Providing tools to reference accurately: observations of citation practices of IFP students

Dr. S Yaakob, Pre-Masters and IY1 English Coordinator
Email: ac0507@coventry.ac.uk, syaakob@oncampus.global

Background

Referencing accurately demonstrates membership of the academic discourse community (Hyland,1999). Previous research on citation practices of novice writers has seen a preference to **attribute** to other writers, in comparison to experts who provide support and justify claims (Mansourizadeh and Ahmad, 2011). Students were observed to use citations mainly to **display knowledge** and higher rated work was observed to use a range of rhetorical functions namely *exemplification, further reference, statement of use, application, evaluation, establishing links between sources, and comparison of one's own work with others* (Petric, 2007). Types of citation have however seen to **vary according to discipline** and determined by whether prominence is given to the writer referred to (Hyland 1999; Thompson and Tribble, 2001). Thus examining the use of citations for Foundation students at the beginning of their academic writing journey could provide as a pedagogical tool for teaching and assessment.

Objectives

The study examined IFP students' first academic writing coursework for:
1) Frequency of citations
2) Types of citations used
3) Choice of reporting verbs and noun phrases used
4) Choice of sources selected

Methods

A small sized corpus of 22,500 tokens was created, with 15 essays from 3 disciplines: Engineering, Life Science and Social Science. Essays were searched for citation forms and manually coded for the integral and non-integral citations (Swales,1990) and reporting structures.

The Corpus

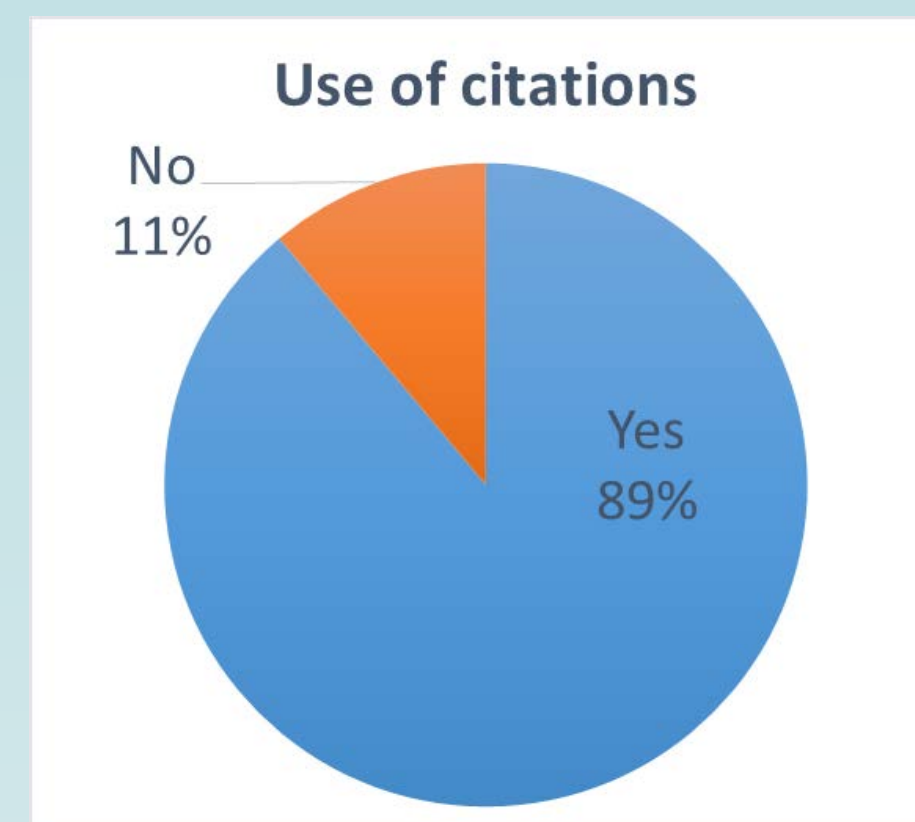| Discipline	Total no. of citations	Density per 500 words	Density per 1,000 words
Engineering (15 essays)	30	2	4
Life Science (15 essays)	45	3	6
Social Science (15 essays)	35	2.3	4.6
Total	110	2.4	4.8

Results

Figure 1 Percentage of IFP students using citations in coursework

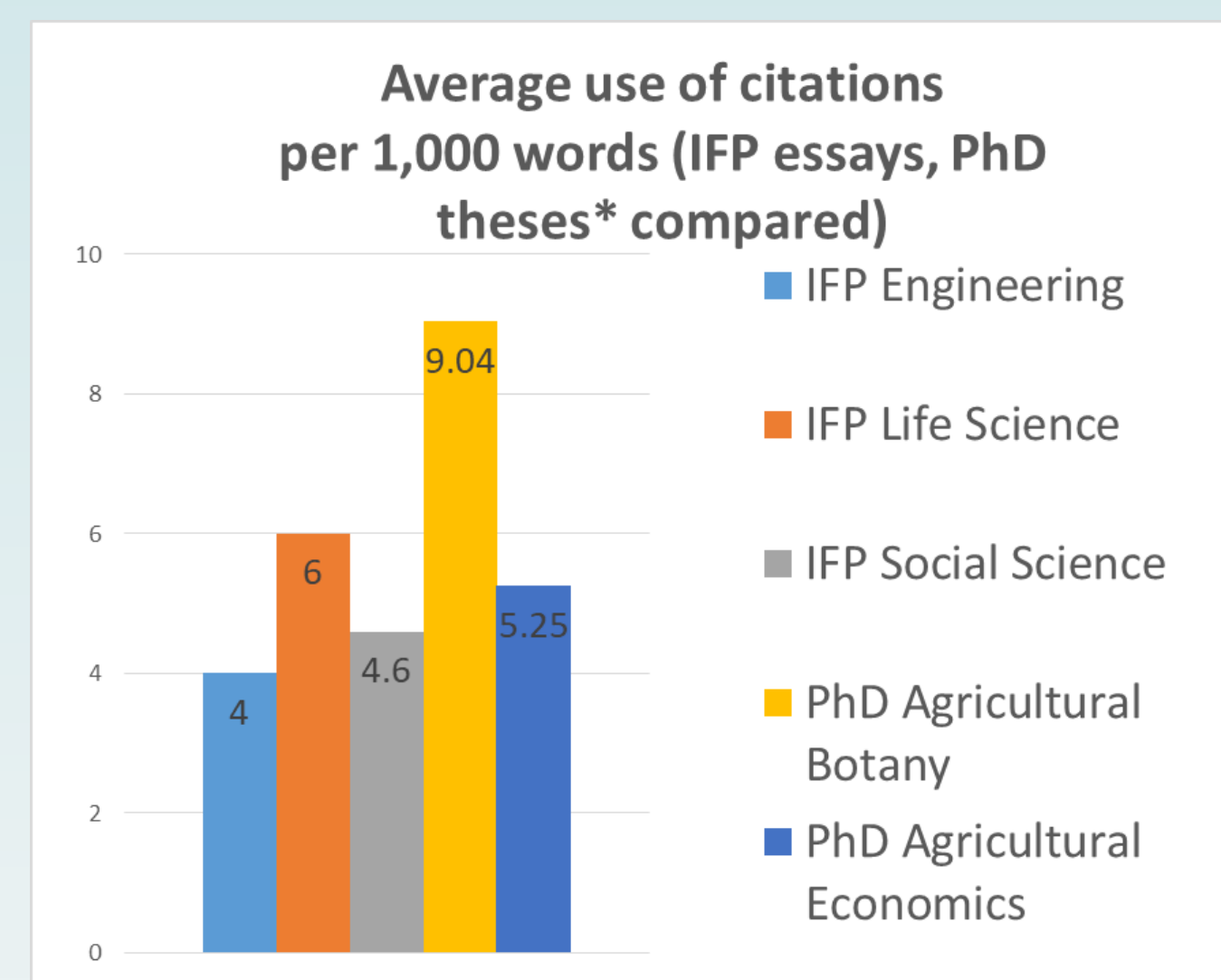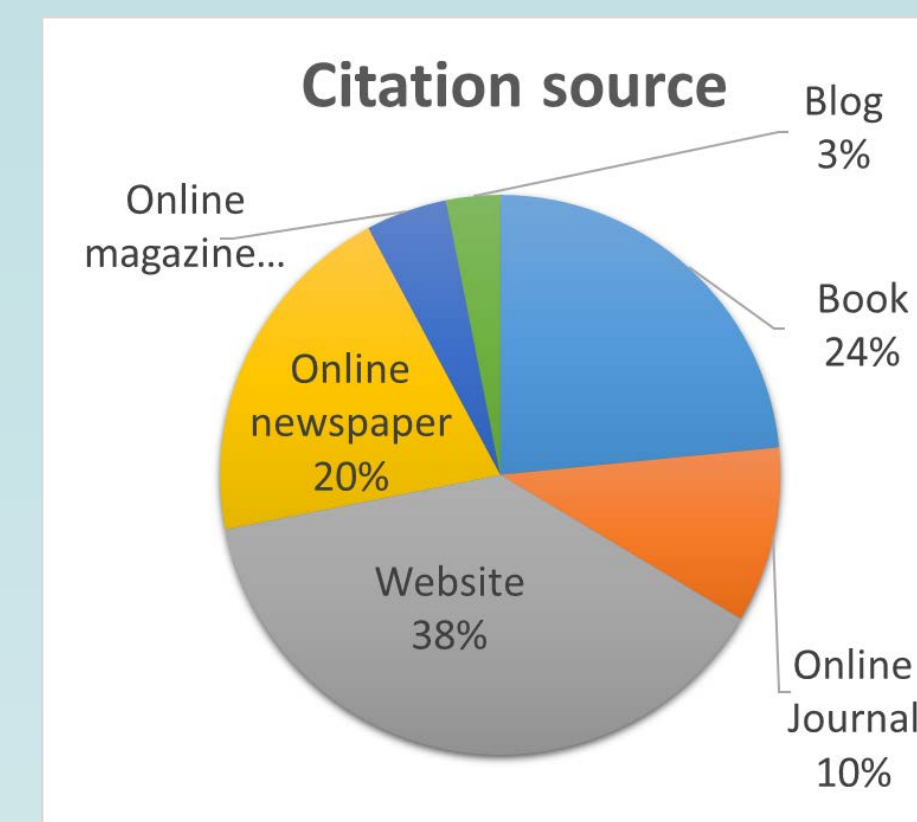Figure 2 Average use of citations per 1,000 words compared

Figure 4 Types of citation sources used by IFP students

Reporting structure	Frequency
Non-integral with noun phrase	
According to	24
Integral with verb phrase	
claims	4
wrote, said, states	3
point out, cites, says	2
argues, believes, mentions, pointed out, indicate, asserts, questioned, finds, showed, found, talks about	1

Table A Reporting structures used in IFP essays

Figure 3 Types of citations used by IFP students

Discussion

1) When referencing is used (Figure 1), IFP students used 4.8 citations per 1,000 words. This is less compared to 5.25-9.04 citations used in doctoral theses* in the study by Thompson and Tribble (2001) (Figure 2).
2) Students used non-integral citation more than integral (Figure 3). This supports Rabab'ah and Al-Marshadi's (2013) study who found that native English writers were found to use Integral citation with nouns more frequently than non-native writers. However, Thompson and Tribble (2001) argue that the use of citations reflect disciplinary practices.
3) 76% of sources were obtained online (Figure 4). Websites were not all academic.
4) Limited reporting structures were observed which mainly indicate attribution to other writers (Petric, 2007) and Discourse Acts (Hyland,1999) (Table A).
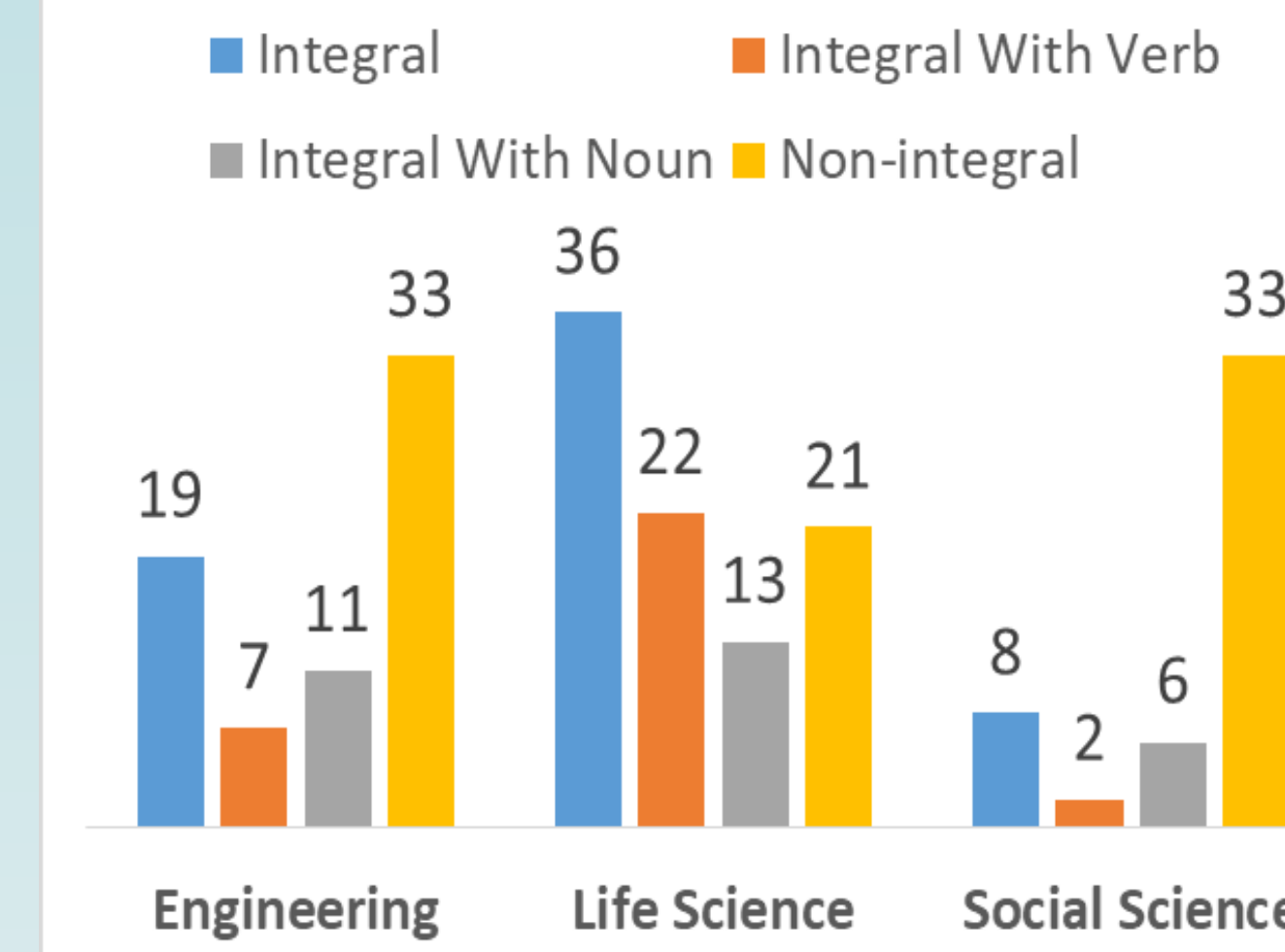
Conclusion

Students will need further support in:

1) Increasing the number of academic sources identified for coursework.
2) Determining the credibility of online sources.
3) Varying the use of reporting structures in referring to other writers.

References

Hyland, K. 1999. 'Academic Attribution: Citation and the Construction of Disciplinary Knowledge'. *Applied Linguistics* 20 (3): 341–67.

Mansourizadeh, K and Ahmad, U.K. 2011. 'Citation Practices among Non-Native Expert and Novice Scientific Writers'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 10 (3): 152–61.

Petrić,B. 2007. 'Rhetorical Functions of Citations in High- and Low-Rated Master's Theses'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 6 (3): 238–53.

Rabab'ah,G and Al-Marshadi, A. 2013. 'Integrative vs. Non-Integrative Citations among Native and Non-native English Writers'. *International Education Studies* 6 (7): 78.

Swales, John. 1990. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.* Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, P., and C. Tribble. 2001. 'Looking at Citations: Using Corpora in English for Academic Purposes'. *Language Learning and Technology* 5 (3): 91–105.