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

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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 a preference to vary according to discipline and determined by whether prominence is given to supporting and justifying claims (Mansourizadeh 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.

Results

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). 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.

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 found to use integral citation with nouns (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.

Discussion

1) Students will need further support in:
2) Determining the credibility of online sources
3) Varying the use of reporting structures in referring to other writers.

The Corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Total no. of citations</th>
<th>Density per 500 words</th>
<th>Density per 1,000 words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering (15 essays)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Science (15 essays)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Science (15 essays)</td>
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<td>110</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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References


