

Reconceptualizing Citation Pedagogy: Faculty Perspectives on Source Use in Omani Tertiary Context

Jinan Issa¹ & Faiza Al-Dhahli²

¹ Associate Professor, Department of English Studies, Bayan College, Halban, Oman

² Deputy Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Department of English, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa, Oman

Correspondence: Jinan Issa, Department of English Studies, Bayan College, Halban, Oman Tel: +96899897256 Email: jinan@bayancollege.edu.om

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Abstract

This research investigates the perception of in-text citations by faculty and students and how they are used in tertiary-level graduation projects in Oman. Using a sequential mixed-methods design, the study interviewed 11 academics and a focus group of 6 students; it also examined 21 student projects in detail. The study's results suggest that the importance of citation is often approached as formatting rather than a rhetorical task, and that students receive limited support to do so in ways without over-reliance on generative AI tools. Both faculty and students identify issues in institutional writing support, favouring guidance that is context- and field-specific. Results indicate a tendency to approach referencing too perfunctorily. This study is noteworthy in that it highlights the necessity for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing pedagogy to elevate from conventional language courses to academic discourse practices, particularly in collective, multilingual contexts. This research addresses a key gap by grounding citation education in a Global South context and recommends the need for future studies on discipline-specific strategies and the influence of AI in academic writing.

Keywords: in-text citation, academic writing, curriculum reform, academic integrity, Global South, UTAS – Oman

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

In tertiary education, particularly in the context of English as a Non-Native Language (ENNL), competence in academic writing, especially in-text citation, is considered a key intellectual skill (Balida & Alhabshi, 2024). This is not only to meet academic requirements, but to develop critical thinking, intellectual involvement and academic integrity (Balida & Alhabshi, 2024; Wilson, 2016; Marsh & Campion, 2018). The matter is made more complex within tertiary institutions in Oman as international standards have been encouraged, but national pedagogy, resulting in alignment of teaching with Oman's cultural values, must be adopted (Hammad & Al-Ani, 2021). In this context, it is necessary to understand how students develop the practice of attributing sources, create analytical writing and participate ethically in academic conversation (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2024; Al-Dhahli & Issa, 2025). As students move from descriptive writing to becoming more analytical, it is universally recognised that citations reflect engagement with their prior knowledge (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Faculty views on citation practices are another aspect of this process.

This paper responds to the need to investigate the effectiveness of citation pedagogy in Oman higher education institutes and its cultural appropriacy.

1.2 Significance of the Problem

The literature on student citation practices focuses on an enduring concern: many EFL learners, who are collected under the umbrella of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), feel that citation is a gatekeeping requirement rather than a means of scholarly dialogue (Pecorari, 2003; Thompson, 2005). Students may engage with citations superficially as opposed to intellectually. This often results in patchwriting without comprehension; words are strung together without synthesis (Neumann et al., 2019, 2020; Uludag et al., 2019). Students frequently prioritize correct formatting over rhetorical intent (Du & Gao, 2024; Sun et al., 2021). In general, the use of citation by EFL students can be not only a technical deficiency but also a language insufficiency, a result of frequency scarcity in research-related writing and a misalignment between the course level and a student's writing abilities (Neumann et al., 2019; Uludag et al., 2019). The issues in the state of Oman are also exacerbated by increasing dependence on generative AI writing aids such as ChatGPT, which, while helpful in brainstorming, poses challenges in terms of authorship and plagiarism (Margono et al., 2024; Praphan & Praphan, 2023).

Given Oman's current goal of developing competitive human capital that can communicate proficiently in English and has excellent standards of academic integrity, this study is timely. It demonstrates practical implications related to education reform for the question of what context-specific instructional strategy can develop better citation ability and analytical capability. The skill of citing could be

integrated into the curriculum and nurtured through an educational culture fostering truthfulness and respect for ideas, the heart of academic integrity (Panjaitan et al., 2024; Marsh & Campion, 2018). By focusing on citation pedagogy, Omani HEIs will be able to develop students' academic integrity, aiding their transition to become scholars and writers with ethical expertise in academics and their future professional arenas (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2024). A successful framework of citation pedagogy ultimately encourages respect for other scholars' work, fosters integrity and develops collaborative spirit in academic endeavours.

1.3 Literature Review

There is a considerable amount of literature concerning how students cite in EFL settings, revealing misconceptions about the function of citing. Students often perceive citation as a way to avoid plagiarism as well as evidence proving that their claims are supported by established research (Pecorari, 2003; Thompson, 2005). This has led to surface practices such as patchwriting, where students paraphrase text with little actual synthesis (Neumann et al., 2019; 2020). Institutional guidance on citation also varies, with some faculty failing to distinguish between mechanical formatting and rhetorical sourcing of material (Du & Gao, 2024).

In spite of previous studies which investigated academic writing challenges in the overall context of the Gulf states, little research has been conducted from a teacher's perspective on this matter in Oman (Author, 2024; Al Ajmi & Ali, 2015). The present study aims to fill this gap by questioning how local faculty-informed teaching strategies are more conducive to student growth in academic writing.

The researchers' focus on in-text citation practices has consistently emphasized their importance in maintaining academic integrity, engaging with scholarly debates and building arguments from reliable sources, especially for EAP students. Nonetheless, many EFL writers continue to experience challenges that are long-standing in mastering citations due to linguistic problems, inadequate exposure to academia, and insufficient instruction (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Wingate, 2011). The difficulties are intensified within the context of Omani higher education, where English serves as the medium of instruction (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2024; Al-Dhahli & Issa, 2025). This scenario requires students to weave together both Western citation practices and local academic standards.

There is increasing criticism in the literature on the perception of citations as a technical skill rather than a tool for analysis and critical thinking. As researchers have demonstrated, teaching the mere format of citations fails to cultivate higher-level thinking (Syahrin et al., 2024) and the evaluation skills required for scholarly activities (Hyland, 1999; Yan & Ma, 2024). Teaching only the format of citations frequently results in students perceiving them as necessary to avoid plagiarism (e.g., "the author states..."), but not as a way to critically analyse a topic. This restricts their analytical voice (Petric & Harwood, 2013). To negotiate higher academic discourse, it is crucial to guide this process by teaching and developing the use of rhetorical tactics, including metadiscourse and evaluative reporting verbs (Lee et al., 2018), thereby achieving intellectual independence and ethical scholarship.

Further complicating the skill of citation, generative AI tools like ChatGPT are gaining ubiquity. While generative AI may be useful for brainstorming and structure, its content generation could be described as superficial synthesis with ambiguous authorship attribution (Margono et al., 2024; Marzuki et al., 2023; Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2024). These programs have enabled students to produce polished, publishable work easily, but at significant cost. By not researching independently, the originality of an idea is in jeopardy, and the ability to explore the references that produced a key text is erased by an artificial, unreliable intelligence.

Among EAP students, patchwriting is a popular strategy. Sutherland-Smith (2008) and Zabihi (2017) argue that this is rarely an indication of plagiarism, but rather a sign of being out of one's depth with complex language. Thus, the solution is not punitive measures, but training focused on source synthesis and reflective note-taking (Fazilatfar et al., 2018). It is also a matter of cultural mindsets about citation: EFL learners from collective cultures may not come to see citation as scholars do, treating it more like an index of respect (Lei & Hu, 2024). This indicates the need for cross-cultural sensitivity in citation pedagogy.

Structural issues stemming from an institution's lack of or inadequate framework for citation pedagogy further intensify challenges. Inconsistent or vague feedback from faculty combined with insufficient rubrics leaves students unclear about expectations, thereby weakening their ability to reference sources in an analytical and ethical way (Uludag et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2020). When comparing Wingate & Tribble (2012) or Lea & Street (2006), it is clear that there is a need for discipline-specific and literacy-based frameworks which aid learners in their development from generic academic writing to scholarly analysis.

While translating and proofreading tools can aid learners, they often lead to shallow comprehension of texts and attribution mistakes, such as citation of page numbers or dates. (Naghdipour, 2021; Naghdipour, 2022). To rectify this, scholars argue for a pedagogy at the intersection of digital literacies and critical scholarly practices. Recent critiques note that 'citation indices' have now moved beyond their function as an epistemic tool to become a performance metric, distorting academic communication and inducing citation bias (Burbules, 2015; Dumas-Mallet et al., 2021; Agarwal et al., 2023).

Referencing certainly does form the bedrock of academic activity and, therefore, should be a topic for developmental work at some level in teaching. The literature supports a shift from instrumental to strategic, rhetorical and ethical models that address the linguistic, cultural and technological issues facing science-based EAP programs like that in Oman. Expanding on this, the present investigation examines both faculty practices and student experiences to help develop citation instruction to be more inclusive, critically conscious, and culturally responsive.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

This research is guided by the following primary objective:

- to investigate how faculty at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) perceive and address challenges related to in-text citation instruction among undergraduate students.

Secondary objectives include:

- identifying the linguistic and educational obstacles that hinder citation skill acquisition.
- exploring faculty strategies for developing students' citation proficiency.
- recommending context-appropriate improvements in teaching strategies and institutional support.

Accordingly, the research questions are:

- 1) What specific challenges do faculty and undergraduate students encounter when learning to cite sources?
- 2) What linguistic and educational obstacles do faculty perceive as hindering students' acquisition of citation skills?
- 3) What techniques do faculty employ to enhance students' proficiency in citation practices?
- 4) How can teaching strategies and institutional support be improved to better assist students in mastering citation skills?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods methodology to explore the experience of difficulty with in-text citations among undergraduate EAP students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Oman. Qualitative and quantitative methods were combined in the research; interview and focus group discussions were used, as well as systematic analysis of written student projects. This methodology facilitated layered analysis of faculty perceptions, student experiences and citation practices in an academic context.

2.2 Participants

2.2.1 Faculty Participants

The sample, selected by purposive sampling, consisted of 11 full-time English language faculty in UTAS-Oman across various branches. Inclusion criteria required participants to have:

- an MA or a PhD in a related field.
- at least 6 years of teaching experience at UTAS.
- taught EAP for at least 2 semesters.
- experience in teaching students in their third or fourth year of tertiary education.
- membership in academia or a research team able to shed light on the difficulty of acquiring sources.

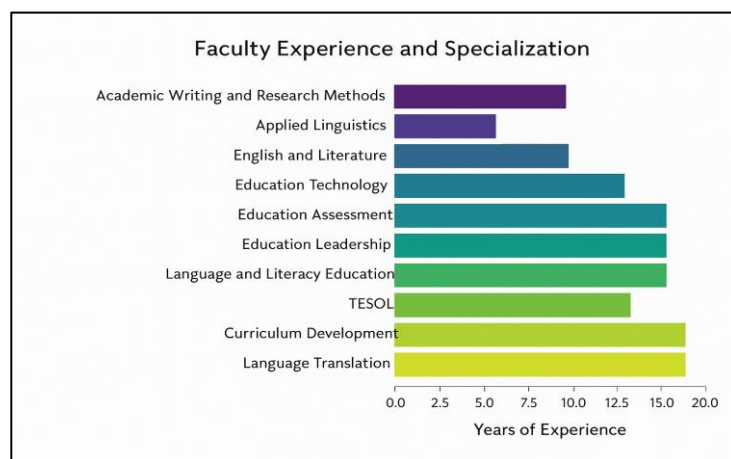


Figure 1. Faculty Experiences and Specializations

Figure 1 shows the faculty profile in terms of experience and areas. This selection ensured high relevance and the presence of well-informed views on institutional practices and teaching activities.

2.2.2 Student-Focused Group Sample

The student-focused group comprised six final-year undergraduate students who conducted a detailed investigation into their perspectives on the use of in-text citations in academic work. Of the 15 students who were initially approached to take part in a focus group discussion,

only 6 ultimately provided input. This selection provided the opportunity for a smaller, more familiar dialogue and discussion that uncovers the subtleties of how in-text citations impact academic writing practices. Rich discussion by the participants was supported, and they identified the issues pushing them to develop their scholarship.

2.2.3 Student-Written Projects Sample

In a quantitative sample, 21 group projects by final-year students majoring in English Language Teaching were studied. All groups comprised 3–5 students, and each of the projects measured between 3,800 and 4,700 words. These pieces of writing were a valuable insight into authentic student citation.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

To sample, a purposive sample was employed to select participants who would be most pertinent to the study. Prospective teachers suggested that students were closer to teaching writing and research due to their placement in schools, which made them more relevant for answering our questions. This culminated in a sample representation of individuals at the most engaged level in student citation development. No incentives were provided. Ethical approval was obtained from the UTAS ethics review board, and written informed consent was given by all participants.

Likewise, these student participants were purposively chosen from higher-level academic writing courses with specific teaching and assessment of citation. Past exposure to source-based and writing-related tasks, which encourages reflection on their citing experience, serves as the basis for inclusion.

2.3.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

Qualitative saturation principles and power recommendations from other similar citation-focused studies guided our selection of 11 faculty interviews, a dedicated unblinded group of six students, and 21 student projects. These sampling numbers are adequate to cover a range of experiences and obtain meaningful, transferable conclusions.

2.4 Measures and Data Collection Instruments

2.4.1 Interviews

A semi-structured interview was used to gather detailed insights from eleven faculty members with different areas of specialization and teaching experience. This approach made it possible to explore how a range of educators perceive their teaching practices, the challenges they face, and the ways they help students develop academic literacy. Semi-structured interviews, based on Robson's (1993) guidelines, were chosen as a data collection method due to the effective way they balance structure with flexibility, allowing participants to express their views freely while keeping the discussion focused (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions addressed faculty expectations, observed student challenges, and institutional support for teaching citation practices. Follow-up questions were used when clarification or deeper reflection was needed, which encouraged more personal and context-rich responses. The tool generated diverse perspectives from areas such as Applied Linguistics, TESOL, Education Leadership, and Curriculum Development, providing a fuller understanding of faculty experiences in higher education. Of the eleven interviews, three were conducted face-to-face and eight online via Microsoft Teams. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

2.4.2 Student Focus Group

In order to gain a deeper insight into source integration and citation problems experienced by students, a focus group interview was conducted with 6 fourth-year students studying academic writing. The goal of the session was to gain an understanding of the students' experiences with integrating sources, difficulties encountered with citation conventions, and their experience with feedback. The conversation was guided by open-ended questions and recorded with participants' consent. Themes were coded in the transcripts for analysis. Open-ended guiding questions were used to facilitate the discussion and audio-recorded with the participants' permission.

2.4.3 Student Projects

Twenty-one final-year research project dissertations were analyzed for content, based on relevance, length and the inclusion of reviews of in-text citations. For each project, we analyzed both the amount of rhetoric and citing the students engaged in as well as their usage quality and specifically tried to uncover missing or vague citations (e.g. no author or a wrong publication year).

2.5 Research Design

The research used an 'exploratory sequential mixed methods' design. The study commenced through semi-structured interviews with faculty to ascertain their expectations and understanding of issues and continued through a student focus group that attempted to understand the students' perspectives on citation practices. Lastly, a content analysis of students' written projects served as an empirical demonstration of the processes and products in academic writing with citations. This convergence supported cross-verification of the findings as well as the interpretation of student actions with both faculty experience and written evidence.

2.6 Experimental Manipulations or Interventions

The current study was an exploratory sequential mixed methods inquiry that attempted to explore the challenges faced by EAP undergraduate students at UTAS-Oman in the effective learning of in-text citation. The study drew on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, including interviews, student focus groups and a systematic analysis of written student assignments. This created

a nested picture of faculty perception, student practice and use of sources in real academic writing.

2.7 Data Analysis Procedures

2.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and student-centred focus group results were themed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage process. Data management, coding and theme development were supported using NVivo 15 software. This was similar to the method used by Naeem et al.'s (2023) five stages of NVivo approach: creating excerpts, generating nodes, coding, querying nodes and thematizing.

2.7.2 Quantitative Content Analysis

The students' projects were content-analyzed through Petrić's (2007) typology of citations according to rhetorical function. Projects were reviewed for incomplete or unclear references (e.g., missing author's name or publication date). It is interesting to observe that while all 21 projects ready for analysis had reference lists, four had no citations, demonstrating a gap between listing sources and using them for discourse.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical human subject research guidelines were followed. Pseudonymization preserved confidentiality during data transcription and analysis. The research was approved through the UTAS institutional ethics committee.

2.9 Integration of Findings

A process of triangulation was employed to combine data from interviews, focus group data and student texts. Validity and convergence were cross-checked in key themes and quantitative results. This example advanced our comprehension of pedagogical issues and students' lived experiences in relation to citation within EAP.

3. Results

Results from the mixed-methods study aimed at exploring quoting habits of undergraduate students in UTAS, Oman. Results are reported according to qualitative and quantitative analyses as well as the project's three primary research questions: (1) to establish challenges related to citing sources, (2) determine how faculty members teach citation, and (3) make recommendations for improving instruction based on our findings.

3.1 Participant Recruitment

A purposive sampling frame was used to select the faculty (n=11) who agreed to participate from October 2023 to November 2023. The participants met specific criteria for academic credentials, experience in teaching and participation in EAP. Student data (n=21 final year group projects) were based on submissions in December 2023-February 2024. All participants provided informed consent.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

3.2.1 Qualitative Findings: Faculty Interviews

The faculty interviews were thematically analyzed revealing three main themes:

- **Linguistic Ability:** According to faculty, students encountered many obstacles or challenges, such as a lack of vocabulary, paraphrasing difficulties, a poor base of knowledge, and they do not read critically and underutilize academic resources.
- **Teaching Strategies:** Participants reported using scaffolding learning activities, guided practice, rubric-informed assessment, engaging critically with sources, peer workshops and drafting for feedback to support citation learning.
- **Implications:** Given the importance of context, in conjunction with a set of best practices identified in these interviews, it would seem that institutions are wise to invest resources specifically aimed at addressing a range of curriculum-integrated promotion and instruction related to academic rigour and quality.

Table 1. Ongoing Difficulties in Citation Proficiency (Faculty Interviews)

Theme	Code	Representative Excerpts (with Interviewee Reference)	Frequency
Linguistic Obstacles	Language barriers	"Wide range of vocabulary is one of the major challenges that our students are facing." (Interviewee #7)	6
	English proficiency levels	"Students with better English perform citation practice better than lower-level students." (Interviewee #2)	1
Educational Obstacles	Lack of citation knowledge	"When it comes to the citation itself, they know nothing about it." (Interviewee #4)	9
	Rote learning background	"They come from a background of rote learning... does not allow for critical thinking." (Interviewee #1)	1
	Paraphrasing and summarizing skills	"Paraphrasing skills and summarizing skills are weak." (Interviewee #8)	1
	Viewing citation as checklist	"Students often view citations as checkboxes rather than tools to strengthen arguments." (Interviewee #9)	1
	Inadequate textbooks	"Even the textbook there does not support proper academic	1

Infrastructure Limits	Lack of reading	skills.” (Interviewee #6) “They don't read, and reading is the foundation for writing and citation.” (Interviewee #11)	1
	Library/resource access	“They have been complaining... students do not visit the library.” (Interviewee #3)	5
	Online/self-paced model	“Citation is an online course they complete on their own.” (Interviewee #5)	1

Table 2. Techniques Employed to Enhance Citation Skills (Faculty Interviews)

Themes	Codes	Representative Excerpts (with Interviewee Reference)	Frequency
Instructional Design	Hands-on and guided practice	“I combine lectures with exercises showing how citations strengthen arguments.” (Interviewee #4)	8
	Online citation tools	“We introduced them to free citation tools online.” (Interviewee #6)	1
	Rubrics and criteria	“We use clear rubrics, so expectations are transparent.” (Interviewee #1)	1
Skill Development	Manual citation training	“They receive classroom instruction to do it manually.” (Interviewee #2)	7
	Gradual task scaffolding	“Each skill is taught separately, with time and practice.” (Interviewee #3)	1
	Source function awareness	“Citations are not only for attribution, but they can also evaluate sources too.” (Interviewee #9)	1
Critical Engagement	Encouraging stance and critique	“They must critique it, show their position and train of thought.” (Interviewee #5)	5
Interactive Models	Peer workshops and group tutorials	“We changed it into tutorials with small groups to enhance interaction.” (Interviewee #8)	4
Feedback Strategy	Draft-based citation development	“Let students produce first drafts focusing on language and citation practice.” (Interviewee #11)	6

Table 3. Recommendations for Institutional and Pedagogical Improvement (Faculty Interviews)

Themes	Codes	Representative Excerpts (with Interviewee Reference)	Frequency
Curriculum Integration	Contextualized disciplinary citation	“Citation functions differ by discipline. Guides must reflect that.” (Interviewee #10)	6
	Embedded citation in core subjects	“Citations should be emphasized in all courses, not solely in EAP.” (Interviewee #2)	1
Faculty Development	Non-educator training	“Non-educators may not recognize the value of teaching reading or citation instruction.” (Interviewee #1)	5
	Ongoing workshops for faculty	“Teachers need to learn how to teach citations in a meaningful way.” (Interviewee #6)	1
Institutional Support	Improve library and digital access	“Libraries need to be well-resourced and seen as collaborative spaces.” (Interviewee #5)	7
	Combine citation tools with feedback	“Students should use citation tools with teachers' feedback.” (Interviewee #3)	1
Student Engagement	Motivate via academic events	“Events like research day or week promote students to actually engage with research and citations.” (Interviewee #8)	4
Assessment and Feedback	Reward citation effort	“Assigning marks for consistency in citations boosts motivation to practice.” (Interviewee #9)	6
	Emphasize rhetorical function in feedback	“Direct feedback toward citation functions, not format alone.” (Interviewee #7)	1

Tables 1, 2, and 3 present representative excerpts, coded references, and frequency distributions across themes. These responses reveal systemic, pedagogical and resource-based issues associated with teaching citation in the Omani HEI context. Without a clear and continuous pedagogical framework for research, compounded by inadequate institutional support, students fail to see the benefits of citation. The results provide a powerful mandate for transformation. Through an increased focus on experiential learning, training faculty, and embedding referencing into the curricula, institutions would enhance students' abilities in this important academic practice.

3.2.2 Qualitative Findings: Student-Focused Group Findings

Focus group interviews with six final year undergraduates provided key findings of how undergraduates perceive and practice in-text citation in academic projects.

Table 4. Students' Focused-Group Findings

Theme	Key Issue / Insight	Frequency (Coded References)
Lack of Formal Instruction on Citation Practices	Structure-focused instruction; citation as an afterthought; self-learning fills the gap	2
Reliance on Self-Learning and Informal Methods	Citation learned via imitation or online sources; no deep understanding	3
Difficulties in Proper Paraphrasing and Attribution	Confusion between paraphrasing and quoting; unclear attribution	2
Over-Reliance on Technology and AI	AI reduces learning opportunities for critical citation skills	2
Limited Disciplinary Support	Subject instructors assumed citation competence; unclear rubrics; feedback lacked depth	3
Recommendations and Emergent Themes	Propose deeper citation instruction, workshops, mentorship, and real-world integration	3

The themes are reflected in Table 4. The students recognized that lacking a cohesive integration between content and language instruction hindered the development of an understanding of citation practices. The lack of explicit rubric criteria and constructive feedback in subject courses only increased their uncertainty, many of whom resorted to guesswork, imitation of classmates or artificial intelligence-based tools such as Google or ChatGPT. This disjointed exposure to referencing education signals the need for a cross-disciplinary approach to teaching citation.

3.2.3 Quantitative Findings: Student-Written Projects

Drawing on a content analysis of 21 group projects using Petrić (2007)'s citation typology and Model of Text for Citing (Thompson, 2005), citation practices that lower academic integrity and detract from sound writing principles were uncovered. 166 citations were listed in the projects, primarily in the literature review sections.

Table 5. Citation Frequency by Section

Rhetorical Function	Introduction	Literature Review	Methodology	Results & Discussion
Supporting Claims	15	17	0	20
Attribution	19	143	3	3
Providing Evidence	0	1	0	0
Contrasting Viewpoints	2	1	0	3
Exemplification	6	1	0	1
Evaluation	1	0	0	0
Establishing connections between sources	0	0	0	1
Statement of Use	0	0	2	0

The results associated with the relation between rhetorical citation functions and types are depicted in Table 5. Using Petrić's (2007) citation typology, the content analysis of 21 group projects demonstrates a problematic trend in students' use of sources which violate norms of academic integrity as well as impair a writer's ability to strengthen their text. Petrić's model is used for this study because it offers a clear view of the functions of citations in academic writing. The overwhelming majority of citations in the literature review suggests an alarming trend; students mainly use citations for their attribution function, namely, reporting back information without thinking about that source critically. For instance, one student referenced a meta-review of deep breathing for mental health, mechanically repeating the findings. That student did attempt to reconceptualize the idea into his own argument. The use of knowledge-telling, the lack of ability to construct an original view, is employed instead.

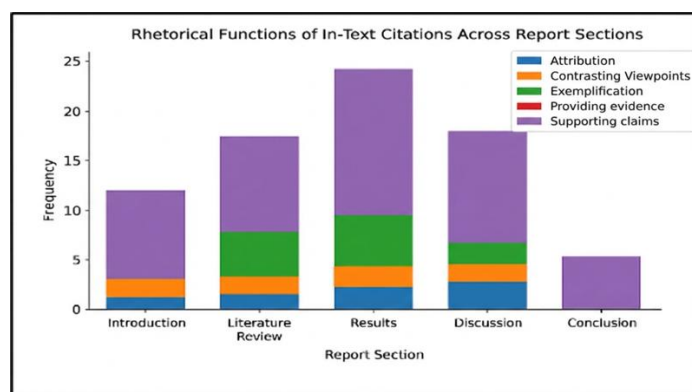


Figure 2. Rhetorical Functions of In-Text Citations Across Report Sections

In Figure 2, the rhetorical roles of in-text citations for report sections are illustrated. Petrić's classification is appropriate for this study as not only does it categorize citations by type (i.e. 49 in support and 13 contrast), but she also claims that students must engage with their loquacious sounding sources critically. Using this model, the study shows that learners often fail to meet the standard of the critical approach proposed by Petrić and points to a misunderstanding of citation practices. This disparity shows the potential for Petrić's framework (2007) to be operationalized as a pedagogical device that might help students improve their academic writing and, simultaneously, develop values conducive to responsible research in response to the findings from the analysis.

The analysis also showed that citations were skewed into literature reviews and had little use in introductions or discussions. It appeared that students regarded citations as mere obligations, not elements of their arguments. The remaining citations were mundane summaries and did not provide the kind of critical analysis or appraisal needed to give them emotional resonance. Reporting factual information with no further discussion or critique demonstrates low-level source engagement, according to Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory.

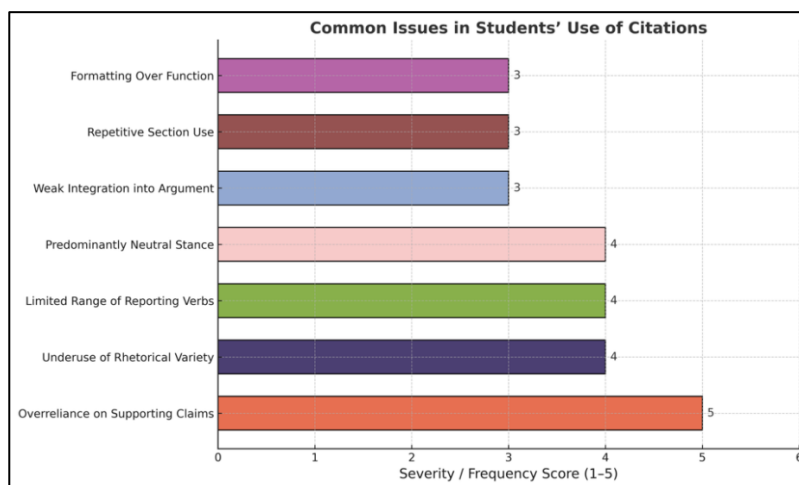


Figure 3. Common Issues in Students' Use of Citations

In Figure 3, the common problems with citations are displayed. Analysis of instructor feedback to the 21 projects made evident that technical aspects of citation had been emphasized (e.g. adherence to APA 7 formatting). While there was feedback on 'mechanical' issues like formatting errors, missing citations or reference list creation, no response showed the students how to better use their sources to argue or develop their point. This feedback gap highlights a major limitation in the pedagogical approach, one that does not develop the rhetorical dimension of citations.

If the goal of citation is to think critically rather than employ a "quote to prove" formula, then teaching must change. Faculty who help students understand the technical as well as rhetorical importance of citations can better equip them to approach writing assignments. It is clear that teacher feedback has been focused on guiding students to achieve a rubric rather than using citations as a skill that critically examines sources, supporting them to become better writers with high standards of academic integrity.

3.3 Participant Flow

All 11 faculty members invited chose to participate in the interviews. In the student focus group, 15 final-year students were invited, but only 6 participated.

Of the 21 student work samples examined, all could be used. Four exhibited no in-text references, although they contained reference lists, exacerbating concerns about the gap in citation education.

3.4 Intervention Fidelity

While independent variables were not manipulated experimentally, consistency of interview protocols and coding frames was upheld throughout all qualitative analyses. NVivo 15 was the software of choice for triangulation and theme identification.

3.5 Baseline Data

The faculty was diverse with regard to teaching experience and subject matter specialization. The data of students were obtained from the Education-English Language Teaching cohorts. These contexts served to situate citation problems as well as pedagogical needs.

3.5.1 Statistics and Data Analysis

The content analysis followed deductive coding, relying on pre-existing typologies and inductive emergence of themes. Inferential statistics were not utilized, and the results are only descriptive.

3.5.2 Adverse Events

There were no adverse events or dropouts. For the purposes of this study, cross-references that included an author and date only were counted and analyzed (references lacking a date or using generic terms such as “the study,” “the writer” were excluded). It is of interest to note that, though all projects provided reference lists with a minimum of 6 source entries, four projects included no embedded citations in any part.

4. Discussion

The results of this study highlight a large gap between what institutions expect and what students are experiencing with regards to citation instruction at UTAS. Faculty valued the incorporation of citation into the curriculum, yet students perceived a lack of direct instruction and practical advice. Their main encounter with citation was in EAP or ESP classes, which carried little reinforcement into their discipline courses. This demonstrates an institutional belief that students take content-area classes with existing knowledge of citation, a belief unsubstantiated by student self-assessment or academic performance.

Focus group students expressed frustration with the guidance from teaching faculty. Rubrics and support for citation rarely offered guidance on how to cite, and revision guidance was often on the surface level, focusing on forms rather than functions, such as inclusion of authors' names and year of publication rather than explorations of readers using research evidence. The absence of instructional support engenders a fragmented comprehension of citation methodologies and diminishes students' endeavours to construct persuasive, evidence-based arguments.

Moreover, an excessive reliance on informal learning exacerbates this issue. Some students reported they taught themselves to cite by copying examples from books or using online tools, such as Google, without grasping the principles of academic writing. This ad hoc approach, while facilitating learners' use of citations, may expose students to inaccuracies or limit their ability to engage critically with published works. This dovetails with Hyland's (2004) perspective that language proficiency has a significant impact on a student's ability to cite effectively with students encountering issues in paraphrasing and attribution as a result of limited lexical range and grasp of syntax.

A major stumbling block was the students' inability to identify when and how to paraphrase appropriately with proper citation and when and how to directly quote a source. It could be seen that some students perceive the rhetorical function of citation as a formal procedure rather than a fundamental part of scholarly interaction. Lei and Hu (2024) observed that learners from collectivist backgrounds are more likely to interpret citation as a sign of respect instead of a means of critique. However, as Petrić (2007) claims, citation is much more than a technical skill; it is a key rhetorical practice.

AI technology, such as ChatGPT, is experiencing a rapid level of popularity among tertiary-level students and making the acquisition of research skills more complex. Though students acknowledged that these tools enable rapid generation of text, they failed to see how this could affect their understanding of citation. This trend has serious ramifications, posing the risk of encouraging superficial engagement with academic writing (Marzuki et al., 2023), thereby undermining intellectual growth.

While faculty participants repeated these concerns and provided scaffolding activities and feedback-based instruction, they appeared to be oriented predominantly towards technical accuracy and correctly formatting with APA. This was supported by the analysis of a student project in which citation typology indicated that most citations were used as an attribution, and there is very little evidence of higher-order rhetorical functions such as comparison, critique or synthesis. This emphasizes the need for a pedagogical framework that supports instructors to teach citation as a rhetorical and epistemological practice.

In particular, many of the participants, faculty and students alike, expressed a preference for more discipline-specific, practical strategies on how to teach citation. Students recommended reintroducing education on citation practices across all levels of education, including secondary and tertiary study. They also recommended practical workshops, mentoring and peer learning to demystify sourcing, rewriting and introducing other views.

4.1 Limitations and Bias

This study is not without limitations, which must be mentioned when discussing results. First, it should be noted that the use of self-reported data from faculty interviews and student focus groups possibly injected social desirability bias into the responses. The second concern is that there is no longitudinal data, and it is therefore unknown whether the effect of citation instruction persists for a longer time period in relation to student learning or engagement.

While purposive sampling was appropriate when selecting those who are directly involved in teaching citation practices, the sample may not necessarily be representative of all experiences within UTAS. Although thematic saturation was reached, generalizations could be constrained due to the single institutional and cultural background of Oman. Because of the explorative nature of an exploratory sequential design, the emphasis on depth rather than breadth in the early phases of inquiry (Zhang & Nicoll-Johnson, 2018), this has “limitations” itself (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

However, methodological triangulation was utilized by incorporating faculty narratives, student voices and analysis of student writing to enhance the internal validity of the study and develop a larger sense of citation practices (Denzin 2012).

4.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

There are serious theoretical and practical implications as a result of this study, especially for the methods of teaching academic writing. Using Petrić's (2007) classification of citations and their cultural dimensions, this study suggests that, in addition to the technical skill of

citation, its social and cognitive dimensions must be acknowledged. Factors, including students' particular academic and cultural backgrounds, influence the way they interact with texts. Therefore, there is a need to develop pedagogical approaches which involve more than just teaching the rules of format; the education of citations must facilitate a rigorous, dynamic intellectual interaction.

Furthermore, this study identifies the need for tertiary-level training of students in critical reading and efficient note-taking, giving them a knowledge base from which to cite with confidence. Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) can be a lens through which to improve teaching, moving from the recall of knowledge to higher-order cognitive skills, including analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Similarly, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) also articulates that learning to cite effectively can be developed through collaborative discourse and pedagogy that responds to the local culture.

Practically, the inclusion of academic integrity module options (as suggested by Dineen and Goff (2024), Eaton and Hughes (2022) and Miron et al. (2021)) may help to strengthen the ethical understanding of citation. Incorporating these concepts into the curriculum may enable students to see citation as something more than a requirement, but also a significant academic skill.

4.3 Future Directions and Remaining Challenges

Despite the limitations of data, some open questions and new challenges in citation pedagogy are addressed in this research. One of the main challenges is to start teaching referencing at an earlier part of students' academic lives. Although there is evidence of the potential for exposure to university writing to increase preparedness, especially at the secondary level in Oman, how this exposure can be achieved across a range of curricula remains relatively underdeveloped.

A third area for potential development is teaching more discipline-specific research skills. Although providing discipline-specific citation training (e.g., science vs. humanities) has potential promise, further study is required to determine how these differences would influence student learning and academic integrity.

Technology-integrated citation instruction is also somewhat double-edged. Citation managers and AI-based writing aids can help encourage precision and autonomy, though overreliance on those tools could undermine a student's ability to internalize the significance of citing. These results highlight the need for further examination of basic skills to be supported optimally by technology.

Furthermore, while many experts commend the integration of critical reading with writing, its impact on students' use of sources and ability to build and support an argument is difficult to measure. Longitudinal studies would likely provide useful information on change in citation practices, but these are by definition time-consuming and often not convenient for most institutions.

Lastly, while some single case studies have reported promising classroom practices in citation instruction, there are no set criteria to judge effectiveness across multiple learning environments. These challenges will need to be met by teachers and institutions that aim to improve ethical and context-aware, discipline-specific citation practices in the face of increasingly complex learning ecosystems.

4.4 Concluding Statement

This paper provides valuable insights as to how source-use practices are imparted, received and implemented in the Omani multilingual tertiary education region. According to the research results, it may be appropriate to revise the mechanical view of citations as a tool for discouraging plagiarism and enforcing formatting requirements, and consider the rhetorical, contextual, ethical and technological influences that affect how both faculty and students engage in citation.

Going forward, academic and professional expectations of source-use practice are a necessary first step in reconceptualizing how to teach analyzing citations ethically and effectively, critically engaging with scholarly sources and citations, and navigating the conventions of integrity. Teaching source-use instructions at a primary or secondary level in the education system is a critical step toward the development of scholarship. Furthermore, requiring students to make responsible use of writing assistance software such as NVivo and AI text production tools in a way that promotes critical thinking should be integrated into curricula.

To make lasting change, educational institutes must adopt a systemic approach that includes feedback, collaboration with peers and cross-collaboration intra- and inter-institutionally. With a perception of academic writing as an integrated practice, higher education in Oman and similar multilingual contexts can support the development of student confidence and ethical practice within academic discourse across both local and global contexts.

This study demonstrates the complexity of relationships involving linguistic, cultural and technological factors that shape how students use citation. The results lead to the conclusion that citation literacy is not the result of isolated instruction, rubric checklists, or ad hoc use of AI. This literacy is not an "add-on" approach randomly inserted into a curriculum; rather, it must be an integrated, holistic and comprehensive institution-wide commitment that blends rhetorical, cognitive, and ethical dimensions of scholarly communication.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Issa was responsible for the Introduction, Literature Review, Research Design, and Discussions sections. Dr. Al-Dhahli was responsible for interviewing the faculty and conducting the focus group, as well as transcribing the interviews and preparing the related summaries. Dr. Al-Dhahli analysed the students' projects. Dr. Issa and Dr. Al-Dhahli contributed equally to analyzing the transcripts and identifying the emerging themes. Dr. Al-Dhahli contributed to writing the discussions section and finalized the conclusion. Dr. Issa drafted the manuscript, and Dr. Al-Dhahli revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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