

COMMON ERRORS FOUND IN APA CITATION: BASIS TO IMPROVE THE INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAM

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Citation and referencing should not be taken for granted. To be scholarly, one must follow a conventional citation and referencing format. The reference list must be accurate and free from mistakes. By doing so, the bibliographic information cited in the research becomes valid. This ongoing research used citation analysis to share the initial results found in tracking the common errors generated by graduate students in referencing. In particular, the research will focus on APA style as this is the citation guide prescribed by the school. Finally, the results of the study will be used to improve the Information Literacy Program in instilling academic integrity in their personal and professional life.

Keywords: citation analysis, referencing, accuracy, academic integrity

INTRODUCTION

Referencing and citation errors continue to proliferate if not given proper attention. Based from a study conducted in Kazakhstan in 2018, there is an error percentage rate of 84% in one of the leading schools in Kazakhstan when it comes to poor referencing practices (Yap, Groen, Kamilova, Terzi, & Zvonareva, 2018). Lee & Lin (2013) noted that citation errors include both bibliographic information and citation style error. Incomplete references impacts the integrity of the scientific communication and creates a loss of trust among peers in the scientific community (Azadeh & Vaez, 2013). Proper referencing also shows how strong the university is committed to ensure that the reference source is accurately recorded. Walker & Taylor (1998) developed the five principles of proper referencing that is applicable to all citation styles. The principles of intellectual property, access, economy, standardization, and transparency can be summed up to denote having a strong sense of academic integrity once you recognize all of them. With this in mind, the library in collaboration with the stakeholders of the university (ie. the Writing Center, Teaching and Learning Committees, Research Methods courses) has a big role to play in building an information literate professional by properly citing references. Having imbued

with Information Literacy is a skill that each graduate student should aspire. It is not only a skill but a competency and an issue of ethics and morals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study identifies the common errors mistakenly produced by the students in their Master's theses. It focuses on the adoption of APA format as the main citation style used in referencing. It will detect whether the students are competent enough to follow the APA style in referencing. If found out that there are still significant amount of mistakes, a revitalized Information Literacy program shall be improved. The study is limited to one department only to compare if the quality of citation improved from 2018 to 2019. The common errors are categorized according to the four essential components that make up a reference list. These four components are the following: Author, Publication Date, Title of Source, and Retrieval Information. These components describe the elements necessary to cite and refer information sources.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Yap, Groen, Kamilova, Terzi, & Zvonareva (2018) traced, reviewed, and analyzed the reference list of graduate students in Kazakhstan. Using the publicly available information extracted from the institutional repository, they found out that there were numerous errors unintentionally committed by the students. They mentioned that mistakes may be avoided if there was proper guidance in the creation of a reference list. In APA citations, we can identify four main components. These are the author, date, title, and retrieval information (Santa Fe College, 2019). A sample illustration is given below.

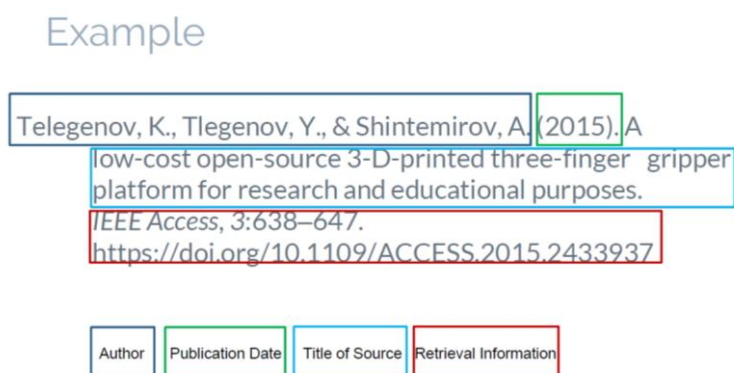


Fig. 1. Components of a Reference List

These components shall go together to produce an accurate reference and ensures the integrity of the manuscript.

Referencing Errors Committed by Students

Citation and referencing errors may happen intentionally or unintentionally. In any case, the authors are responsible for what they have written including the references and citations. Lee & Lin (2013) reported a 20-24% error rates found in the theses of the graduate students in one of the universities in Taiwan. A review of five theses in India indicated that almost 40% of the references had major errors (Harinarayanaa, Chikkamanjub, & Raju N, 2011). Jamaican graduate students are not exempt from referencing errors. There was a time where most students committed a formatting and layout errors prior to introducing a thesis consultation (Robinson, Nelson, & Lewis, 2018). Azadeh & Vaez (2013) identified more than 50% flawed references with Iranian students. There were also inaccurate references even in the PhD dissertations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed citation analysis to track the current status on the quality of reference list. Although citation analysis is inclined in measuring the impact, influence, or quality of citations, citation analysis can be extended to references as the reference list is a symbol of the content of the intellectual work (Hellqvist, 2009). The assumed quality of the intellectual output depends on the quality of the reference list.

The paper studied 20 master's theses submitted in an open institutional repository in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. The theses were all uploaded in 2018 and were considered best theses among their batch. Each thesis was assessed carefully looking into the four components of a reference list: Publication Date, Author, Title of Source, and Retrieval Information. The average number of references cited and average number of errors were calculated. A comparison of the errors between 2018 and 2019 were also analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean number of references used by a graduate student is about 67.4. In 2019 data, the highest number of references used in a thesis is 145 with a 14% error in the reference list. The lowest number of references used in a thesis is 37 where all of them are considered mistakes which brings to a 100% error rate (Table 1).

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Table 1. References and Error Data

Thesis Number	Number of References Used	Number of Presumed Errors from the Reference List	% of Error
1	55	52	95%
2	55	35	64%
3	76	49	64%
4	56	46	82%
5	145	21	14%
6	92	37	40%
7	111	46	41%
8	115	106	92%
9	62	27	44%
10	72	40	56%
11	75	49	65%
12	71	48	68%
13	64	64	100%
14	57	37	65%
15	45	18	40%
16	55	42	76%
17	81	26	32%
18	68	33	49%
19	40	37	93%
20	37	37	100%
	67.4	42.5	

The highest number of presumed errors is based on the total number of errors per thesis divided by the total number of references used. Two of the theses had a 100% error rate. The first one had 37 references and the other had 64. On the average, there is a 42.5% of presumed errors in the reference list based from the 20 theses reviewed in 2019.

Table 2 gives us an idea on the increase of references cited as well as the mean number of errors found. It is alarming that the number of errors increased despite the introduction of thesis manual where citation and referencing is introduced during the orientation program. On the part of the library, we are

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making our Information Literacy program known to the schools to support the research needs of the students as well as make them familiar with the citation styles. A lot has to be done to make a concerted effort in improving the citation skills of students.

Table 2. Errors in a Reference List

Year	Number of graduates	Number of theses uploaded in the repository	Number of theses reviewed	Average number of references cited	Average number of errors found
2018 and below	224	36	18	56.17	31.22
2019	90	20	20	67.4	42.5
Percent of increase				20%	36%

Common Errors Found per Component

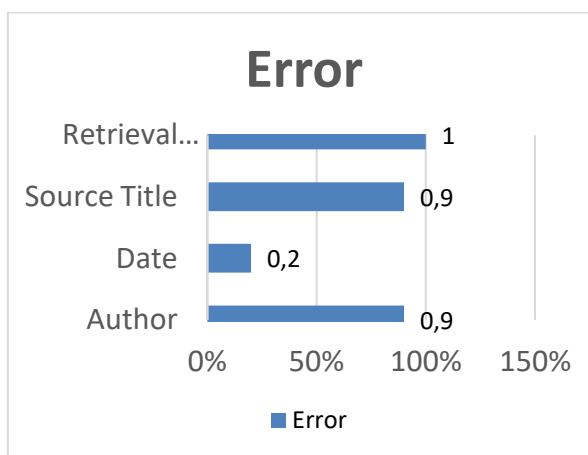


Fig. 2. Percentage of Component Errors

It is apparent that students are confused or cannot follow the APA citation guide. There is a very high error rate in retrieval information component, 90% error in both source title and author components and 20% error in date component (Fig.2). Table 3 is a summary of common errors found in a reference list. These are actual mistakes from the submitted theses. The most common error is when

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students forget to change the uppercase letters of a common noun and convert them into lowercase letters.

Table 3. Common Errors Found

Author	Date	Source Title	Retrieval Information
<p>Incomplete author details</p> <p>Names not inverted</p> <p>Corporate (group) author not spelled out (No abbreviations in the reference list)</p> <p>No need to mention the first names of the authors unless there are two different authors with the same surname and first name initials.</p> <p>Use of “and” and “&” for multiple authors (fig. 3)</p>	<p>Incomplete publication date details for magazines and other source types</p> <p>Wrong placement of month and year for magazine / newsletter sources/ online articles (fig. 4)</p>	<p>Forgot to italicize titles</p> <p>Forgot to name the title of the source / Missing title of the article (fig. 5)</p> <p>Abbreviated or incomplete journal titles</p> <p>Journal titles are written in lowercase letters</p> <p>Incorrect use of uppercase and lowercase letters</p>	<p>Missing place of publication (fig. 6)</p> <p>No volume or issue number</p> <p>No doi</p> <p>Wrong permalinks or incomplete URL</p> <p>Date of retrieval unnecessary</p> <p>ISBN unnecessary</p> <p>Incomplete</p>

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			Pagination Exclusion of “pp” to indicate page numbers for edited books
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Examples

Darrell M. West and Joshua Bleiberg (2013) retrieved from

<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/five-ways-teachers-can-use-technology-to-help-students/>

Fig. 3. Wrong use of connector “and”

Thiers, N. (June, 2017) Making Progress Possible: A Conversation with Michael Fullan.

Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/jun17/vol74/num09/Making-Progress-Possible@-A-Conversation-with-Michael-Fullan.aspx>

Fig. 4. Wrong placement of month and year

Wermke, W. & Salokangas, M. (2015). *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 1(2), 1-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.28841>

Missing title of the article

Fig. 5. Missing title of the article

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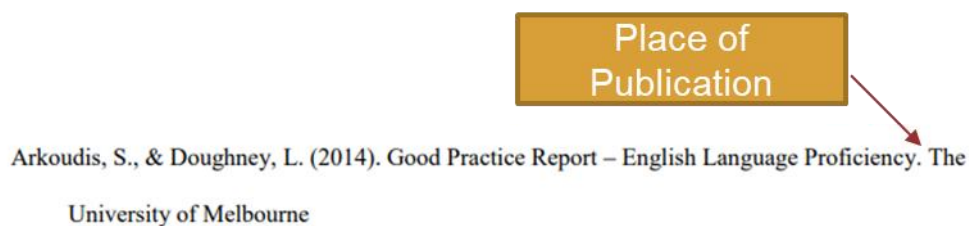


Fig. 6. Missing place of publication

CONCLUSIONS

The number of errors that increased from 2018 to 2019 implies that there is a need to review the competencies of students when it comes to using APA for citation/referencing. Majority of the students neglect the citation format as they focus more on content of their work. These errors will affect not only their future as it is already digitally available like a footprint but also the image of the university. The errors suggest that there should be an intensive collaboration between the schools, the writing center, and the library. It seems our IL program (Fig. 7) needs to be revitalized as the errors rise up. The NU Library has a module devoted for citations and referencing. Although the matter on referencing was only taken up seriously in 2018, we need to engage the schools and the students to be aware about the citation practices.

Nazarbayev University Library / Nazarbayev University LibGuides / Information Literacy at NU / Information Literacy Program

Information Literacy at NU: Information Literacy Program

The Nazarbayev University Library Information Literacy Program (NU LILY) was launched in 2018 to achieve student success across all schools of the university.

Library Sessions | Information Literacy Program

Information literacy Program | Library Orientation | Module 1 - Searching for information | Module 2 - Evaluating information | Module 3 - Citing sources | Module 4 - Avoiding plagiarism

Learning Outcome

Search, collect, manage, refer and cite reliable information as evidence.

At the end of the discussion, the students are expected to:

- Be responsible authors/scholars;
- Be aware of the different and available citation tools (reference management software);
- Learn how to cite internet sources such as blogs, online videos and social media sites.

Sample Lesson Topics (but are not limited to the following):

- Discuss available citation formats (APA, Chicago, Harvard, etc.)
- Introduce citation management tools like Endnote, Mendeley and Zotero
- Practical application of these tools

Assessment

- Identifying parts of a reference list.

To request this module, email reference@nu.edu.kz

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Fig. 7. IL program of NU Library

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen the IL program by collaborating with the faculty members teaching research and literature review/literature search (research seminar/methods class).
2. Collaborate with the Writing Center (ongoing discussion) on how to improve the citation and referencing / avoiding plagiarism when it comes to the delivery and teaching.
3. Improve the IL module content on citation and referencing by adding more concrete examples.
4. Creation of a LibGuide devoted for common errors in APA citation.

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