

Plagiarism-Free Writing in Digital Learning Environments: How Possible Is It?

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Abstract

What do EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students truly know about plagiarism? The issue of students' plagiarism is rather serious in many contexts due to a paucity of knowledge and understanding of what it is. Many students are not aware of why it is intolerable in the academic community while some are without skills necessary to avoid it. To address this problem, this paper explores a collaborative digital platform designed to enable students to learn about the essence of plagiarism and to practice necessary skills, including summarizing, paraphrasing, and referencing. The study involved students enrolled in an academic writing course. The students worked on tasks and shared content through Google Workspace. During an informal feedback session, the students generally reported that working on the platform allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of plagiarism and improve their writing skills, particularly in summarizing, paraphrasing, and referencing. Overall, the study highlights the value of using collaborative digital learning approaches to foster plagiarism awareness and strengthen academic writing skills in contemporary learning environments.

Keywords: Plagiarism; Learning environments; EFL learners; Academic writing

Introduction

Have your EFL students had problems understanding what creates plagiarism? Have they struggled with acquiring their own voice when writing? What can be done to help them to learn to write observing the conventions of academic integrity? These are questions that many EFL educators continue to face across different educational contexts these days, particularly in EFL settings where students learn new language forms and meet rigid academic expectations.

These could well form the starting point for a deeper reflection on how plagiarism is understood, instructed, and addressed in classroom practice in the post pandemic era.

The problem of students' plagiarism is rather acute in many teaching contexts for various reasons (Muthuraman, 2025). Some students lack certain knowledge of what plagiarism is and why it is unacceptable in academics. Many learners are even short of skills needed to avoid it. In many instances, students may not deliberately plagiarize, but they struggle with interpreting academic texts, synthesizing information, and expressing ideas in their own words. Cases of plagiarism among EFL students are not uncommon and often take a form of 'cut and paste' (McCabe, 2005), with students copying sentences and entire paragraphs from the Internet or online sources and pasting them into their work (Zhang et al., 2024). This act shows that students may have limited awareness of what they are doing. They may lack confidence in their English ability, thinking that their English is not adequately accurate or academic.

Over the past years, the arrival of generative artificial intelligence devices has changed the nature of plagiarism from traditional practices to AI text generation (Hutson, 2024; Eaton, 2025). This has created new challenges for teachers in helping students understand what originality and authorship are. Since AI-generated content becomes more accessible, students may depend on those tools without fully understanding the limits between adaptation and plagiarism in academic writing.

The availability and accessibility of online sources today makes it even easier for students to plagiarize at the fingertips. In addition, students may come from educational backgrounds where memorization and copying of texts are acceptable; thus, original writing may not be valued or highly encouraged. Therefore, addressing plagiarism requires more than warning students about its consequences; it requires helping them to understand the concept deeply and equipping them with the necessary skills to promote originality.

The idea of creating this learning environment was conceived by the necessity of dealing with the problem of plagiarism in writing courses for undergraduate students. While the original design of this environment was based on a website that allows collaborative editing of its content and structure by its users like wiki, it is now more appropriate to conceptualize it as a collaborative digital platform that reflects current technological practices; that is Google Workspace. However, it is worth noting that other platforms such as Notion, Figma, Miro or integrated learning management systems (LMS) offer similar collaborative support with

flexibility, ease of use, and user friendliness for students. This change does not change the main pedagogical approach but enhances its implementation in current language classrooms.

This classroom-based study included 12 students in an academic writing course at a Thai university. Over one semester, the students used Google Workspace to participate in collaborative writing activities and tasks related to plagiarism, such as summarizing, paraphrasing, referencing, and online discussions. Informal feedback at the end of the course was used to reflect on their learning experiences and views of the platform.

A Collaborative Digital Platform for Developing Academic Writing Skills

To address this issue, the researcher designed a collaborative platform using Google Workspace to help students to learn about the essence of plagiarism and practice a variety of skills necessary to prevent it. The several objectives of using the platform were as follows: to understand what forms plagiarism and why it emerges; to learn about different types of plagiarism; to learn about the consequences of plagiarism; to understand the purposes of referencing; to improve note taking, summarizing and paraphrasing skills; to compile a bibliography about plagiarism; and to improve academic reading and writing skills (Wattanapanit, 2025). These learning objectives indicate that it is an approach that integrates knowledge and skills, and attitudes together. Plagiarism in this sense is closely in line with student literacy in academics.

It was expected that by achieving these objectives, the students would improve the skills needed to learn to write from diverse sources of information without committing plagiarism. At the same time, the approach intended to support a change in students' views of writing. Writing should not be perceived as a task of copying information. Rather, it should be seen as a process of engaging with ideas and constructing meaning. Writers can even develop their critical voice in their written discourse. This adjustment is vital for students' lifelong learning and success in academic performance (Sugiharto, 2025).

The collaborative platform was informed by social constructivism, which views learning as emerging through interaction and shared understanding. Through cooperative writing and peer feedback, students were encouraged to engage with ideas actively and learn from one another.

In fact, the course which this cooperative learning platform was part of, involved a number of activities that inspired both independent thinking and collaborative learning. One of the activities was creating a practical link or list of resources about plagiarism using the social

bookmarking service. The students were in addition asked to write summaries of articles assigned throughout the course. One challenge they all had to face was improving the existing reference list in Google Workspace about plagiarism and adding their own references to it. Currently, all of the said tasks could be implemented using modern digital features, such as shared documents, collaborative annotation platforms, and online reference gadgets. It is the job of the teacher to ensure that the learning experience stays relevant while maintaining the pedagogical merit of the original activities.

One appealing feature of doing these tasks in Google Workspace is that they are completed by students who work collaboratively. This way they learn from each other and share ideas. In a digital environment, this collaboration is even more interactive as students can provide real-time feedback. They can easily engage in discussions and revise their work based on peer advice. This process appears to enhance learning and help to build a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing ideas and learning from mistakes.

As part of the assignment marks of 10 %, students had to contribute to a Google Space article devoted to plagiarism using their experience of learning about plagiarism throughout the course. This task gave them a chance to further practice their writing skills in the authentic context and provided them with additional motivation through an opportunity to receive feedback from other peers and users. In other similar contexts, possible tasks may involve contributing to shared class publications, digital portfolios, or open educational platforms, thereby maintaining the authenticity of audience and purpose.

According to Warschauer (2005), to ascertain the successful integration of computer-mediated instruction, it is necessary for an activity to be socially and culturally significant. In addition, the use of an electronic medium should match its purposes and make use of proper linguistic structures. These principles remain relevant today regardless of the specific platform used, highlighting the importance of aligning technology with pedagogical goals.

Incorporating contributions to the article on plagiarism in Google Space in the course made its different parts fit together and the whole experience of working digitally more authentic. Zhang and Zou (2024) point out that writing in online learning platforms allows students to reach a wide audience who can provide them with additional feedback. This provides a missing link between theory and practice. Among other things, the Google Space task allowed the students to practically use tools for editing, such as ranking articles based on their quality, editing articles that require improvement of their content and presentation, and

including citation and referencing. In new online learning platforms, these practices can be done using regular peer review, new collaborative features, and well-designed activities on giving feedback.

Developing Skills and Reflecting on Learning Outcomes

Acquiring academic skills is necessary provided that students aim to write without plagiarism (Sharma & Khan, 2026). Deliberately embedded, tasks are constructed and put in Google Space and the main purpose is to familiarize students with how to quote, summarize, paraphrase and even reference properly. Such tasks are significant because they provide students with practical strategies in how to engage with sources sensibly and academically. Rather than avoiding plagiarism because of fear, students learn how to adjust and make use of information with confidence and in ways that it is safe and acceptable.

In reality, the process of acquiring these skills is incessant and requires consistency over time. Students start identifying key ideas in texts. They then move on by summarizing those ideas. This is followed by paraphrasing more complex structures and finally incorporating them into their own writing with proper references. This so-called guided approach enables students to gain confidence and develop competence. What is obvious is that it helps them to understand that academic writing is not about copying texts. It is more about crafting and synthesizing it critically and analytically.

During an informal feedback session at the end of the course, most of the students reported that working in Google Workspace helped them to gain a deeper understanding of the core of plagiarism and improve their writing skills. In particular, summarizing, paraphrasing and referencing were well-learned. These responses showed that the approach was helpful. It is advantageous in raising their awareness and developing practical skills. The students were able to express what they had learned and how their writing had improved. Overall, this suggested their meaningful learning experience.

Another favorable effect was seen when the students became more aware of the value of academic integrity. Working on collaborative tasks together, they had opportunities to discuss ideas and learn how others summarized and referenced. This made them see that academic writing is not just about avoiding plagiarism but being original and giving credit to original writers. The digital platform also made it possible for the students to review feedback and improve their work in due course. Some students appeared more willing to ask questions and seek clarification when they were in doubt about how to use sources suitably. The

collaborative nature of the activities constructed a supportive learning environment in which students could learn from both the teacher and their peers. As a result, they increasingly became more confident in referring to different sources and integrating them into their own work.

Moreover, the students gave the impression of being more careful when using information from online sources. Through regular practice and feedback, they learned to focus on how ideas were presented in academic writing. This awareness may help them avoid plagiarism in the course and in their future work.

Another observation was about the students becoming more reflective readers of academic texts. To summarize and interpret effectively, they first had to understand what they were reading. This encouraged them to focus on the gist rather than just replicating information from sources. While they worked with different texts throughout the course, many seemed to become more selective in deciding how to use information in their own writing. This supported the development of their writing skills and helped them engage more actively with academic reading. This also helped them realize that effective writing requires effective reading. Consequently, they appeared to handle both reading and writing tasks with more care and attention.

Also, the students showed confidence in their ability to utilize their own ideas and connect with academic texts. The shared tasks used also contributed to a supportive learning environment, where students could learn from each other and get some constructive feedback. This kind of community learning is remarkably pivotal in addressing plagiarism, as it shifts the emphasis from punishment to collaborative learning and development.

Together, it is important to note that such an approach requires careful implementation. Teachers need to provide clear instruction and implement effective practices. They also have to offer constant support to ensure that students can fully learn from the activities. Furthermore, students need time to adjust to collaborative learning in addition to mastering the necessary digital skills to participate effectively. A comparison between traditional approaches to plagiarism and the collaborative digital platform approach can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Traditional and Collaborative Digital Approaches to Addressing Plagiarism

Traditional Approach	Collaborative Digital Platform Approach
Focus on punishment and detection	Focus on learning and awareness
Teacher-centered instruction	Collaborative learning
Plagiarism identified after submission	Prevention through skill development
Individual writing tasks	Group writing and peer feedback
Limited interaction during writing	Shared online discussion and feedback

Conclusion

Briefly put, plagiarism-free writing takes a thorough method that combines awareness, skills, and actual practice. A collaborative digital platform in any format could lead to a way of backing up this process. When students are engaged in tasks that are meaningful and collaborative while focusing on core academic skills, they could develop the competence needed to write with pride and propriety. However, the paper is considered limited in terms of its small-scale nature and informal feedback given. Future research may examine the effectiveness of using other digital platforms on plagiarism and writing. Despite the road to plagiarism-free writing being slow and challenging, with the right support and practice, it is achievable.

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