiarism. Although they could define or explain plagiarism in a manner that largely reflected the widely adopted Anglo-American conceptions of plagiarism, some of their beliefs, such as acceptability of copied textual chunks and the function of imitation as a learning strategy, were potentially problematic. Their expressed attitudes toward plagiarism were punitive, but they appeared to be rather lenient in practice. While they recognized the value of various pedagogical practices recommended in the literature, they did not allocate time for teaching about plagiarism in their classrooms. Their perceptions and expectations of institutional roles suggest that the way forward is for institutions to adopt a holistic approach to promote a positive climate towards responsible academic writing. While there are abundant studies of institutional policies and

regulations on plagiarism in Western contexts (e.g., Brown & Howell, 2001; Sutherland-Smith, 2011), few of these previous studies were conducted from the perspective of teachers. Our study adds to knowledge of how teachers perceive institutional policies in particular and institutional commitment to plagiarism prevention in general. Our findings not only complement previous research but can also inform efforts to improve institutional plagiarism policies.

Despite this study being of a small scale and an exploratory nature, several important implications can be drawn from its findings. One implication comes from the finding that the teachers in this study, especially those who had overseas academic experience or other forms of exposure to Western conventions of academic writing (i.e., P7 and P10), tended to perceive plagiarism in a manner similar to that prevalent in Anglo-American academia. This finding lends support to the prediction that as long as English remains the academic lingua franca, Anglo-American ideas of plagiarism will continue to influence perceptions of plagiarism in non-Anglo-American contexts (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Lei & Hu, 2014). Chinese academics who wish to publish in English, and Chinese universities that would like to increase their international presence, will have to adapt their values and practices to navigate Anglo-American dominance in the international academic community. A second implication is derived from the finding that most of the Chinese universities represented in this study seemed to be only minimally engaged in anti-plagiarism efforts, as evidenced by the absence of policy attention to plagiarism in coursework assignments and the absence of training for staff and students on issues related to plagiarism. While recent research advocates a shift away from viewing plagiarism as an ethical and regulatory violation to seeing it as a teaching/learning issue and a direct consequence of a lack of knowledge (Bašić, Kružić, Jerković, Buljan, & Marušić, in press), there is still a place for the disciplinary approach in the Chinese context, where policies and regulations are often either absent or shelved. Of course, a disciplinary approach anchored in strengthening institutional policies should be adopted in tandem with an educative approach and with measures that ensure the implementation of the institutional policies in the classroom.

Several directions for future research can be identified. First, in the last few years, several high-profile cases of plagiarism and academic misconduct in China have led to firmer actions from relevant national departments and academic institutions to combat academic dishonesty. This heightened attention could have influenced teachers' perceptions and practices concerning plagiarism. It is therefore worthwhile to revisit these issues in the near future. Second, more policy research in the context of Chinese higher education is in order. Given the absence of institutional commitment to curb plagiarism perceived by the participants, and their own limited awareness of institutional policies, more research on plagiarism policies in Chinese universities will not only add to the literature on plagiarism-related policies in different educational settings, but also enable comparisons between teachers' perceptions of such policies in different contexts, leading to the identification of

key factors shaping such perceptions. Third, future research can look into whether and how text matching tools are used in Chinese universities, teachers' and students' perceptions of them, and how their adoption might affect understandings and practices surrounding plagiarism. Compared with the abundance of studies on such tools in Anglo-American and ESL contexts (e.g., Atkinson & Yeoh, 2008; Heather, 2010; Mphahlele & McKenna, 2019), this is a conspicuously under-researched topic in the Chinese context. Fourth, this study only involved a limited number of Chinese teachers from a single discipline. Future studies may consider involving participants from a range of academic backgrounds to identify similarities and differences in their perspectives on plagiarism and contributing factors. Finally, empirical studies can be carried out to develop instructional tasks for teaching students about plagiarism and gauge their pedagogical efficacy. Such studies will help teachers make more informed decisions regarding the type of instructional intervention that can best benefit their students.

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