

Acceptable or Plagiarized? Thai University Students' Evaluations of Academic Texts

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ABSTRACT

University students are expected to develop an awareness of correct and ethical approaches to writing. This awareness includes the ability to determine the suitability of academic texts that are written based on references made to other sources. This study aims to examine Thai university students' evaluation of the acceptability of academic texts that were paraphrased. Recent research from the region had indicated that university students had an incomplete understanding of acceptable academic writing. To further examine this phenomenon, this current study employs a mixed-methods approach where students had to rate the acceptability of three paraphrased versions of a text and provide their views on what constituted acceptable paraphrase through a survey. The survey was distributed to university students enrolled in an undergraduate-level academic writing course. A total of 104 students completed the survey by providing their ratings of acceptability. Among these, 89 students provided qualitative responses to share their views on what acceptable paraphrase is. The quantitative results indicated that many students were able to identify texts that were paraphrased completely; nonetheless, the qualitative responses revealed that students' perceptions towards paraphrased revolved around form, that is, the substitution of words and reorganization of text. This reaffirmed existing studies from the Thai context, but it also provided new insights about how students viewed academic writing.

Keywords: Academic integrity; plagiarism; academic writing; student perspectives; English as a foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism remains a pervasive problem affecting English academic writing courses regardless of the cultural context (Li et al., 2024). In Thailand, where this study is carried out, concerns regarding plagiarism have also been reported. Nagi and John (2020) discussed students' plagiarism as a form of logical action taken due to personal and situational constraints. In fact, reasons given by Thai students in their use of AI tools were varied and nuanced. For example, they recognized that rather than trying to paraphrase on their own, students would rely on tools that can help them maintain language and writing accuracy (Thangthong et al., 2024). On the other hand, Thai

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lecturers' have also been found to lack an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (Khathayut & Walker-Gleaves, 2021). This concern, however, is not unique to higher education students and lecturers from Thailand. Even in other Asian university contexts, plagiarism has been reported and perspectives regarding the severity of plagiarism have been dissimilar (e.g., for Indonesia, see Patak et al., 2021; for Malaysia, see Hussein et al., 2021; for Japan, see Yoshimura, 2018; for a transnational context in Singapore, see Palmer et al., 2019). These cross-national differences indicate that the problem with plagiarism cannot be viewed similarly; instead, it needs to be understood based on local and institutional practices, and students' literacy development.

While insightful, studies regarding plagiarism or other concerns of academic dishonesty have been done primarily through surveys that analyze students' attitudes or understanding towards plagiarism (e.g., Charubusp, 2015; Thomas, 2017; 2020). However, such survey-based approaches often remain at a surface level of attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, findings from these studies may not offer insights into students' ability to determine the acceptability of a text produced for academic purposes. In response to this limitation, scholars and practitioners have turned their attention to the cognitive dimensions of writing. Practitioners have discussed plagiarism as a problem arising from a lack of metacognition. In academic writing, metacognition comprises knowledge, which is knowing about strategies related to an academic activity or task; and regulation, which are the skills needed to regulate the strategies such as monitoring one's own work or evaluating the quality of a work (Teng & Yue, 2022). Building on this view, to be able to make inferences about authorship and originality is also linked with metacognitive monitoring, which suggests that plagiarism is not simply a moral issue but also one that is cognitive and educational. Given these insights, there is a need to move beyond attitudinal surveys and examine students' actual evaluative capacities. To address this gap, this study seeks to answer this question: *How well are Thai university students able to identify and evaluate instances of plagiarism and academic dishonesty in written academic texts?* In line with this question, a mixed-methods approach will be taken and the implications from this study are two-fold: first, it will shed light on the notion of acceptable paraphrase and second, it will provide a basis for writing practitioners and instructors to plan lessons targeted at improving students' metacognitive awareness.

METACOGNITION, PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ASIAN CONTEXTS

A central factor that shapes a students' ability to produce an academic text is metacognition, which is closely related to the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate information and writing (Negretti, 2012). Gallant (2017) defines metacognition as a set of skills where students have a "self-awareness of the knowledge they have, the knowledge they need, and how they can develop new knowledge" (p. 89). To increase students' metacognitive awareness, practitioners are encouraged to carry out reflective exercises, as well as to discuss their students' written work (Negretti, 2012). These reflective activities can encourage students to evaluate their own processes and recognize lapses in originality and authenticity. Based on these activities, instructors may also give paraphrasing tutorials to students and teach them how to self-check their work whether with tools or without (Stander, 2020). The latter may take the form of reflection done after submitting a written work, where students are tasked to think of their work in terms of originality, authenticity, and integrity. Engaging in this activity may prompt an extent of transformative learning as they may recognize parts of their writing process or written output that may be questionable or lack integrity (Dalal, 2015; Rustan & Thaha, 2023). As such, metacognition is not simply a cognitive skill but also a pathway toward cultivating ethical awareness for academic communication.

When imparting metacognitive skills to students, it is important to remember that their struggle to write properly and ethically may be due to their awareness of what constitutes acceptable forms of academic communication (Negretti, 2012). Furthermore, for L2 learners, plagiarism should not be viewed solely as a moral failure; rather, it should be treated as evidence for the learners' developing writing ability. In this sense, instances of plagiarism highlight areas where targeted support is needed, especially in proper paraphrasing and source integration. It should also highlight the type of intervention needed to guide students to develop their academic literacy skills to be able to write better (Festas et al., 2022).

In the context of Asia, studies have found that L2 university students have minimal experience or skills in academic writing. This has led to poor writing skills, such as problems in paraphrasing (e.g., Patak et al., 2021). Even if students understand the topic or content required of them in an academic essay, paraphrasing can still be challenging as it requires word substitution and sentence reconfiguration, for which students need sufficient lexical resources, as well as grammar and syntax knowledge. In addition, students' struggle with paraphrasing often intersect with how they engage with references, since summarizing or elaborating on sources involves higher-order thinking and reasoning. Furthermore, students' ability to paraphrase is mediated by their referencing of sources; in particular, how students summarize sources, whether in comparison with other relevant sources or by itself, and how sources are elaborated (e.g., Liu & Wu, 2020). In some Asian cultures, it may be that students view borrowing expressions as a way to develop their own academic voice without realizing that this action constitutes unethical writing (e.g., Yoshimura, 2018). This cultural lens reinforces the argument that plagiarism must be examined not only as a misconduct but also a learning and development phenomenon.

While there are many students whose first language is not English, it should not be assumed that they are more prone to committing plagiarism. In fact, Keck (2014) reported that students who learned English as a second language made more attempts in paraphrasing sources rather than copying them, and understood that the paraphrase had to be done in conjunction with the objective or purpose of their written assignment. This indicates that language learners actively attempt to engage with academic conventions, even if their outcomes are not perfect. In Thailand, several studies have pointed out that university students typically hold a negative perception towards dishonest or dubious behavior in an academic setting (Charubusp, 2015; Thomas, 2017, 2020). Nonetheless, plagiarism remains a concern affecting the quality of education in the Thai higher education context. One major explanation for this paradox is the limited or inconsistent understanding of plagiarism across both students and lecturers. To illustrate, in a study by Khathayut et al. (2020), it was found that students did not have a complete nor correct understanding of plagiarism or its related behaviors. Consequently, students did not find it wrong to plagiarize for the sake of completing their assignments. This was reported by Bowen and Nanni (2021) as well, where students knew what plagiarism was; nonetheless, their views regarding its severity were different. Not only were students unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, lecturers were also reported to have a limited understanding of this behavior. For instance, as reported by Khathayut and Walker-Gleaves (2021), Thai lecturers may be aware that copying word-for-word is unethical, but they did not necessarily consider other forms of academic dishonesty such as ghostwriting or poor citation as plagiarism. More importantly, these lecturers did not know what to do in the event of discovering that their students had plagiarized (see also Aziz & Silfiani, 2020). These findings suggest that strengthening metacognitive awareness among both students and lecturers is important for improving academic integrity in Thailand and across the region.

GENRE-BASED PEDAGOGY AND METACOGNITION

When teaching academic writing, a genre approach is commonly adopted. To learn academic writing through genre, there needs to be the ability to notice, monitor and also revise – all of which are integral metacognitive strategies. Specifically, L2 learners will need to notice that certain language or writing features are considered disciplinary conventions and as such, should emulate similar features in their own writing. Furthermore, when they can notice, they would be expected to have the ability to monitor their output. Expectedly, they should be able to identify inconsistencies in features or mistakes in language use, which should prompt revision (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023). On the other hand, for teachers, using the genre approach may translate to teaching practices that focus on providing instruction on language or writing features. They may assign a model text for students to refer to and use this text to draw out examples of language and writing features guide (Bai & Wang, 2023; Wingate, 2012; Wette, 2014). Genre pedagogy does not only place emphasis on form but also cultivates self-regulatory practices that are essential for independent writing.

In the context of Thailand, the genre approach is a common pedagogical activity when teaching academic writing in English to L2 university students. For instance, in the study of Samaranayake et al. (2025), Thai university students were found to feel supported when learning academic writing through a genre approach, coupled with a process orientation. This means that while paying attention to specific writing or language conventions, students are receiving feedback either from their instructors or their peers to ensure an increase in their metacognitive awareness of academic writing. This approach was also implemented by Kitjaroonchai et al. (2022), which found that Thai students had a greater level of improvement when compared to their classmates who learned academic writing through only a recursive process. The qualitative results also indicated that students were able to reflect on writing conventions when learning through a genre approach, indicative of a development of their metacognitive abilities.

Students' academic writing experience may also be shaped by other factors, such as how their written output are assessed and how the assessment or feedback was provided and understood (Loo & Imperial, 2022). This may result in students writing towards attaining desired marks, without necessarily developing a better understanding of writing or communication conventions relevant to their disciplinary area (Elliott et al., 2019). Moreover, given that student-produced academic texts will differ as students advance in their university studies, arriving at a stable notion of what constitutes good academic writing can be quite complex. This reinforces the point that academic writing should be treated as a dynamic and situated practice, rather than a fixed set of rules. This is because academic writing does not merely involve the accurate use of a particular form or style of language; instead, appropriate academic discourse is often determined by the context it is serving, rendering academic writing as a situated artifact (Xu et al., 2023).

As mentioned earlier, when students do not quite grasp the nature of academic writing, they may resort to questionable and unethical behaviors, such as plagiarism. In the Thai context, besides using a genre-based approach to closely guide students, other teaching approaches have also been introduced. Among them is inferential reasoning, which also constitutes a part of metacognition as it requires students to link known information with that being derived from the source text being paraphrased. Furthermore, inferential reasoning requires students to first form a correct or deep understanding of a source text before attempting to paraphrase it or to represent it in a different form (Soto et al., 2019). For the Thai setting, Thienthong (2018) writes that inferential reasoning “is a flexible process of creating meanings that enables students to express their ingenuity” (p. 11). This shows how inferential reasoning is not only supportive of comprehension

but it also promotes ethical paraphrasing. Taking this approach will liberate students from a restricted interpretation of a source, and the recognition of alternate interpretation may encourage students to paraphrase ethically. This is to accommodate students' differing levels of language or writing proficiency by emphasizing meaning. To this end, Thienthong suggests three ways to do inferential reasoning. First, a complete paraphrase of the source text; second, synthesizing shared information between several sources; and third, drawing relationships between sources. These three ways, nonetheless, require students to have language competency that would allow them to paraphrase well.

THE STUDY

This study examined Thai university students' ability to evaluate the acceptability of academic texts that are paraphrased. The focus on paraphrasing was chosen because of its central role in academic writing and its close association with plagiarism and academic integrity. The current study was guided by Liu and Lin (2022), who also looked at university students' rating of paraphrased text. In their study, the ability to evaluate paraphrased text was premised on metacognition, whereby students possessed the knowledge and skills to determine the suitability of academic discourse, as well as to plan and strategize its production. Building on this perspective, the present study conceptualizes paraphrase evaluation as not only a linguistic task but also a cognitive and reflective one. Evaluation was considered an integral facet of student metacognition, as it would have an impact on students' success in participating in academic procedures (e.g., writing and/or revising academic texts) (see Negretti & McGrath, 2018; Santelmann et al., 2018). Accordingly, this study aimed to capture how Thai students determine the acceptability of paraphrased academic texts, thereby connecting metacognitive awareness with the broader issue of academic honesty.

DATA COLLECTION TOOL AND ANALYSIS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to glean deeper insights regarding students' perceptions towards, as well as evaluation of, academic acceptability. A mixed-method approach is capable of 'exploring underlying mechanisms', especially phenomena that may be multidimensional (Riazi & Candlin, 2014; see also Khathayut et al., 2020). With regards to the issue being examined, this method was deemed appropriate as other related studies have often relied on surveys comprising a series of statements on students' writing practices. While these studies collect students' reported behaviors or perceptions, they do not offer a complete picture of university students' actual practice or capabilities. On the other hand, the mixed-methods approach of this study included responding to a survey (quantitative), where students/participants were tasked to evaluate the academic acceptability of an academic text that was paraphrased for academic purposes; and also an open-ended question (qualitative), where students had to describe how they determined the academic acceptability of the paraphrased texts. More details, especially with regards to the survey, are provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

The survey comprised three parts. In the first part, demographic information of the students was collected: educational level, student's area of study, and a self-evaluation of academic writing competency. The second part of the survey had two texts. For each text, three versions were provided, which were rewritten by the first author and checked by the second. These rewritten

versions were different in terms of the extent of paraphrase: one version with 10% of words or phrases rewritten; another version with 50% words or phrases rewritten; and a version that was completely rewritten. This approach was guided by the suggestion to use inferential reasoning by Thienthong (2018), as well as Keck's (2006) Taxonomy of Paraphrase Types (Table 1). In the survey, after reading and comparing the original and rewritten versions, students were asked evaluate the academic acceptability on a 4-point rank, with 1 being "not acceptable at all" and 4 being "acceptable". The quantitative data was analyzed descriptively.

TABLE 1. Paraphrase Types

Keck's Taxonomy of Paraphrase Types		Modified Taxonomy for Current Study	
Paraphrase Type	Linguistic criteria	Paraphrase Type	Linguistic Criteria
Near Copy	50% or more words contained within unique links	Minimally Paraphrased	Word replacement of only 10% of total words
Minimal Revision	20–49% words contained within unique links	Moderate Paraphrase	Word replacement of 50% of total words
Moderate Revision	1-19% words contained within unique links	Not adapted	Not adapted
Substantial Revision	No unique links	Complete Rewrite	No unique links with the original text

The qualitative component comprised an open-ended question at the end of the survey, where students shared how they determined the academic acceptability of the rewritten texts. The qualitative responses were thematized based on their content. The analysis of qualitative data began with the comparison to relevant literature, especially findings on academic writing and academic honesty/plagiarism in the context of Thailand. Some recent relevant literature included the work of Bowen and Nanni (2021), where they reported students' uncertainty regarding the (re)use of word or sentence forms from a source they are using for their own academic written work. Qualitative data was also compared against the study of Khathayut et al. (2020), where they reported students' lack of experience as a factor that led them to rely on word substitution, but still copying sentences or whole paragraphs into their own work.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which in this context referred to students who were directly accessible to the researcher (Golzar et al., 2022). After ethics approval, students taught by the main researcher were invited to participate anonymously and voluntarily. This choice of sampling was made because the researcher had direct teaching access to the participants, which allowed for practical administration of the survey and ensured that all participants were receiving similar English academic writing instruction. The participants comprised four undergraduate classes taking a first-year fundamental academic English course at a Thai public university located in Bangkok. Students in these classes were from various disciplinary backgrounds. Each class had up to 50 students. The survey was distributed to the students, and it remained open for two weeks. A total of 109 students did the survey. Out of this, five incomplete responses were discarded. As a result, only 104 responses were included in this study.

RESULTS

In this section, quantitative results are provided for each text that was evaluated. This is then followed by the qualitative responses of the participants. A majority of the students were studying arts and humanities (34.6%; n=36), followed by social sciences (30.8%; n=32), science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (28.8%; n=30), and finally health sciences (2.9%; n=3) and agriculture, forestry, and fishery (2.9%; n=3). Students' self-reported writing competence saw more than half (55.8%; n=58) evaluating themselves as not so competent in academic writing; 26.9% (n=28) evaluated themselves as needing improvement in academic writing and the remaining 17.3% (n=18) considered themselves as quite competent in academic writing.

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF ACCEPTABILITY FOR TEXT 1

Text 1 was taken from a textbook students used for their academic writing course. The table below presents the original text, and the rewritten versions. Words or phrases that were rewritten are indicated by a (number), original word or phrase in bold, followed by the rewritten word or phrase in bold and in brackets. Students' ratings of the three rewritten versions follow.

TABLE 2. Original and rewritten versions for Text 1

Original Text	Don't look upon drafting as merely translating a storyboard or outline into words. If you draft with an open mind, you can discover lines of thought that you couldn't have imagined before you started. But like other steps in the process, even surprises are better with a plan.
Text A (10% word replacement)	Don't (1) look upon (view) drafting as merely translating a storyboard or outline into words. If you (2) draft (write) with an open mind, you can discover (3) lines of thought (perspectives) that you couldn't have imagined before you started. But like other steps in the process, even surprises are better (4) with a plan (when planned) .
Text B (50% word replacement)	Don't (1) look (view) (2) upon (-) drafting as (3) merely (only) (4) translating (converting) a (5) storyboard (narrative) or (6) outline (concept-map) into (7) words (paragraphs) . (8) If (When) (9) you (students) (10) draft (write) (11) with (using) an (12) open (broad) (13) mind (approach) , (14) you (they) (15) can (are able) (16) discover (to explore) (17) lines of thought (perspectives) that (18) you (they) (19) couldn't (did not) (20) have imagined (consider) (21) before (when) (22) you (they) started. But like other steps in the process, even surprises are better (23) with a plan (when planned) .
Text C (Completely rewritten)	Writing should not be considered as transferring an idea from an informal outline to a formal text. Writing is an exercise where other opinions or views may emerge for the consideration of the writer. This also might happen when writing is planned.

TABLE 3. Students' evaluation of acceptability of the rewritten versions

Text 1	Not acceptable at all 1	Not acceptable 2	Somewhat acceptable 3	Acceptable 4
A (10% word replacement)	41.3% (n=43)	29.8% (31)	16.3% (17)	12.5% (13)
B (50% word replacement)	8.7% (9)	39.4% (41)	38.5% (40)	13.5% (14)
C (Completely rewritten)	11.5% (12)	6.7% (7)	27.9% (29)	53.8% (56)

Text 1-A had 10% of the words replaced. For this version, a majority of the students evaluated it as not acceptable at all and not acceptable. Text 1-B, which had half the words replaced, was deemed by many students as not acceptable (39.4%; n=41) and somewhat acceptable (38.5%; n=40). Text C, which was completely rewritten, saw more than half the students evaluating it as somewhat acceptable (27.9%; n=29) and acceptable (53.8%; n=56).

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF ACCEPTABILITY FOR TEXT 2

Text 2 is from the same source as Text 1. The table below presents the original text, and the rewritten versions. This is followed by the students' evaluation of the three rewritten versions.

TABLE 4. Original and rewritten versions for Text 2

Original Text	The point is to find a question that you want to answer. Too many students, both graduate and undergraduate, think that the aim of education is to memorize your own answers to your own questions. To do that, you must learn to wonder about things, to let them puzzle you, particularly about things that seem most commonplace.
Text A (Completely rewritten)	As university students, there needs to be the desire to be inquisitive - to ask questions about ideas or things that are presented to them. This should be the way to learn; instead of just remembering facts in an uncritical manner.
Text B (10% word replacement)	The point is to (1) find (identify) a question that you want to answer. (2) Too many (countless) students, both graduate and undergraduate, think that the (3) aim (goal) of education is to memorize your own answers to your own questions. To (4) do (accomplish) that, you must learn to wonder about things, to let them puzzle you, (5) particularly (especially) about things that seem most commonplace.
Text C (50% word replacement)	The (1) point (idea) is to (2) find (identify) a (3) question (concern) (4) that (-) you want to (5) answer (address) . (6) Too (There are) (7) many (countless) students, (8) both (either) (9) graduate (master's) (10) and (or) (11) undergraduate (bachelor's) , (12) think (perceive) that the (13) aim (goal) of (14) education (university studies) is to (15) memorize (commit to memory) own (16) answers (opinions) to your own (17) questions (learning points) . To (18) do (accomplish) that, (19) you (students) must (20) learn (know) to (21) wonder (think) about (22) things (stuff) , to (23) let (allow) (24) them (the stuff) (25) puzzle (to make) you (26) (think more) , (26) particularly (especially) (27) about (regarding) things that seem most (28) commonplace (ordinary) .

TABLE 5. Students' evaluation of acceptability of the rewritten versions

Text 2	Not acceptable at all 1	Not acceptable 2	Somewhat acceptable 3	Acceptable 4
A Text A (Completely rewritten)	9.6% (n=10)	14.4% (15)	32.7% (34)	43.3% (45)
B Text B (10% word replacement)	34.6% (36)	27.9% (29)	21.2% (22)	16.3% (17)
C (50% word replacement)	5.8% (6)	28.8% (30)	42.3% (44)	23.1% (24)

For Text 2, version A was completely rewritten. Most of the students evaluated this version as somewhat acceptable (32.7%; n=34) and acceptable (43.3%; n=45). Text 2-B, on the other hand, had 10% of its words replaced. While it seemed that many of the students evaluated this as not acceptable at all (34.6%; n=36) or not acceptable, there were still several students who considered this as somewhat acceptable (21.2%; n=22) and acceptable (16.3%; n=17). Text 2-C, which had 50% of the words replaced, saw a majority of the students evaluating it as somewhat acceptable (42.3%), and more who perceived it as not acceptable (28.8%; n=30) compared to it being acceptable (23.1%; n=24).

Based on the quantitative data, it appeared that the participants were able to determine the acceptability in written discourse, as seen in the evaluations of the versions that were completely rewritten: Text 1-C and Text 2-A. Students' capability to determine acceptability may also be observed in the somewhat acceptable rating for versions that were 50% rewritten: Text 1-B and Text 2-C. Nonetheless, there were still students who may find difficulty in paraphrasing appropriately or representing information in academic discourse, such as that seen in the somewhat acceptable and acceptable ratings of Text 1-A and Text 2-B, which are versions where only 10% of the words were replaced.

STUDENTS' QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

There were 89 qualitative responses provided by the students, written either in English or in Thai (which have been translated in this paper). The thematization of these qualitative responses were guided by relevant studies (Bowen & Nanni; 2021; Khathayut et al., 2020), which yielded three main themes, namely academic writing on the basis of form, meaning, and meaning and ethics. The first theme, 'Form', refers to participants' perception that acceptable paraphrase is bound to form, without much thought given to the meaning of the source text. The next category, 'Meaning', refers to students' perspective that acceptable paraphrase can be achieved by rewriting the source text and retaining the meaning from the original source. The third theme is an extension of the second, where the acceptable paraphrase is achieved not just by meaning but also by 'Ethics'. In this theme, there is an overt concern about ensuring that sources are treated ethically, with an awareness of writing practices that may lead to plagiarism. The table below shows the number of responses based on the three themes, followed by some examples of students' responses.

TABLE 6. Qualitative responses from the students

	Form	Meaning	Meaning and Ethics
N of Responses	58	24	6
Example of Responses	Response #14 ที่ไม่เหมาะสม คือ เปลี่ยนศัพท์บางคำนิดๆหน่อยๆ รูปประโยคคล้ายเดิม (Inappropriate to just change some words a little bit but should keep the same sentence form). Response #23 การcopyข้อความจะไม่เป็นที่ยอมรับ ส่วนการเปลี่ยนคำหรือข้อความบางอย่าง	Response #17 เป็นข้อความที่มาจากการใช้ความเข้าใจ องตัวผู้เขียนในการเรียบเรียงประโยค ไม่ซ้ำกับประโยคต้นแบบ ทั้งในเรื่องของคำศัพท์ หรือการเรียงประโยค (It is a text that comes from the use of the author's understanding in composing sentences. It is not the same as the original sentence, both in	Response #1 Rewritten versions should not only includes changing of word by simply finding their synonyms, we also need to concern about the structure of the sentence. In the academic writing, we should be aware that our research is our thoughts and beliefs. So, using other people

จะทำให้เป็นที่ยอมรับมากกว่าเช่นการใช้ ถ้อยคำที่ทางการมากขึ้น (Copying the text will not be acceptable; changing certain words or phrases will make it more acceptable, such as using a more formal wording.) Response #24 การใช้คำศัพท์ที่มีความเหมาะสม มีการสรุปใจความจากต้นฉบับที่ไม่ได้ นำข้อความต้นฉบับมาทั้งหมดแต่เป็นกา รเขียนขึ้นใหม่ให้มีการสื่อความหมายเห มือนต้นฉบับเดิม (Use of appropriate vocabulary. The paraphrase is a summary of the original text that does not take all the original text but it is rewritten to have the same meaning as the original text.)	terms of vocabulary or sentence arrangement). Response #27 มีการสรุปใจความสำคัญของบทความไม่ คัดลอกมา ใช้คำที่แตกต่างจากต้นฉบับแต่มีความห มายเหมือนกันเพื่อให้ไม่ซ้ำกับบทความ ต้นฉบับ (There is a summary of the main idea of the article, not just copying it. Use words that are different from the original but have the same meaning to make them unique from the original article.) Response #77 การเรียบเรียงใหม่ที่ดีไม่ใช่แค่เปลี่ยนกา รใช้คำศัพท์อื่นแต่ความหมายเดิม หรือเปลี่ยนเพียงแค่โครงสร้างและtens e ของประโยคนั้นๆ แต่ควรที่จะเข้าใจบริบทดั้งเดิม แล้วexpress ออกมาในแบบของตัวเองมากกว่าว่าตนเ ข้าใจแบบไหน ถึงจะเป็นที่ยอมรับและเหมาะสมในการ เขียนเชิงวิชาการ (A good reformulation is not just changing the use of words, or just changing the structure and the tense. There should be a correct understanding of the original context with it being expressed according to the author's style)	thoughts to support our theory is doable by editing the original sentence to what we call a rewritten versions and provides citation as needed. We all should be reminded that neglecting to learn how to do a proper paraphrasing might change our status from researcher to a thief. Response #86 ดูจากรูปแบบโครงสร้างของประโยค แล้วก็คำศัพท์ สุดท้ายดูที่ใจความของประโยค หากพบว่ายังคงความหมายหรือคอนเซป ต์ตามต้นฉบับ ก็ถือว่าสามารถใช้ได้ แต่การที่แค่เปลี่ยนคำศัพท์เฉยๆ ซึ่งแม้ว่าจะเป็นหนึ่งในวิธีการพาราเฟส แต่อาจจะไม่สามารถนำวิธีนี้มาใช้ในงาน เขียนวิชาการได้ ซึ่งอาจจะเกิดการplagiarism ได้ (Look at the structure of the sentence and the vocabulary. Then, look at the meaning of the sentence. If the meaning or concept of the original is retained, then it is considered acceptable. Just changing the vocabulary, which, although is one of the paraphrasing methods, may not be suitable for academic writing as it leads to plagiarism)
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As can be seen from the table above, many of the participants' responses were thematized as reflecting a focus on form. When considering the responses from this theme, it may be said that their understanding of paraphrasing was incomplete due to their perception that the substitution of words alone was sufficient and acceptable for academic writing. While word substitution is part of paraphrasing, it may not be to the extent of rewriting the original source, which may lead to patchwriting, such as that explained by Yang et al. (2019). Furthermore, the participants' understanding of how words were used in academic writing may be somewhat distorted. As seen in Response #23, it is implied that replacing words with those that are more formal would be acceptable, and Response #24 seemed to assume that there is an allowance for an extent of the original text that can be included in a paraphrase. This is not entirely wrong, given that there are words that are expected to be retained, such as key- or discipline specific words. But it is important

for these conditions to be understood by the students (see also Nontasee & Sukying, 2023; Sukying, 2025).

The second theme consisted of responses where students indicated that the correct understanding of the meaning of the source text is necessary to be able to paraphrase in an acceptable way. This process involves replacing not just words, but also reconfiguring the sentence structure. In other words, a paraphrase needs to be distinct from the original text, and reflective of the author's style (Response #27 & #77). While the responses for the second theme point towards the correct conventions for paraphrasing and academic writing, it lacks the ethical dimension of attributing paraphrased information to the original source. This may be reflective of an incomplete understanding of academic writing, such as that discussed by Khathayut et al. (2020), where, in their study of Thai university students, found that they did not quite understand types of plagiarism and ways for prevention, including proper citation or references. Nonetheless, it should be noted too that students may have not been provided sufficient instruction or guidance from their teacher, or that the writing tasks failed to explicitly state the need for complete and correct attribution. The third theme is an extension of the second, by means of students indicating the importance of citation and reference. The third theme reflects a desired understanding of academic paraphrasing; nonetheless, this was not found to be prominent among the participants of this study. Specifically, of the 89 qualitative responses, only six mentioned the need to cite or reference. This finding points towards the need for instruction about ethical academic writing.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine Thai university students' ability to determine acceptable paraphrase, and subsequently, plagiarized academic texts. This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to provide insights into students' perceptions towards academic writing. Specifically, they had to evaluate different versions of paraphrases in terms of their academic acceptability. The quantitative results indicated a majority of students being able to identify text that was written ethically for academic purposes. Nonetheless, this was not necessarily reflected in the students' qualitative responses. Both quantitative and qualitative findings also point towards varying views about the severity of academic dishonesty (see İrina & Ali, 2018). This is illustrative of the discussion by Khathayut et al. (2020) and Bowen and Nanni (2021) regarding Thai university students' understanding of plagiarism, which they found to be incomplete and varied. Another aspect of the findings worth mentioning is the students' disciplinary background. Although most students were from arts, humanities, and social sciences, the variation across disciplines did not emerge as a strong factor in the quantitative analysis. However, the qualitative responses suggest that discipline-specific expectations of writing may influence how students perceive paraphrasing. For example, students from technical disciplines might prioritize accuracy of meaning, while those from humanities might emphasize language expression and style (see Davis & Morley, 2015). The qualitative findings are also particularly revealing. Many students equated acceptability with surface-level word substitution ("Form"), while fewer recognized the need for restructuring and preserving meaning ("Meaning"). Only a small minority associated paraphrasing with ethical responsibility ("Meaning and Ethics"). This distribution points to a developmental trajectory: students begin by experimenting with form, move towards grasping meaning, and eventually integrate ethical awareness. Such a progression aligns with research on plagiarism as part of academic literacy development (Festas et al., 2022; Rustan & Thaha, 2023). The fact that most

students remained at the level of form suggests that pedagogical interventions should scaffold them into deeper levels of inferential reasoning and reflective practice (Soto et al., 2019; Dalal, 2015).

In terms of the participants' academic literacy level, it may be said that they were not yet capable of doing academic writing through inferential reasoning, such as that suggested by Thienthong (2018). Based on the participants' qualitative responses, many of which placed an emphasis on form, it may be that the students' immediate concerns in academic writing revolved around language issues (Bowen & Nanni, 2021). With this taking the forefront of students' writing process, it may not be surprising that other academic writing features, such as referencing correctly, were sidelined. This overemphasis on form resonates with Yoshimura's (2018) finding that students often see copying as part of learning to write, and it may also indicate underdeveloped metacognitive monitoring (Negretti, 2012; Teng & Yue, 2022). A possible reason for this may be the lack of academic writing requirements throughout the participants' university studies, which had subsequently reduced opportunities for guidance given to students. In such a situation, students' development in academic writing becomes incidental, which may not allow sufficient practice opportunities needed to build and achieve an ethical approach for academic writing. It may also be the case that the broader university context did not articulate consequences for unethical academic behaviors (Aziz & Silfiani, 2020). Thus, as seen in this current study, while the participants were able to recognize what proper academic writing is, they were not able to clearly articulate that knowledge at an individual level. For students to be able to reflect on ethical values and to maintain integrity in their academic work, there needs to be a concerted effort by the writing instructor and the institution. Doing so is believed to bring about academic ethics and integrity that are more tenuous, compared to that which is formed on the basis of compliance with university policies and rules (Sefcik et al., 2020).

Based on the findings and discussion, there are three pedagogical implications that this study proposes. The first implication is, in the context where English is used as a foreign language, such as that in the setting of the current study, academic writing instruction should perhaps be fronted by ethical guidance and considerations. This is to allow students, especially those who are still developing academic writing skills and language proficiency, to receive clear instructions on ethical practices such as citing and referencing sources, before moving on to other conventional aspects of academic writing. Second, students may require explicit and continuous instruction about academic writing conventions, which should include activities that help students recognize instances of plagiarism and acceptable paraphrasing and proper referencing (both in-text citations and reference list) (Du, 2020). This will be possible if the depth of a writing task or the length of assignments is regulated carefully, so as to allow the instructor to provide optimal attention and instruction to the students. The third implication is that it may be useful for students to also reflect on the process of writing. This may be done by getting students to accompany their academic texts with a short reflection, where they highlight their writing experience. By doing so, students are made to actively think of their writing process and to take ownership of what they write, which may contribute to their metalanguage of ethical writing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Written assignments will continue to be an integral component of the university experience. This mode of learning is not only valuable for students' development of communication for academic purposes, but also for their growth in ethical academic practices. While the quantitative findings of this study showed students evaluating texts paraphrased completely as being academically acceptable, the qualitative responses show otherwise. The divergence between quantitative and qualitative results highlights the complexity of academic literacy development, suggesting that surface recognition of acceptability does not necessarily translate into deeper metacognitive or ethical understanding.

To provide further insights into this incongruity, future studies could consider a longitudinal approach and include data gleaned from the process of initiating, doing, and completing an academic writing assignment. Students' study program as well as the type of writing assignments required of them could also be considered variables when analyzing their perception and ability in acceptable and ethical academic writing. One limitation of this study is the use of convenience sampling of the researcher's own students, which limits the scope of generalizability. Another limitation is that disciplinary background was collected but not deeply analyzed in relation to students' responses; future work should investigate whether disciplinary norms shape perceptions of acceptable paraphrase. A further limitation is that the study relied on written survey responses; classroom observations or writing portfolios could provide richer triangulation. Future research could therefore adopt a mixed longitudinal and cross-disciplinary design, combining textual analysis with interviews, to capture how students' metacognitive and ethical awareness evolves over time.

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