

Tension and resolution: A conceptual model for L2 plagiarism

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ABSTRACT

The scholarly discourse on second/foreign-language (L2) plagiarism is characterised by a complex debate between competing perspectives. In 2015, the Journal of Second Language Writing hosted a scholarly dialogue between these competing perspectives, giving rise to a naturally occurring framework to help understand L2 plagiarism. As a starting point, this study employed this framework to understand the nature of these schools of thought and propose a new conceptual model to L2 plagiarism by synthesising the evidence-based literature ($n = 62$) via the framework synthesis approach. From this analysis, the study proposes a conceptual model that reframes the debate on L2 plagiarism into a dynamic system. The model posits that the central challenge in addressing L2 plagiarism is actively managing the core tension between the writer's context and universal standards and positions institutional pedagogy (curriculum & instruction, faculty development, and policy & communication) as the essential mediating force. This study concludes that future research and practice should shift from debating the problem to applying and evaluating such integrated institutional strategies to foster genuine academic integration for L2 writers to move beyond mere compliance toward active membership.

1. Introduction

Plagiarism is among the most prevalent threats to academic integrity in higher education, and it is often at the centre of institutional (Perkins et al., 2020) and pedagogical (Pecorari & Shaw, 2012) concerns. Understanding and addressing plagiarism has become a complex issue, especially in a foreign/second-language (L2) writing context, as universities become increasingly globalised. The scholarly discourse around plagiarism shows that plagiarism is not a monolithic issue. Rather, there are significant differences between the source use practices of first-language (L1) and L2 writers. These differences led to conflicting ideas about the nature of plagiarism in L2 writing.

In 2015, Diane Pecorari streamlined this debate with her influential article, “Plagiarism in second language writing: Is it time to close the case?” (Pecorari, 2015). She argued that decades of research on plagiarism largely established an essential point: much of what is labelled as “plagiarism” in L2 writing is not intentional cheating, but is rather an outcome of a developmental process. Building on Howard's (1992) approach to patchwriting, Pecorari contended that practices like patchwriting are indicators of students learning the complex linguistic and rhetorical conventions of a new academic discourse (Pecorari, 2015). Based on this understanding in L1, Pecorari made a call to action in L2: the field should shift its focus from conducting more of the same research to the practical dissemination and application of this knowledge to effect real change within educational institutions.

Pecorari's call ignited a scholarly dialogue that revealed the central tensions within the L2 writing community about plagiarism in L2 writing. The *Journal of Second Language Writing* published a series of responses from prominent scholars in reacting to Pecorari's

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claims. They articulated the competing perspectives on the topic of discussion. This scholarly discussion reveals a naturally occurring framework for understanding the schools of thought about the nature of plagiarism in L2 writing.

First, the developmental perspective championed by Howard (1992) and raised by Pecorari in L2 contexts was amplified by Taylor (2015). Taylor argued that L2 writers face additional challenges due to their prior educational experiences, cultural differences or linguistic difficulties in manipulating source texts and these challenges are often not recognised by faculty or policymakers when judging misconduct cases. Taylor criticises institutional policies where L2 writers are disproportionately accused of plagiarism without providing enough support to these students, who are already not supported enough. She advocates that the central task for institutions is indeed one of advocacy and education. This viewpoint frames the issue as a campus-wide communication challenge.

Second, as a response to Pecorari's calls for more empirical research, Flowerdew (2015) concentrated on the cultural perspective of the discussion. He argued against simplistic East vs. West (Confucian vs. Western) dichotomies often used to explain plagiarism in L2 writing, acknowledging the risk of stereotyping the problem. Based on his earlier studies, he proposed a multi-layered framework to understand textual borrowing. According to this view, a student's source use is not just a product of their ethnic culture (stemming from national values like Confucianism) but, at the same time, is shaped by local culture (the specific expectations of their university), academic culture (general norms of higher education), and disciplinary culture (the citation conventions of their specific field). Flowerdew strongly advocates for culture-sensitive, empirical research to understand the role of culture in understanding plagiarism in L2 writing.

Third, bringing a counter perspective from STEM fields, computer scientist Weber-Wulff, 2015 presented a different view grounded in universal compliance, arguing that why students plagiarise is irrelevant to their intention, as it is impossible to determine. From her perspective, a writer's developmental stage, cultural background, or intent is "quite irrelevant" to the act of plagiarism itself (p. 103). She expresses her concerns that by attributing plagiarism to cultural or linguistic difficulties, L2 research seems to excuse plagiarism. She continues with a warning that differentiating L1 and L2 plagiarism is problematic because plagiarism is a universal ethical breach, and all students should be treated equally. While she acknowledges Pecorari's view that L2 research is often unknown outside the field, Weber-Wulff argues that bridging this gap requires actionable solutions rather than nuanced discussions of intent.

These approaches highlight a central tension in the field: the struggle to balance the context-sensitive reality of the learner (developmental and cultural perspectives) against the objective demands of academic integrity (universalist perspective). This scholarly dialogue was further expanded by the work of scholars like Sandra Jamieson and Rebecca Moore Howard. Although not specifically focusing on L2 writing, in their 2019 article, "Rethinking the relationship between plagiarism and academic integrity," they advocate for a radical reclassification, arguing that developmental "intertextual missteps" like patchwriting should be removed entirely from the moral category of plagiarism and treated as pedagogical issues, while the term "cheating" should be reserved for cases of academic dishonesty (Jamieson & Moore Howard, 2019, p. 74).

Unifying these contrastive but complementary perspectives would help resolve the dilemma where students are encouraged to develop their voices yet often face penalisation for developmental struggles. A conceptualisation emerged from these perspectives could, in practice, move beyond binary choices, supporting versus policing, by positioning institutional pedagogy as a potential bridge between learner needs and universal standards. Moreover, investigating how these conflicting perspectives are represented in the evidence-based literature is also of great importance in terms of policy development and pedagogical approaches. The perspective of educational institutions on L2 plagiarism can directly affect educational environments and the support received by L2 learners. From this perspective, it is important to systematically investigate empirical studies in the literature that will guide and shed light on this debate. As Pecorari also highlights, it is crucial to examine the findings of studies that focus on the practical application of knowledge to create real change. This approach can ground practice not in assumptions but in a synthesized understanding of how to best support student learning while upholding academic integrity.

2. The present study

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive framework synthesis to map how academic studies focusing on L2 plagiarism empirically contribute to the ongoing discussion on L2 plagiarism and propose a conceptual model for L2 plagiarism. Responding to Pecorari's call, synthesising the findings of studies that concentrate on the practical dissemination and application of existing knowledge rather than reiterating the same research will illuminate this discussion significantly. This study utilises the naturally occurring analysis framework that was crystallised in the 2015 Journal of Second Language Writing dialogue following Pecorari's article. This framework consists of four key perspectives that represent the central tensions in the field:

- **The Developmental Perspective:** This view, advocated by Pecorari (2015), posits that practices like patchwriting are not intentional plagiarism but are predictable, symptomatic parts of learning the complex conventions of academic writing in L2 contexts.
- **The Institutional Advocacy Perspective:** Articulated by Taylor (2015), this viewpoint frames L2 plagiarism as a campus-wide communication challenge and argues that the primary task for institutions is campus-wide education and advocacy to equip all stakeholders with a more nuanced understanding of L2 writing.
- **The Cultural Perspective:** Proposed by Flowerdew (2015), this view argues against simplistic "East vs. West" dichotomies and insists on a multi-layered framework for understanding how textual borrowing is shaped by overlapping ethnic, local, academic, and disciplinary cultures.

- **The Universalist Compliance Perspective:** Presented by [Weber-Wulff \(2015\)](#), this perspective holds that factors like intent and cultural background are irrelevant to the act of plagiarism, which is an objective ethical breach that requires consistent prevention, detection, and sanctions.

According to this analysis framework, this framework synthesis is guided by the following research question:

- How does a framework synthesis of the scholarly literature clarify the distinct arguments and underlying assumptions of the primary schools of thought on L2 plagiarism, and what conceptual model emerges from this analysis?

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

A systematic search was conducted on the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus to compile a comprehensive dataset of relevant literature. The search strategy aimed to identify and collect evidence-based studies focusing on plagiarism and related source-use practices within L2 writing contexts. The search queries combined variations of terms related to plagiarism (e.g., plagiar*, patchwrit*, “source use”) with terms identifying the L2 writer population (e.g., “second language writ*”, “L2 writ*”, “non native”).

The search queries with Boolean operators used in the two databases are as follows:

Web of Science Search Query:

TS=((plagiar* OR “textual borrow*” OR patchwrit* OR “source use” OR “source misuse” OR “citation misuse” OR “academic integrity” OR “academic misconduct”) AND (“second language writ*” OR “L2 writ*” OR “ESL writ*” OR “EFL writ*” OR “foreign language writ*” OR (“academic writ*” NEAR/2 (L2 OR ESL OR EFL OR “second language”)) OR (“non native” NEAR/3 writ*) OR “English for academic purposes”)).

Scopus Search Query:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ((plagiar* OR “textual borrow*” OR patchwrit* OR “source use” OR “source misuse” OR “citation misuse” OR “academic integrity” OR “academic misconduct”) AND (“second language writ*” OR “L2 writ*” OR “ESL writ*” OR “EFL writ*” OR “foreign language writ*” OR (“academic writ*” W/2 (“second language” OR L2 OR ESL OR EFL)) OR (“non native” W/3 writ*) OR “English for academic purposes”)).

The search and screening process followed a multi-stage procedure. The initial searches yielded 154 results from WoS and 191 from Scopus. These studies were first filtered to include only academic journal articles, reducing the numbers to 132 and 139, respectively. The abstracts were then screened to retain only evidence-based studies, resulting in 119 studies from WoS and 91 from Scopus. After combining these lists, duplicates were removed, leaving 151 unique studies. These studies entered a final full-text reading cycle. During this stage, studies were excluded if the full text was not accessible through institutional membership (13 studies) or if a deeper reading revealed that the study's focus did not align with the research question (76). This final screening resulted in a dataset of 62 studies for thematic synthesis.

3.2. Data analysis

This study employed a framework synthesis approach to explore the arguments related to L2 plagiarism in the scholarly literature. Framework synthesis is a deductive qualitative inquiry ([Carroll et al., 2011](#)) for exploring the understanding of the issue under scrutiny based on an initial conceptual framework ([Brunton et al., 2020](#)). Unlike inductive thematic analysis approaches, framework synthesis is based on a priori framework, making it ideal for this study, which aims to analyse the arguments on L2 plagiarism through the lens of scholarly dialogue initiated in the Journal of Second Language Writing.

The analysis process was completed in several rigorous stages, including (1) Study profiling and data charting, (2) argument clustering and (3) synthesis and interpretation. In the first stage, the identified 62 studies were annotated into an Excel spreadsheet. The annotation process was conducted by the researcher through iterative reading cycles to ensure consistency. A matrix approach was employed, wherein relevant findings from a single study could be mapped to multiple perspectives simultaneously (e.g., a study might present findings relevant to both developmental and cultural arguments). Since this was a deductive framework synthesis, data extraction focused specifically on mapping evidence to the four a priori perspectives derived from the 2015 scholarly dialogue. At the end of this analysis process, a comprehensive master framework matrix was created. This annotation list allowed the researcher to have a nuanced understanding of each study in particular and the overall discussion in general. In the last stage, each perspective was synthesized into a coherent narrative by describing the argument and critically examining the relationship between the other clusters. The core aim was to move beyond a straightforward summary of the literature but to generate a critical interpretation of the argument lines in the literature.

4. Results: Framework synthesis

4.1. The Developmental Perspective

A significant body of research supports the notion that L2 plagiarism should be understood through a developmental lens. According to this perspective, plagiarism among (especially) novice L2 writers is not solely attributable to an ethical deficit but rather reflects stages in the development of academic writing skills and language proficiency. This section synthesises findings from studies that support this perspective with a special focus on the developmental perspective of L2 source use.

Many studies show that L2 writers progress through identifiable stages in their source use practices. Several scholars highlight patchwriting, the practice of copying from a source text with minimal modification (Howard, 1992), as a common stage in this development. Pecorari (2003), for instance, through analysis of L2 student writing and interviews, found extensive textual borrowing even among students who understood plagiarism guidelines. Pecorari's study reveals a clear gap in students' knowledge of plagiarism and their writing practices, suggesting that inappropriate source use mainly stems from undeveloped writing skills, not from an ethical weakness. Her findings support Howard's (1992) patchwriting model by highlighting that avoiding plagiarism for developing writers is a competing concern and patchwriting is a strategy to cope with the challenges of source-based writing, not an act of intentional plagiarism. Similarly, Charubusp (2015) linked patchwriting to students' limited academic literacy skills by highlighting a key psychological challenge that developing writers face: a fear of misinterpreting the source texts. This study reveals that one of the reasons students patchwrite is that their own paraphrasing attempts would distort the original meaning; therefore, they cling to the original wording. Charubusp (2015) explains this approach taken by students by referring to the Thai culture in which knowledge transmitters are highly respected and students are reluctant to alter an expert's (source text owner) words. The mixed-methods study of Çelik and Razi (2023) further supports the concept of patchwriting as a developmental stage by finding that a focus on intertextuality skills, rather than punitive measures, can facilitate L2 writing development. Their study provides concrete evidence that patchwriting is a starting point in L2 writing development and students abandon this practice as they get more skilled in writing. This developmental path is also highlighted by Keck (2006, 2014), whose comparative studies confirm that heavy reliance on copying is a characteristic strategy of novice writers, contrasting with the sophisticated paraphrasing observed in more experienced academic writers. Keck's (2006) study provides clear quantitative evidence that L2 writers used significantly more near copies than L1 writers when summarising, suggesting a reliance on source text wording. Keck notes that this copying behaviour is a necessary and formal phase in the academic writing journey of students, not a moral failure. Another study by Keck (2014) reinforces this idea, showing that novice writers, regardless of L1 and L2, rely more on copying than experienced writers. This study proposes a developmental sequence that novice writers follow; first by learning to identify important ideas (even by copying them), second by learning to alter the language (paraphrasing) and lastly by learning to integrate the source ideas into their own argument. The study of Chen and Wang (2022) draws an important conclusion about the paraphrasing stage that Keck (2014) mentioned. They found that while post-novice L2 writers use more paraphrasing than novices, they still struggle with accurate representation and synthesis of source information. They provide evidence for a "post-novice" stage, a concept extensively explored by Wette (2017). Wette found that even third-year undergraduates continue to rely on patchwriting, not as a form of misconduct, but as a necessary linguistic scaffold to bridge the gap between their current proficiency and the complex demands of disciplinary assignments. According to these researchers, post-novice writers' difficulties are more nuanced than those of novices. The issues like accurate representation and the fuzzy boundary between their own ideas and the sources are all signs of a developing authorial voice.

Some studies highlight the influence of prior learning experiences on L2 source use. In-depth interviews with ESL students show that students arriving from educational backgrounds that do not emphasise source-based writing often lack familiarity with citation practices (J. Hu & Yu, 2023), leading to unintentional plagiarism. In a similar way, Du and Liu (2024) found that Chinese undergraduates rely heavily on their prior Chinese writing experiences, leading to unconventional source use in English. Their research also reveals that the paraphrasing skills of L2 learners is governed by their past education (e.g., as a grammar drill, as imitation, as summarising), showing that this skill acquisition is a complex and non-linear process. Therefore, students' unconventional practices are predictable developmental efforts. The study of Sutherland-Smith (2005) contributes to the developmental perspective from the point of view of prior learning, claiming that the majority of students begin their university studies as true novices with no prior instruction on the concept of plagiarism. This frames their subsequent struggles as a natural part of a new learning process, not as a pre-existing moral flaw.

The research that supports the developmental perspective overwhelmingly highlights the efficacy of instructional interventions in guiding L2 writers along this developmental pathway. The action research study of AL Harrasi (2023) found that targeted interventions can improve L2 learners' citation practices. This study tells us about how the nature of intervention contributes to the developmental perspective. For instance, students master concrete, rule-based skills faster than abstract, interpretive ones. This shows a common developmental pattern where mechanical competence precedes deeper rhetorical and analytical writing skills. The study also shows that students' writing development is constrained by their underlying language proficiency because lower-proficiency students continued to struggle with accurately interpreting sources. This finding emphasises that source-use development is deeply intertwined with broader L2 development. Similarly, the study of Fazilatfar et al. (2018), in the Iranian EFL context, shows that citation skills can be developed through direct instruction, echoing the mechanical emphasis of AL Harrasi (2023). Different from previous studies we discussed, Fazilatfar et al. (2018) argue that instruction is a powerful developmental tool regardless of the students' prior academic level (both undergraduate and postgraduate students benefited equally from the training). Unlike AL Harrasi (2023) and Fazilatfar et al. (2018), the studies of Dodigovic (2013) and Cheng (2023) focus on the effectiveness of rhetorical intervention and found that combining explicit instruction with tool-based practice significantly improves students' paraphrasing skills. Their studies frame digital

tools as scaffolds for writing development rather than mechanisms for policing students. Both studies strongly emphasise that tools like Turnitin or language editing tools should be used to build writer competence rather than merely ensuring compliance. The intervention of Neumann et al. (2020) shows the effectiveness of focusing on vocabulary and reading comprehension in improving students' source integration skills. Their study identifies a significant milestone of writing development: from using a high quantity of source material to using sources more judiciously and effectively. This supports a view where novice writers develop from simply reporting source information to strategically using it to build their own arguments, leading to less transgressive source use. Some studies also show that engaging students in a writing process fosters development, whether through iterative drafting and feedback (Makovskaya & Radjabzade, 2022) or a metacognitive sensitising task (Rezvani & Miri, 2023). Both studies provide evidence that process-based writing interventions decrease plagiarism incidents, leading to a significant shift away from direct copying and toward more interpretive paraphrasing.

In sum, the literature overwhelmingly supports the developmental perspective as a useful framework for understanding L2 plagiarism. According to this view, plagiarism, particularly patchwriting, is not a simple moral failure but a predictable (often necessary) stage in the writing development of novice writers. This established process is not a linear one. It is shaped by students' educational backgrounds, constrained by their language proficiency and marked by evolving challenges as they gain new skills. The most important aspect that emerged in the literature is that the developmental perspective requires an active pedagogy rather than a passive observation. This process can effectively be scaffolded via instructional interventions. While doing so, this perspective shifts the focus from policing students to cultivating competence in source integration.

4.2. The Cultural Perspective

Unlike the developmental perspective, the cultural dimension of L2 plagiarism is a complex and contested area. While many studies acknowledge the influence of L2 writers' cultural background on their source integration practices, the extent of this influence remains an ongoing debate.

Several studies suggest that L2 writers' cultural backgrounds influence their textual borrowing practices in a way to lead unintentional plagiarism. For instance, the study of Charubusp (2015) found that Thai students, influenced by a high-power distance culture, were reluctant to paraphrase authoritative sources because this high power distance dictates that altering the words of a respected author can be seen as a sign of disrespect. This cultural nuance led some Thai students to use verbatim quotes from the sources. Chen and Wang (2022) observed a similar situation with Chinese EFL students. Students' heavy reliance on vocabulary and sentence-level paraphrasing practices often stemmed from their educational culture of Chinese EFL instruction, which values memorisation and imitation as effective learning tools. Chinese EFL students use source texts not only for content but also as a repository for useful expressions and linguistic models. So, this culturally-informed practice increases textual borrowing similarity percentages of Chinese EFL students, but this intent is not due to a moral failure. Similarly, Du and Liu (2024) highlight the influence of L1 writing experiences, finding that Chinese undergraduates often view sources primarily as stylistic enhancements rather than as evidence supporting their claims. Echoing the findings of Chen and Wang (2022), Du and Liu (2024) put forward that in the Chinese writing culture, the elegance of style is a key criterion for good writing, and this culturally-specific aesthetic value shapes textual borrowing practices of Chinese L2 writers to use source texts primarily for stylistic decorations. This practice is considered an attempt for good writing in the Chinese context, but it is perceived as plagiarism in the Western academic context.

This East vs. West dichotomy, raised by Flowerdew (2015) in his response to Pecorari (2015), was explored in several studies. Hu and Yu (2023), for instance, found that ESL students from diverse national backgrounds had been educated in systems where source-referenced writing was either not required or practised differently, with some students having been taught to reproduce source texts verbatim without attribution. While the authors frame this primarily as an educational gap rather than a cultural conflict, their findings illustrate how diverse educational traditions produce fundamentally different understandings of what requires attribution, contributing to the East–West tension in plagiarism discourse. Du (2022) suggests that students' preference for implicit attribution may be rooted in a cultural value system that prioritises humility and collective credit. In this context, explicitly and repeatedly naming individual authors could be perceived as boastful or inappropriate. So, their textual borrowing practices are shaped by their cultural identity. The other two studies focusing on Chinese culture provide a nuanced view of how Chinese educational culture shapes students' source use (Hu & Lei, 2012; Shi & Dong, 2018). The findings of Hu and Lei (2012) support the findings of other studies we discussed in the Chinese context, arguing that Chinese undergraduates simply do not recognise blatant copying or unacknowledged paraphrasing as plagiarism. They attribute this to a cultural-educational background where practices like memorisation and imitation of authoritative texts are valued as legitimate learning strategies. Mu (2010) reinforces this finding, showing that students' textual borrowing was a direct result of their Chinese literacy education, in which copying expressions from authoritative works is an established and valued learning strategy. However, the study of Shi and Dong (2018) adds a crucial layer of complexity to the discussion. They found that the culturally-influenced practices of high textual borrowing and implicit citation were most evident when students wrote in their L1 Chinese. When writing in English (L2), the same students became more cautious, using less direct borrowing and more explicit citations, thereby adhering more closely to Western norms. They show that L2 writers are capable of adapting their rhetorical strategies to different academic conventions. Some studies in the Iranian context highlight a different reflection of cultural influence on plagiarism perception. These studies suggest a broader cultural view where knowledge is perceived more communally. This contrasts with the Western emphasis on individual intellectual property, leading to different understandings of what requires attribution (Oghabi et al., 2020; Saadabadi et al., 2017). According to the study of Oghabi et al. (2020), personal relationships dictated by cultural norms can override copyright rules of academic conventions. This can result in practices like sharing work with friends, which is seen as a social obligation rather than academic misconduct. Similarly, Saadabadi et al. (2017) point to a conflict between the

learned expectations of the Iranian educational system and international academic norms. The local academic culture, which often involves a “chain of reading and reproducing what they read in their writings”, clashes with the Western convention of integrating and citing multiple sources (p. 168).

On the other hand, some studies approach with caution to overemphasizing culture as a predictive factor in L2 plagiarism discussion. One of the most explicit contestations to cultural explanations comes from the study of [Gu and Brooks \(2008\)](#) in the Chinese context. They argue that students' perceptions and practices in academic writing evolve over time, and their cultural background is just a starting point for their developmental journey, not a fixed identity that dictates their behaviours. This finding is in line with the findings of [Shi and Dong \(2018\)](#), who claimed that although Chinese students stick to their cultural norms in their L1, when the same students write in L2 (English), they adhere to textual borrowing conventions. In their paper, [Gu and Brooks \(2008\)](#) mention a “conceptual confusion” students experience about the purpose of using source text, and they shift the focus of this confusion from cultural norms to a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge construction (p. 12). Similarly, [Keck's \(2014\)](#) study posits that cultural labels can be misleading in conceptualising L2 plagiarism. Within this discourse, Keck explicitly states that their “findings challenge the belief that L2 writers plagiarise more frequently than L1 writers due to cultural and linguistic inadequacies ...” (p. 18), adding that academic experience is a more powerful predictor of source use than cultural background. Another study by [Pecorari and Shaw \(2012\)](#) approached the issue from the faculty perspective and found that faculty hold conflicting and contradictory views on the role of culture. [Pecorari and Shaw \(2012\)](#) also highlight that these conflicting views create an “us/them dichotomy” (p. 155), raising a critical question about whether these perceptions reflect genuine cultural differences in student writing or a tendency among some instructors to stereotype international students.

This controversial and contested landscape of the cultural perspective of L2 plagiarism has significant pedagogical implications. While the literature highlights the need for culturally sensitive textual borrowing instruction, the studies also emphasise the importance of integrating Western academic conventions, including paraphrasing, summarising, and citation practices into these instructions. Furthermore, several studies challenge the simplistic cultural stereotypes and advocate for a more nuanced understanding of L2 plagiarism. Effective interventions should address specific needs and challenges faced by L2 writers, considering their diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

4.3. The Institutional Advocacy Perspective

The majority of studies supporting this perspective advocate for a shift in the L2 plagiarism conceptualisation, moving it away from student responsibility towards a shared responsibility between all stakeholders of institutions. While the developmental perspective analyzes interventions as mechanisms for individual skill acquisition, this perspective reframes them as essential infrastructural obligations. Accordingly, this institutional advocacy perspective highlights the critical role of institutions in cultivating a culture of academic integrity and providing the necessary support and resources so that they can navigate the complexities of source use. Almost all studies call for the need for clear guidelines, training, and support structures for both students and faculty.

[AL Harrasi's \(2023\)](#) study, in the Omani higher education context, provides empirical evidence that an integrated institutional strategy is highly effective in plagiarism mitigation. The study found that the most effective approach was an integrated plagiarism management system comprising three distinct layers: a disciplinary component, which focused on ethics education and university regulations through the analysis of model essays and referencing checklists; a proactive component, which utilized scaffolded 'Report Logs' to guide students through the process of searching, reading, and integrating sources; and a punitive component, which employed plagiarism detection software alongside manual teacher scrutiny to ensure compliance and deter misconduct.

Regarding faculty development, [Charubusp \(2015\)](#) extends institutional advocacy to faculty level and argues for a more comprehensive approach for faculty training and curricular reform to address L2 plagiarism. According to [Charubusp \(2015\)](#), lack of clear institutional policies and guidance result in a critical paradox in teacher perceptions of L2 plagiarism. Although teachers accept that skills to avoid plagiarism are inherently difficult and require extensive training, they still think that student plagiarism is an intentional moral failure. Some other studies echo these inconsistencies in faculty perceptions of plagiarism. The studies of [Davis and Morley \(2015\)](#) and [Pecorari and Shaw \(2012\)](#) provide evidence that faculty members have diverse and conflicting views of what constitutes plagiarism. They call for institutional-level actions rather than putting the responsibility on the individual instructors' shoulders.

In terms of curriculum and instruction, a proactive and pedagogical approach to addressing L2 plagiarism is advocated in many studies in the institutional advocacy perspective, emphasising the crucial role of curriculum design, instruction and holistic faculty development. For instance, [Allagui's \(2024\)](#) study empirically provides evidence for the effectiveness of a structured, institutionally delivered scaffolding program to enhance students' writing skills. Allagui advocates for institutions to prioritise pedagogical designs that build student confidence, rather than relying solely on punitive measures to address writing issues. In a similar way, [Cheng's \(2023\)](#) study further strengthens this call for institutional support for pedagogical solutions by describing a successful paraphrasing intervention in a university EFL writing course. Cheng highlights that the study's findings can help “raise students' awareness of plagiarism and to avoid patchwriting” (p. 65). This research demonstrates that the root cause of unintentional plagiarism can be addressed by institutional pedagogical solutions. Furthermore, the study of [Liu and Wu \(2020\)](#) reveals the crucial role of institutional context in shaping students' understanding of plagiarism. This study provides evidence that in a supportive institutional context which has a strong emphasis on research ethics, has effective institutional mechanisms such as seminars and plagiarism detection tools, students are able to develop and apply appropriate citation skills.

Finally, regarding policy and communication, along with the pedagogical interventions, several studies highlight the need for an institutional response to the unique challenges posed by the emerging digital technologies ([Alsaedi & Alhums, 2024](#); [Erguvan, 2014](#);

Shin et al., 2025; Stapleton, 2012; Yan, 2023). Stapleton's (2012) research demonstrates that a clear institutional policy of using detection software has a powerful deterrent effect. This study found that students who knew their work would be checked by a plagiarism detection tool had significantly lower rates of intentional plagiarism. Supporting this finding, Alsaedi and Alhums's (2024) work found that one reason students reported avoiding plagiarism is that they are aware of the fact that the institution uses a plagiarism detection tool in the online assignments. These studies show the effectiveness of such digital tools, but they come with some challenges, as reported in the study of Erguvan (2014). This study revealed that instructors felt confused about their pedagogical role, suggesting that this can be overcome with comprehensive institutional support and guidance. Yan's study also calls for the development of institutional regulatory policies and pedagogical guidance especially in the use of artificial intelligence tools because students reported having anxiety about academic integrity and educational equity. Similarly, the study of Shin et al. (2025) emphasises the importance of institutional policies about the use of AI tools in academic writing because the findings of their study reveal significant perception gaps between instructors and learners.

The implications of these studies point towards a paradigm shift in addressing L2 plagiarism from the institutional advocacy perspective. Instead of putting all the responsibility on students' shoulders, institutions must play a proactive role in creating a supportive environment that fosters academic integrity. This includes developing clear and consistent policies, providing comprehensive faculty training, implementing effective pedagogical interventions, and offering accessible resources and support structures for L2 writers. Adopting a holistic, institution-wide approach helps institutions create a more equitable and supportive environment for L2 writers. The success of comprehensive institutional programs which combine educational interventions, clear policies, faculty training, and robust detection processes provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of this approach (Perkins et al., 2020). Ultimately, addressing L2 plagiarism requires a shared responsibility and a commitment to fostering a culture of academic integrity at all levels of the institution. The institutional advocacy perspective emphasises the importance of moving beyond individual blame and recognising the crucial role of institutions in creating an environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed academically.

4.4. The universalist perspective

The universalist perspective asserts that plagiarism should have a single, universal definition regardless of L1 or L2, with the root cause being a lack of academic skill rather than cultural background or writer's intention. Based on these claims, the perspective calls for education in fundamental academic writing skills. The synthesis shows limited empirical support for this position in its strong form. While several studies demonstrate that targeted instruction can reduce plagiarism incidents (Al Harrasi, 2023; Perkins et al., 2020), and that institutional agents do prioritise compliance as a primary concern (Al-Bargi, 2022), a substantial body of research challenges the sufficiency of the universalist claim. Even studies that document the effectiveness of skill-based instruction simultaneously reveal that motivation, beliefs, prior educational experience, and cultural background mediate citation competence in ways a compliance-only model cannot address (Fazilatfar et al., 2018; Ma & Qin, 2017; Mahmud and Tahir, 2024). The evidence thus positions the universal standard as a necessary but insufficient component: its demands are legitimate, but its assumption that skill training alone resolves L2 plagiarism is empirically contested. These studies reveal the complex interplay of linguistic proficiency, cultural background, pedagogical approaches, and disciplinary conventions in shaping L2 students' source use practices.

One of the key contestations to the universalist perspective arises from studies that found that even after explicit academic writing instruction, L2 writers continue to experience difficulties with plagiarism avoidance during source integration. For example, the study of Chen and Wang (2022) provides evidence that prior instruction is not the sole solution to mitigate L2 plagiarism, as post-novice students still demonstrated patchwriting and plagiarism in their writing practices. Similarly, Baxter and Neumann (2023) support this finding of Chen and Wang (2022), claiming that even high-proficiency students struggle with consistently applying source attribution rules. This complicates the claim that plagiarism is merely a lack of skill, and a universal, one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach may be insufficient. Chuang and Yan (2023) also identified verbatim copying in the works of high-scoring students in a standardised writing assessment. Their study found that the source of verbatim copying behaviour is not a skill deficit, but rather the assessment design, which doesn't penalise improper source use, focusing only on argument development and grammar. In such cases, even high-scoring students can plagiarise. Dugartsyrenova's (2024) study found that while it is important to provide structured instruction, it is not merely enough to ensure students critically engage with sources, since there are other factors that intervene, such as prior experiences, cultural background, and disciplinary differences. Some other studies also confirmed the same notion that only instruction is not enough to mitigate L2 plagiarism (Al Harrasi, 2023; Hirvela & Du, 2013; J. Hu & Yu, 2023; Lee et al., 2025; Merkel, 2020; Ouellette, 2008; Overstreet, 2025).

Cultural and linguistic background emerge as significant factors influencing L2 writers' understanding and practice of source use, directly challenging the Universalist claim that culture is irrelevant. The concept of authorship and intellectual property varies across cultures, influencing how L2 writers perceive source use and attribution. Studies have shown that in some cultures, textual reuse, especially from authoritative sources, is valued as a demonstration of knowledge and respect, rather than as plagiarism (Q. Du & Liu, 2024; G. Hu & Lei, 2012; Mott-Smith, 2013). Students from these backgrounds may not intend to deceive but rather apply what they consider appropriate writing practices learned in their native language. Furthermore, the idea of knowledge as a communal resource, rather than individual property, can lead to different understandings of source ownership (Mu, 2010; Sutherland-Smith, 2005; Wang, 2016). This culturally influenced understanding of appropriate source use extends beyond paraphrasing to broader conceptions of plagiarism, as demonstrated by Hu and Lei (2012), who found that Chinese students' perceptions of plagiarism differed significantly from the Anglo-American perspective. Even the evaluation of plagiarism appears to be culturally influenced, with studies like Shin et al. (2025) revealing cross-cultural variations in perceptions of digital plagiarism, especially concerning AI writing tools. Studies in specific cultural contexts, such as Mott-Smith (2013) with Chinese students and Teeter (2015) with Japanese students, further

underscore the complexity of plagiarism perceptions and challenge simplistic cultural generalisations. These findings highlight the limitations of a universal approach to plagiarism education and underscore the need for culturally sensitive pedagogical interventions.

5. Conclusion: A conceptual model for L2 plagiarism

This framework synthesis mapped 62 empirical studies onto four *a priori* perspectives derived from the 2015 *Journal of Second Language Writing* dialogue. While the four perspectives served as an effective analytical lens, the synthesis revealed that they do not function as four parallel, equal positions. Rather, cross-perspective analysis revealed three recurring patterns and how these perspectives relate to one another.

The first pattern is an empirically grounded tension between context and standards. The developmental and cultural perspectives converge on a central insight: L2 writers' source-use practices are shaped by identifiable developmental stages (Chen & Wang, 2022; Keck, 2006, 2014; Pecorari, 2003; Wette, 2017) and culturally situated norms of authorship and attribution (Charubusp, 2015; Du & Liu, 2024; Hu & Lei, 2012; Oghabi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the universalist perspective insists on objective, uniform standards (Weber-Wulff, 2015). Rather than one side being correct, the synthesis shows that both poles are empirically substantiated and that the field's central challenge lies precisely in the unresolved conflict between the writer's context and the universal standards. This tension is not merely theoretical. It manifests concretely in faculty who simultaneously acknowledge developmental difficulty and attribute moral failure (Charubusp, 2015), in instructors who judge identical practices inconsistently (Davis & Morley, 2015; Pecorari & Shaw, 2012), and in assessment contexts where source-use quality is not evaluated, even high-scoring writers resort to verbatim copying rather than developing rhetorical source integration (Chuang & Yan, 2023). These findings warrant grouping the developmental and cultural perspectives together as one pole (Construct A: The Writer's Context) and the universalist perspective as the other (Construct B: The Universal Standard), with the space between them defined as a core structural tension (Relationship 1).

The second pattern is the asymmetrical role of institutional pedagogy & advocacy (Construct C). The synthesis revealed that the institutional advocacy perspective does not sit alongside the other three as a co-equal description of the problem. Instead, it consistently emerged as the mechanism through which the tension between the other perspectives is addressed. The most effective outcomes in the literature occurred when institutions enacted comprehensive, integrated strategies (combining curriculum design, faculty development, and clear policy) that were simultaneously informed by learner realities and motivated by integrity standards (AL Harrasi, 2023; Liu & Wu, 2020; Perkins et al., 2020). Conversely, where institutional mediation was absent, the literature documented predictable negative outcomes: paradoxical faculty views (Charubusp, 2015), inconsistent judgement (Davis & Morley, 2015), perception gaps between instructors and students about digital integrity standards (Shin et al., 2025), and the stereotyping of international students (Pecorari & Shaw, 2012). This consistent pattern, resolution when institutions act, persistence of conflict when they do not, warrants repositioning the institutional advocacy perspective from one of four equal categories to the model's active point of resolution.

The third pattern concerns the directionality of influence between the base and the apex. The synthesis shows two distinct directional relationships. First, context informs pedagogy (Relationship 2): interventions that were designed around specific developmental needs and cultural realities succeeded (Fazilatfar et al., 2018; Makovskaya & Radjabzade, 2022; Neumann et al., 2020), while those that ignored the writer's context failed to produce lasting change (Baxter & Neumann, 2023; Chen & Wang, 2022; Hirvela & Du, 2013). Second, standards motivate pedagogy (Relationship 3): it was institutional commitment to academic integrity that drove the creation of pedagogical infrastructure in the first place (AL Harrasi, 2023; Liu & Wu, 2020; Shin et al., 2025; Yan, 2023). These two directional relationships complete the model's dynamic structure: the writer's context informs the content of institutional pedagogy, the universal standard motivates its existence, and the resulting institutional action mediates the tension between the two.

Table 1 provides a derivation matrix that makes these inferential steps explicit and traceable. For each construct and structural relationship in the proposed model, the matrix specifies the conceptual definition, the synthesized evidence and the specific warrant linking the evidence to the model's structure. The model that follows from this derivation (Fig. 1) is therefore not an external organising framework imposed on the literature, but a conceptual system that emerged from the patterns identified across the 62 studies in the synthesis.

The proposed model is structured as a triangle to illustrate how a central conflict is managed by a mediating force. The foundation of the model is The Core Tension between the two poles at its base. At the left is The Writer's Context, which recognises that L2 writers' source use is part of a developmental process, with practices like patchwriting serving as a coping strategy rather than intentional cheating. This pole acknowledges that students' actions are informed by their prior educational and cultural backgrounds, where concepts of authorship and citation may differ significantly from Western norms. At the right is The Universal Standard, which asserts that plagiarism is an objective act. From this perspective, all students must be held to the same ethical standard, making the differentiation between L1 and L2 writers problematic. At the apex of the triangle sits Institutional Pedagogy & Advocacy, which functions as the active Point of Resolution. This is a multi-faceted solution that encompasses several key pillars of action. These strategies include direct Curriculum & Instruction, which involves designing scaffolded assignments and providing explicit instruction on source integration to guide students through their developmental stages. It also involves robust Faculty Development to train instructors to move beyond inconsistent views on plagiarism and implement policies with a nuanced understanding of L2 writers' challenges. Finally, it includes clear Policy & Communication to establish consistent institutional rules and avoid the "conceptual confusion" students often experience.

The dynamics of the model are shown through the flow of influence. The Writer's Context informs the design of these pedagogical strategies, while The Universal Standard motivates the need for them. The institutional strategies at the apex then engage in Active Mediation, applying these informed and motivated practices to resolve the tension at the base.

Table 1

Derivation matrix of model constructs and relationships from the synthesized literature.

Model Component/ Relationship	Conceptual Definition	Synthesized Evidence	Key Empirical Studies
I. THE BASE: The Core Tension			
Construct A: The Writer's Context	Recognises that L2 source use is shaped by two interacting forces: (a) a <i>developmental process</i> where practices like patchwriting are transitional coping strategies, not intentional cheating; and (b) <i>culturally situated practices</i> where concepts of authorship, attribution, and knowledge ownership may diverge from Western academic norms.	Developmental evidence: The synthesis shows that patchwriting is a predictable stage in L2 writing development. Studies confirm that novice writers rely on patchwriting as a coping strategy for linguistic difficulty, and this reliance decreases as proficiency grows. Post-novice writers still struggle with nuanced challenges (accurate representation, synthesis), which shows a non-linear developmental trajectory constrained by language proficiency and shaped by prior educational experiences. Cultural evidence: Multiple studies identify culturally distinctive source-use norms such as high-power distance cultures that discourage altering authoritative texts, educational traditions valuing memorisation and imitation, communal conceptions of knowledge ownership, and stylistic aesthetic values that treat sources as linguistic models rather than evidence.	Developmental: Pecorari (2003); Keck (2006, 2014); Wette (2017); Chen and Wang (2022); Çelik and Razi (2023); AL Harrasi (2023); Charubusp (2015); Du and Liu (2024); Hu and Yu (2023); Sutherland-Smith (2005). Cultural: Hu and Lei (2012); Du and Liu (2024); Charubusp (2015); Du (2022); Shi and Dong (2018); Oghabi et al. (2020); Saadabadi et al. (2017); Mott-Smith (2013); Mu (2010).
Construct B: The Universal Standard	Asserts that plagiarism is an objective ethical breach requiring consistent prevention, detection, and sanctions, regardless of the writer's intent, developmental stage, or cultural background.	The synthesis shows limited support for this perspective. Institutional agents prioritise plagiarism prevention as a primary concern, detection tools can effectively identify textual matching, and educational interventions paired with integrity standards produce measurable reductions in misconduct. However, a substantial body of evidence challenges the sufficiency of the universalist claim by demonstrating that even after explicit instruction, L2 writers continue to struggle; and that motivation, beliefs, prior educational experience, and cultural background mediate citation competence in ways a compliance-only model cannot address. The synthesis thus positions the Universal Standard as a necessary but insufficient pole: its demands are legitimate, but its assumption that detection and skill training alone resolve L2 plagiarism is empirically contested.	Supporting: Weber-Wulff (2015); Perkins et al. (2020) (partially); Al-Bargi (2022). Contesting: Baxter and Neumann (2023); Chuang and Yan (2023); Dugartsyrenova (2024); Hirvela and Du (2013); Chen and Wang (2022); AL Harrasi (2023); Merkel (2020), Stapleton (2012); Alsaedi and Alhums (2024); Ma and Qin (2017); Floyd (2015); Mahmud and Tahir (2024); Hu and Yu (2023).
Relationship 1: The Core Tension (A ↔ B)	The fundamental conflict between the subjective, context-sensitive reality of the L2 learner (A) and the objective, uniform demands of academic integrity (B). This tension manifests when students are encouraged to develop their voices yet penalised for developmental struggles.	The synthesis reveals that there is a tension between the two constructs (A and B) operating at faculty and student levels. At the faculty level, instructors simultaneously acknowledge developmental difficulty while treating plagiarism as moral failure, and judge identical practices inconsistently across disciplines, creating an “us/them dichotomy” toward L2 writers. At the student level, a fundamental mismatch exists between textual evidence and writers' intentions: detection systems flag plagiarism where no deception was intended. Source-use practices shift between L1 and L2 writing, and a persistent gap separates students' knowledge of plagiarism rules from their ability to apply them.	Faculty level: Charubusp (2015); Pecorari and Shaw (2012); Davis and Morley (2015) Student level: Pecorari (2003); Shi and Dong (2018); Keck (2014); Oghabi et al. (2020); Sutherland-Smith (2005); Gu and Brooks (2008); Chuang and Yan (2023)

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Model Component/ Relationship	Conceptual Definition	Synthesized Evidence	Key Empirical Studies
II. The Point of Resolution			
Construct C: Institutional Pedagogy & Advocacy	The active mediating agent that resolves the core tension through three integrated pillars: (1) Curriculum & Instruction, (2) Faculty Development, and (3) Policy & Communication.	The synthesis shows that the most effective responses to L2 plagiarism are not isolated initiatives but integrated institutional systems. Empirical evidence demonstrates the efficacy of a comprehensive approach combining educational interventions, faculty training, clear policies, and detection processes as an interconnected system. This institutional perspective shifts the locus of responsibility from individual student deficit to shared institutional infrastructure.	Systemic efficacy: AL Harrasi (2023) (three-layered integrated system); Çelik and Razi (2023) (institutional shift shapes outcomes); Perkins et al. (2020) (comprehensive institutional programs). Pillar 1 – Curriculum: Allagui (2024); Cheng (2023); Neumann et al. (2020); Çelik and Razi (2023); Makovskaya and Radjabzade (2022); Rezvani and Miri (2023). Pillar 2 – Faculty: Charubusp (2015); Davis and Morley (2015); Pecorari and Shaw (2012); Pillar 3 – Policy: Stapleton (2012); Alsaedi and Alhums (2024); Yan (2023); Shin et al. (2025).
III. THE DYNAMICS: Structural Relationships			
Relationship 2: Context → Informs Pedagogy (A → C)	The specific developmental needs and cultural realities of L2 writers (A) must dictate the design of institutional pedagogy (C). Pedagogy that ignores context fails.	Convergent evidence (context-responsive interventions succeed): Interventions that were designed around specific developmental needs produced measurable improvement. Targeting vocabulary and reading comprehension addressed novice writers' source integration difficulties. Direct citation instruction matched to skill level improved paraphrasing. Process-based and metacognitive approaches that recognised developmental stages reduced plagiarism incidents. Contrastive evidence (context-blind instruction fails): Critically, the synthesis also shows that when interventions ignore the writer's context, they are insufficient. Even high-proficiency students continued to struggle with source attribution after instruction. Post-novice writers still demonstrated patchwriting despite prior training. Structured instruction alone did not mitigate plagiarism when prior experiences, cultural background, and disciplinary differences intervened. Students questioned the very purpose of paraphrasing when instruction lacked developmental rationale. Lower-proficiency students continued to struggle even within otherwise effective interventions, showing that language proficiency constrains pedagogical outcomes.	Context-responsive success: Neumann et al. (2020); Fazilatfar et al. (2018); AL Harrasi (2023); Makovskaya and Radjabzade (2022); Rezvani and Miri (2023); Çelik and Razi (2023); Dugartsyrenova (2024). Context-blind failure: Baxter and Neumann (2023); Chen and Wang (2022); Hirvela and Du (2013); Merkel (2020); Ouellette (2008).
Relationship 3: Standard → Motivates Pedagogy (B → C)	The requirement to uphold academic integrity (B) provides the institutional impetus for creating and sustaining pedagogical infrastructure (C). Without these standards, institutions lack the motivation for systematic action.	The synthesis shows that it was the institutional commitment to academic integrity that motivated the creation of comprehensive pedagogical systems. Academic integrity requirements motivated the design of comprehensive misconduct education programmes. The introduction of detection tools into institutional policy created the need for faculty pedagogical guidance and support. Emerging concerns about AI-related integrity violations drove the development of new institutional regulatory policies and pedagogical frameworks.	AL Harrasi (2023); Liu and Wu (2020); Perkins et al. (2020); Stapleton (2012); Yan (2023); Shin et al. (2025); Alsaedi and Alhums (2024).

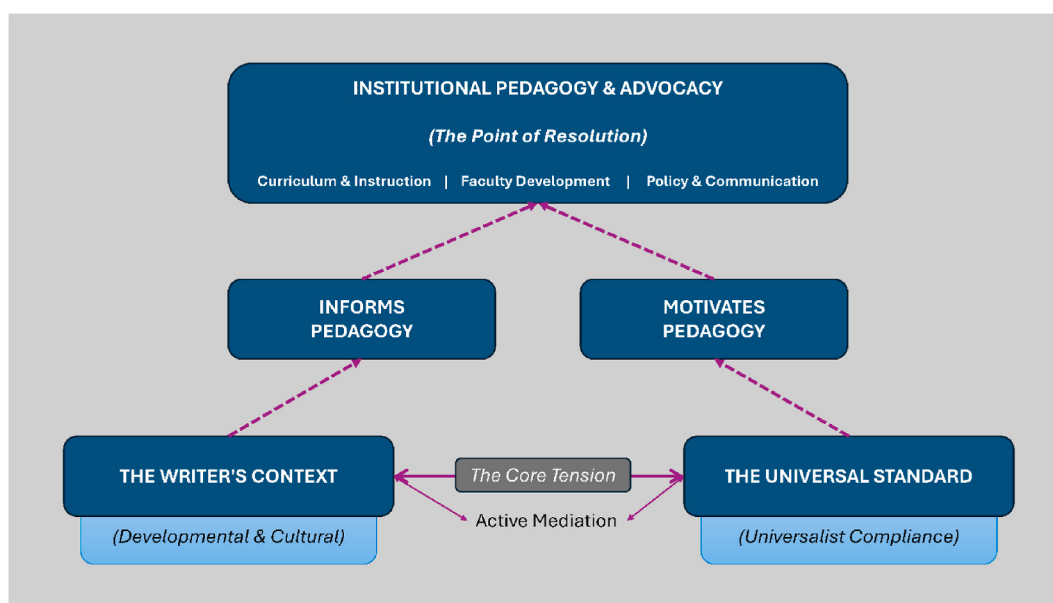


Fig. 1. A conceptual model for L2 plagiarism.

This model offers several key insights that advance our understanding of L2 plagiarism. It reveals that effectively addressing the issue moves beyond a simple checklist approach; it is about actively managing an ongoing tension rather than solving a static problem. The model centralises the role of the institution, positioning institutional action not as one of four equal options, but as the indispensable force for resolution. It highlights that without a robust institutional response, the conflict between understanding students and upholding standards remains unresolved, leading to predictable negative outcomes like the disproportionate penalisation of L2 writers and faculty frustration. Ultimately, the model provides a practical framework for action. It allows institutions to audit their practices by asking if their pedagogy is truly informed by their students' realities, if their goals are motivated by a clear commitment to academic standards, and if they are actively mediating the space between the two through coordinated efforts in curriculum, faculty development, and policy.

The emergence of the conceptual model from this synthesis not only clarifies the existing scholarly debate but also proposes a clear path for future work in the field of L2 plagiarism. It suggests a necessary shift in research focus away from continuing to describe the well-established problem, as suggested by Pecorari (2015) and toward empirically evaluating the solutions at the model's apex. Future studies should therefore concentrate on the practical efficacy of the institutional resolution strategies, conducting longitudinal research on the impact of specific pedagogical interventions, comparative analyses of faculty development programs, and the real-world effects of different institutional policies on student writing and academic integrity cases. For administrators and practitioners, the future direction involves applying this model as a diagnostic and strategic tool to move beyond isolated initiatives. By doing so, they can build a more holistic and integrated system of support that is simultaneously informed by the realities of their students and motivated by a commitment to academic standards. The model calls for the field to progress from a state of perpetual debate to an evidence-based focus on implementing and refining solutions that foster genuine academic integration for all L2 writers. Finally, while this model offers a resolution for traditional source use tensions in L2, the rapid emergence of GenAI tools presents a new frontier for plagiarism (Eaton, 2023). This study establishes a necessary baseline for human writing development, but the field must urgently investigate how using AI tools in writing development intersects with this conceptual model. Future research should examine whether AI serves as a legitimate mediating force for L2 writing development, similar to the institutional advocacy proposed here, or if it requires an entirely new ethical classification.

Submission declaration

By submitting, I confirm that this work has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal.

Author statement

As the sole author of this manuscript, I hereby confirm that I have carefully reviewed all comments and suggestions provided by the reviewers. I have personally conducted all necessary revisions to the manuscript.

Declaration of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work. This research was conducted independently, and no funding and external parties influenced the study's design, analysis, or conclusions. All opinions, findings, and interpretations are solely those of the author.

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