

## *Putting Academic Research in Algerian Universities under the Lens through Shedding Light on Plagiarism*

وضع البحث الاكاديمي في الجزائر تحت المجهر من خلال تسليط الضوء على السرقة الادبية

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### **Abstract:**

Protecting research has become the first discussed issue among experts in academic writing to create awareness of ethical dilemmas that novice researchers are facing. In this vein, the current research under scrutiny pursues to give a thoughtful discussion of the status of academic research in Algerian universities by taking second-year Master English students at Saida University as a case in point. Ultimately, another concern of this research paper is to uncover some unethical practices that threaten the quality of research. To fulfil this claim, this research work endeavours to provide an in-depth look at ethical research primer for novice researchers to reduce dishonesty in the academic community. To this effect, an examination of the learners' attitudes, perception and knowledge about plagiarism was made through approaching a systematic analysis based on a structured questionnaire and an interview. To this end, the main findings obtained proved that most students have a bad knowledge about academic delinquency in addition to many hindrances like weak writing skills, time constraints and information deficiencies about the topic. The results also demonstrated that there is an extensive lack of students' awareness of academic penalties for plagiarism.

**Keywords:** academic honesty; academic community; ethical considerations; plagiarism.

ملخص:

لقد اصبحت حماية البحث العلمي القضية الاولى التي يتم مناقشتها بين خبراء الكتابة الأكاديمية وهذا من اجل خلق الوعي بين الباحثين المبتدئين حول المعضلات الاخلاقية في البحث العلمي. في هذا المنوال، تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية الى اعطاء نظرة حول واقع البحث العلمي في الجامعات الجزائرية من خلال اجراء دراسة ميدانية مع طلبة السنة الثانية ماستر لغة انجليزية بجامعة الدكتور الطاهر مولاي بسعيدة. كما تهدف هذه الدراسة الى الكشف عن بعض الممارسات الغير الاخلاقية التي تهدد نوعية البحث. لتحقيق هذه الاهداف، يتمحور الاهتمام الرئيسي لهذا البحث في اعطاء نظرة حول المبادئ الاخلاقية الاولى التي يجب اعتمادها من طرف الباحثين المبتدئين من اجل الحد من الانتحال العلمي في المجتمع الاكاديمي. وعلى هذا ثم فحص مواقف عينة من الطلبة ومدى معرفتهم بالانتحال من خلال الاعتماد على استبيان واستجواب. ولقد بينت النتائج الرئيسية ان معظم الطلبة لديهم معرفة سيئة عن الانحراف الاكاديمي الى جانب بعض العوائق الاخرى كنقص المهارات الكتابية، ضيق الوقت وقلة المعلومات حول الموضوع المدروس. كما اظهرت النتائج كذلك ان هناك نقص كبير جدا في درجة وعي الطلبة بالعقوبات الأكاديمية الناجمة عن الانتحال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية ؛ النزاهة الأكاديمية؛ المجتمع الاكاديمي؛ الاعتبارات الاخلاقية؛ السرقة الادبية

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## 1- Introduction

Plagiarism becomes one of the most discussed ethical issues in academic writing. With the help of technology, committing unethical practices turn research into a competition of getting grades without paying attention to honesty, although novice researchers are warned from dishonesty in conducting research works, their knowledge is still poor on how to avoid taking others' works and even ideas. This means that they plagiarise for two reasons, either they have an indigent knowledge on the different types of plagiarism, or they do it in purpose due to some motives including time constraints and the weak linguistic skills in the target language. In other words, how teachers can expect from their students to write whole dissertations using their style and words and in contrast, they have not the ability to build a small essay without taking others' expressions.

Additionally, plagiarism has also become a nightmare for teachers not only in supervising debutante researchers in their dissertations but also during conducting research works for classes. Learners tend to copy down directly from the net what they need and bring it to their teachers in the form of exposes or research proposals. Even though, most teachers welcome the use of technology like mobile phones and iPads during their research in class or at home and try to introduce their students to the positive side of technology in scientific research works, they forget to guide them on how to use digital tools in realizing academic integrity.

Most importantly, plagiarism can also be a consequence of the bad writing skill for EFL learners. Some researchers, whose writing style is not good, tend to fetch for other alternatives to carry out research. In another way, their weak writing style prevents them from other choices like paraphrasing and summarizing. Another important point, that can justify plagiarism, is that some novice researchers do not know how to quote and put references; consequently, they find themselves committing indirect plagiarism.

With this perspective in mind, this small scale research work attempts to shed light on the status of academic research in Algeria. It also endeavours to give an in-depth look at some unethical practices that learners conduct in academic research. Lastly and most importantly, this research work calls for a consistent way that can be helpful for researchers to avoid plagiarism and teachers to guide novice investigators to realise academic integrity in their pieces of work. In the light of this tight, the following research questions spring from the previous research objectives:

1. Do EFL learners develop a good knowledge of plagiarism?
2. Do students recognize the consequences of unethical practices?
3. How can they avoid them?

To answer these peripheral questions, the following research hypotheses are put forward:

1. EFL learners may have a bad knowledge of plagiarism and its different types.
2. It is predicted that students are unaware of the unethical practices.
4. It is hypothesized that they can avoid plagiarism if they will be aware of ethical considerations in academic research.

Hence, this study intends to explore the focal motives behind committing plagiarism and how they can be avoided to realise academic integrity in Algerian universities. In this regard, it yields data on the issue of plagiarism as a form of academic misconduct and the status of research in higher education through conducting a study based on quantitative and qualitative research instruments including a questionnaire and an interview.

## 2- Literature Review:

Having mentioned the notion of academic integrity in the introduction, it makes it incumbent upon us to say that it has put the concepts of trust, respect, fairness and values in the forefront so that to build an honest academic community where novice researchers have to struggle to put themselves in the right path. Henceforth, academic integrity takes a position of indelible significance. In this sense, research and honesty are intertwined and embedded in the beliefs of each community. For this reason, one can deduce that integrity is a cultural component before it becomes a part of academic research. This means that integrity has turned into a norm that students and researchers must apply to avoid academic misconduct. Although these norms are agreed on them by all institutions and universities, many studies show that about 80% of college students commit academic misconduct (Kleiner & Lord, 1999).

Stepping back to the notion of integrity, one cannot forget to talk about ethics as a concept. Ethics are regarded by the academic community as policies or regulations, which are put to organize research, realise integrity, and diminish misconduct. It involves honesty as the primer ingredient to probity in addition to respect of intellectual property, confidentiality, and objectivity...etc. Before proceeding further, it may be helpful to give an insight into the perception of ethics by individuals. It is agreed that ethics are learnt at home or school, but their interpretation differs from one person to another depending on his/her own experiences and moral values (Resnik, 2015).

Interestingly enough, the main starting point that should be taken into account when talking about misconduct or academic impropriety is the fact that it does not only contain the concept of plagiarism, but it also involves the notion of cheating. Cheating takes place when the student tends to copy down from their colleagues, books or the net during exams, tests, and home works. Factually, some studies conducted in the field of sociology and didactics prove that students tend to cheat in class and this behaviour will be

repeated even in their workplace (Morgan & Foster, 1992). In the same line of thought, Pramadi, Pali, Hanurawan, and Atmoko (2017) claim that cheating is presented in four categories. In this regard, they offer the off-quoted lines through which the four categories are described in details:

[...] academic cheating behavior is generally displayed in four categories: information transfer between individuals, the use of assisting tools, exploitation of weakness, and copying answers or information. Commonly, cheating behavior is conducted in two activities, which are during tests/exams and homework. (p. 157)

Before embarking on the issue of plagiarism, it is important to note that cheating can lead to plagiarism. Questionably, the latter is a part of the former, although there are significant differences between them. The sharing point is the attitude or the intention to plagiarise or cheat which can be intentional or unintentional because of “three factors in attitude, which are on adaptation, ego-defence, or self-expression” (Pramadi, et al., 2017, p. 158).

Following this discussion, one can infer that plagiarism has become a serious phenomenon in the academic community and a challenge for institutes and universities and therefore resulting in ethical dilemmas. This means that plagiarism has been connected with the moral values of the researchers because the notion of ethics is deeply related to integrity and honesty. In another word, the act of stealing harms not only the individuals but also their universities and colleges. In this vein, Fusch, Ness, Booker, and Fusch (2017) argue that “[...] the act of stealing is not the true-crime; rather it is the act of deception that inflicts moral harm on all parties by damaging the reputation of self and others, insulting others’ intelligence, and harming the integrity of all” (p. 55).

Although much has been said and conducted to diminish plagiarism like the use of detectors and high penalties, there is still a high rate of academic misconduct. As such, experts in research methodology felt the need for approaches to fulfil academic integrity. A good example is the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in promoting not only honesty in research but also evaluating the student’s behaviour through encouraging group work and changing the classroom environment (Velliari, 2017).

One point that should be also mentioned in this context is the motives behind committing academic fraud as many researchers called it (Ferris in Carmi, Ferris & Nachshon, 2007). In this regard, plagiarism is related to either subjective or objective motives. The latter involves reasons such as pressure by family and administration, time constraints and the shortage of rules and penalties, while the former is linked to the lack of ethical concerns that guide the individuals’ behaviours.

To inspect closely and thoroughly, mentioning the motives is not enough without providing a glimpse on certain parameters that can open the door and encourage

plagiarism. According to Wilkinson (2009), age, gender, the academic level, and the cultural background play a prominent part in raising or diminishing the rate of plagiarism. She adds that until now “there is no consistent finding for any of these variables and the significance of these factors appear to be context-dependent” (p. 98). She further highlights that new studies reveal that undergraduate students tend to plagiarise more than postgraduate learners. This view is proved by scholars like Sheard et al. (2003) and Marsden et al. (2005) (Wilkinson, 2009). On the other side of the corner, Bennett (2005) confirms through a research work that conducting plagiarism is not only restricted to the aforementioned variables, but it is directed by certain attitudinal dimensions of the individuals themselves.

Stating that there are some social factors behind academic misconduct is not enough without giving at least an overview of the different types of plagiarism. According to Maurer (2006), academic dishonesty is divided into causal plagiarism which takes place due to the lack of the learners’ knowledge on how to quote and or put references. The second type is called unintentional plagiarism which occurs when the researcher acquires a good knowledge on the subject and his ideas match the views of other scholars. Thirdly, intentional plagiarism happens consciously in purpose and the student knows that he is committing academic stealing. Lastly, some researchers tend sometimes to rewrite their published works in a different style and published them again. This type is known as self-plagiarism or they attempt to cut their published work into small research papers. This kind of self-plagiarism is known as salami-slicing (Starovoytova, 2017). Self-plagiarism has turned into a widespread phenomenon in the last few years when scholars resort to republish their published works through changing their styles. Hence, it has become the first form of academic misconduct.

When one talks about plagiarism, he has also to give a place for the consequences of conducting unethical practices in the academic community. According to Kleinert (2009), conducting plagiarism has severe penalties among which the learner is dismissed from academic research. In the case of authors, their works are deleted from academic research and readers are warned about the researchers who practise academic fraud (Starovoytova, 2017).

Another significant idea that should not be forgotten in this context is that plagiarism is just a type of academic misconduct. There are other kinds like cheating, misrepresentation, fabrication, collusion and bribery...etc. This means that plagiarism is not the only form which is found in higher education.

### **3- Method and Tools:**

The researcher selected about one hundred students from Master two to answer the questionnaire, while the interview was conducted with ten teachers. The

questionnaire was distributed by the end of the first semester and the interview was done during the second semester. The researcher chose students from both streams (Didactics, Literature and Civilisation).

The questionnaire, which was distributed to students, contains three sections. The first section was about the learners' knowledge of plagiarism. The second rubric was devoted to exploring the reasons behind committing academic misconduct, whereas the last part is devoted to testing their knowledge about the consequences of committing academic dishonesty. The researcher focused on random sampling since she did not take into account the students' age and gender.

As far as the interview is concerned, the researcher asked all teachers of the English department to be interviewed, but due to time constraints, only ten cooperated and answered all the questions. The interview was face-to-face with teachers and all their speech was recorded.

## 4- Results and Discussion

### 4-1 Questionnaire

After the questionnaire has been gathered, all the informants returned their copies with full answers to the questionnaire. More information about the questionnaire and the participants are given in table 1 in the list of appendices.

The researcher took the most important questions, from the questionnaire that has a relationship with the research questions.

**Question One:** What is the level of your knowledge about plagiarism?

1. Good
2. Average
3. Bad

About 56% of the students have a bad knowledge about plagiarism and its different types, while 33% of them have some information and 11% declared that they know plagiarism and its different types. In this regard, it should be noted that the students are familiar with the notion plagiarism although their knowledge is poor (table 2 & figure 1 in the list of appendices).

**Question 2:** Do you know that academic misconduct is an unethical practice?

- Yes
- No

About 58% of the informants highlighted that committing plagiarism is an unethical practice, but they added that they were not taught about ethics in research, whereas the remaining informants reported that they have no idea about ethics in research (table 3 & figure 2 in the list of appendices).

**Question Three:** Did your teachers inform you that you conduct plagiarism in your research proposals?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Always

About 58% of the informants declared that their teachers never warned them about plagiarism. In contrast, 32% of the students claimed that teachers are always guiding them to avoid plagiarism through teaching them how to summarize and paraphrase (table 4 & figure 3 in the list of appendices).

**Question Four:** Are there any penalties against plagiarism at the department of English?

- Yes
- No

About 90% of the participants informed that there are no penalties on plagiarism at the level of the department. They further maintained that there is no plagiarism checker at the level of the department. On the other hand, 10% of the students claimed that although there is no plagiarism checker, the teachers are severe against unethical practices (table 5 & figure 4 in the list of appendices).

#### 4-2 Interview

The interview was conducted with ten teachers. Most of them taught the module of research methodology. The researchers focused on three questions from the interview to present for the analysis.

**Question 1:** Did you introduce the lecture of plagiarism in the module of research methodology?

All the teachers answered 'yes'. They claimed that they taught their students what is meant by plagiarism and its different types from the first lecture during the first year. They added that they gave them more details about techniques of writing including paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting.

**Question 2:** In your opinion, what are the reasons that push them to commit plagiarism?

Four teachers out of ten argued that the students are unconscious about the severe penalties of conducting plagiarism because there are no specialized sessions or conferences that tackle the issue of plagiarism to raise the students' awareness of the effects of unethical practices. They added that the administration did not provide any checking materials to warn or punish them, whereas six of the interviewees claimed that the learners know what is meant by plagiarism, its different types and the severe penalties, but they are unaware because of their poor linguistic competence in writing English in addition to time constraints since some of them tend to write their dissertation by the second semester of the second year.

**Question 3:** How can they avoid plagiarism?

All the interviewees agreed on the point that plagiarism can be avoided if learners depend on themselves to write their essays and dissertations. One of them maintained that hand-writing students are better than those who type their writings. He added that students, who tend to use their hand-writing, write concise and precise language without plagiarism.

**5- Recommendations:**

The findings revealed that most of the learners were familiar with the subject and its different types, due to the help of their teaching through lectures on the subject. The results also showed that students are only warned by teachers of research methodology, while no one mentioned the issue during writing assignment like in written expression, literature or linguistics where the learners have to write essays and they tend to copy down from the internet. More importantly, the analysis of data collected demonstrated that the students tend to plagiarise from the internet due to their weak writing style, the lack of references and time constraints. In light of these findings, the following points are recommended:

- All teachers should raise their students' awareness of the results and penalties of committing plagiarism.
- Teachers should give their students assignments and check them through a plagiarism checker.
- The university should apply strict policies and severe penalties to restrict plagiarism and improve the quality of research by providing checking materials.
- Teachers have to insist on teaching their students the importance of ethics in research and that they are intertwined and cannot be separated.

**6- Conclusion**

It is agreed that the first reason that pushes students to plagiarise is easy access to books and articles through the internet. In this sense, teachers can benefit from the students' attitudes towards the use of the internet. Hence, it can be turned into a useful medium in academic research. More importantly, the universities should articulate regulations that can help learners to understand the severe penalties regarding those who conduct plagiarism to protect academic integrity.

It is also noteworthy to state it is also the duty of the parents to make their children aware of ethics and their importance in study and research. This means that honesty should take an indelible part in the child's life. Consequently, he will try to depend on his skills, build them and avoid all kinds of academic misconduct like cheating and plagiarism.



In the guise of conclusion, this small scale study explored the reasons that drive students to conduct unethical practices and the means that help them including the net. It also provided recommendations on how plagiarism can be avoided to realise integrity in the academic community.

#### Appendix of Tables and Figures:

**Table 1. Participants in the questionnaire**

Students	Number	Number of the Answers Returned
Master two (Didactics)	50	50
Master two (Literature & Civilisation)	50	50

**Table 2. Students' knowledge of plagiarism**

Answers	Master two (Didactics)	Master two civilization and Literature	Expressed in %
Good	07	04	11%
Average	11	22	33%
Bad	32	24	56%

**Table 3. Participants' knowledge of ethical practices in research**

Answers	Master two (Didactics)	Master two civilization and Literature	Expressed in %
Yes	19	23	42%
No	31	27	58%

**Table 4: Teachers' warning of their students**

Answers	Master two (Didactics)	Master two civilization and Literature	Expressed in %
Never	31	27	58%
Sometimes	07	13	20%
Always	12	10	22%

Table 5. Penalties against plagiarism

Answers	Master two (Didactics)	Master two civilization and Literature	Expressed in %
Yes	03	07	10%
No	47	43	90%

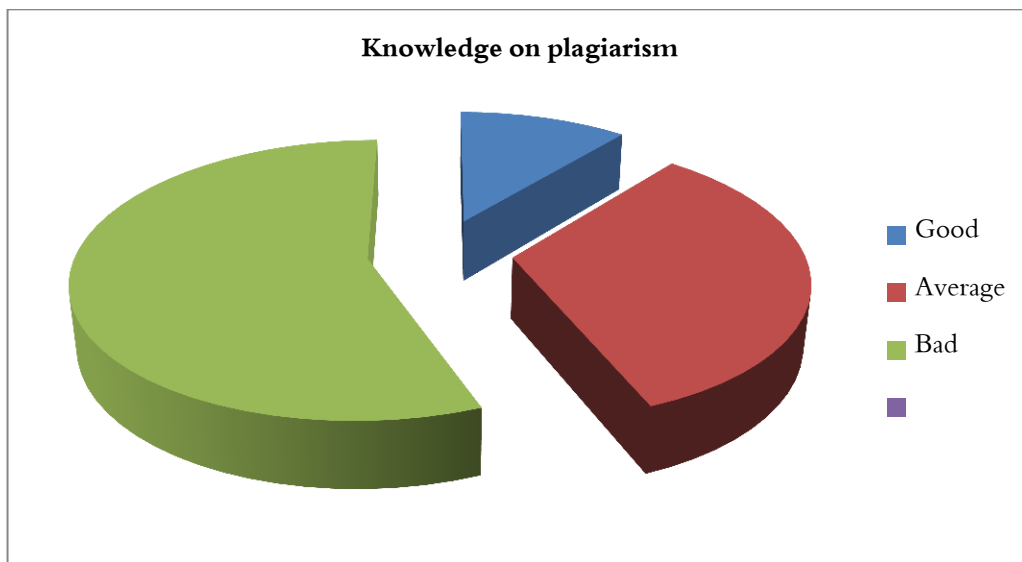


Figure 1. Students' knowledge of plagiarism

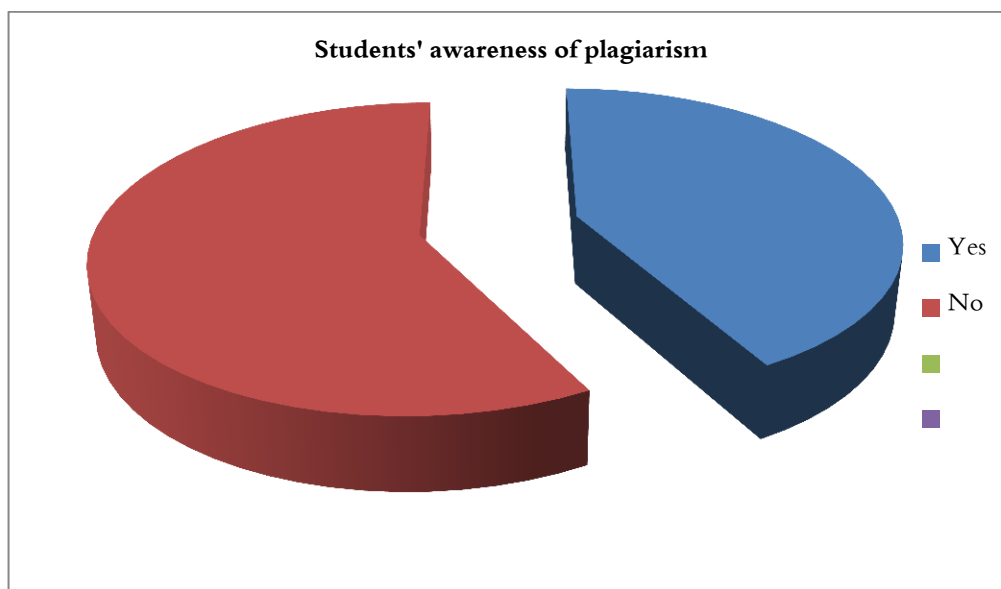


Figure 2. Participants' knowledge of ethical practices in research

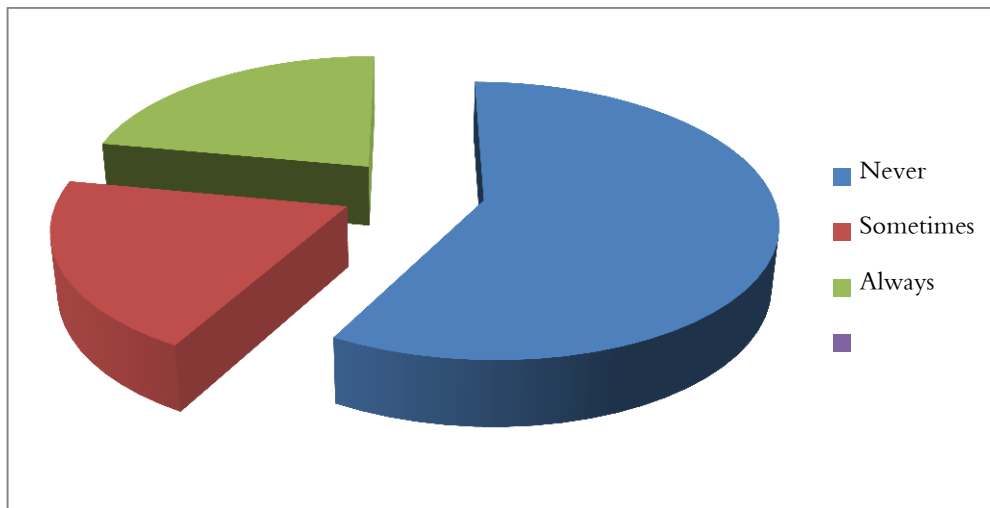


Figure 3: Teachers' warning of their students

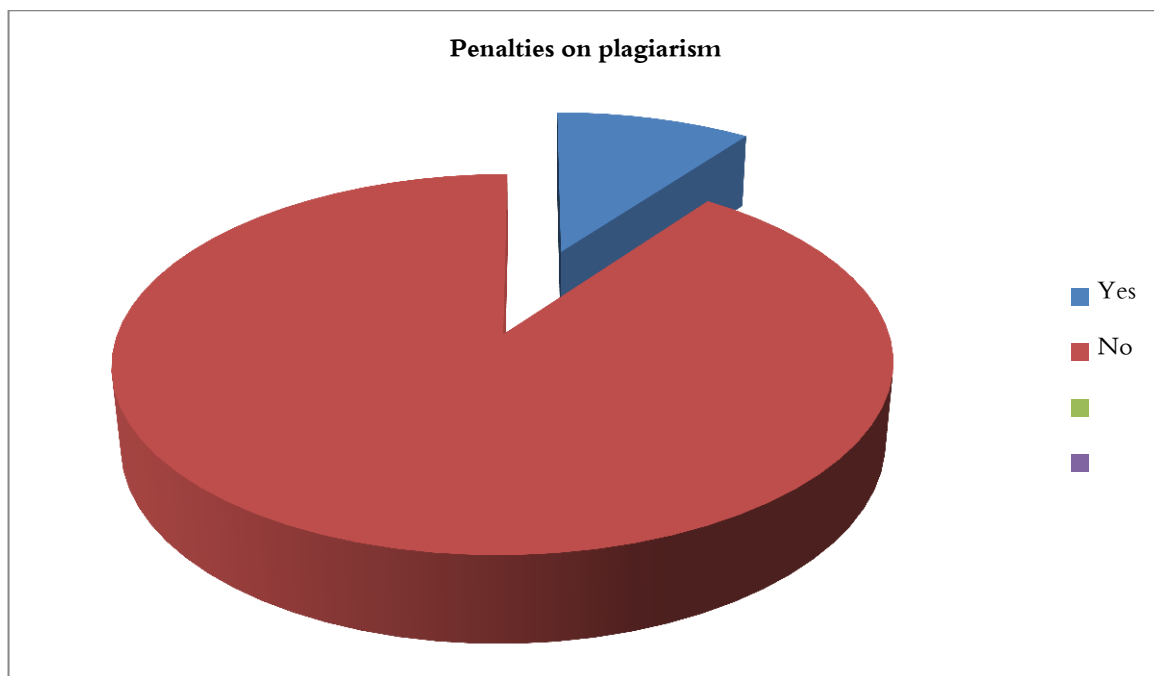


Figure 4. Penalties against plagiarism

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