

Undergraduate Students Citation Writing Difficulties

Suntoro Suntoro *, Ida Zulaeha, Hari Bakti Mardikantoro, Tommi Yuniawan

Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: suntoro@students.unnes.ac.id

Abstract. Writing citations is one of the skills that must be developed by students to be able to do research well. The fact is that there are still many students who need help writing citations. This study aims to identify students' difficulties in writing citations. The research method used was a mixed method with data collection instruments in the form of questionnaires distributed to 68 respondents and 10 student research proposal documentation. Data analysis was carried out by analyzing quantitative data first by making a description of the level of difficulty and type of difficulty in writing citations in the form of a percentage with the help of SPSS and then elaborating using qualitative data to draw conclusions then. The results of the research show that: (1) students think that writing citations is a problematic competency; (2) the percentage of student difficulties in writing citations from the largest to the smallest includes: (a) identification and evaluation of credible and non-credible references of 26.4%, (b) determining and finding relevant reference sources of 21.7%, (c) technical writing of citations by 20.8%, (d) synthesis and analysis of citations by 13.2%, (e) determining the attitude or position of the author of several citations made by 12.3%, and (f) paraphrasing citation of 5.7%. The root of the problem in citation writing is the need for students to determine and find relevant and credible reference sources, which results in difficulties in analyzing, synthesizing, and determining attitudes. While technical difficulties related to writing are more caused by writing citations manually without using reference manager software, difficulty understanding foreign languages, and many citations that need to be reported or accompanied by sources.

Keywords: difficulty; students; writing; citation

INTRODUCTION

One of the skills that students must develop is conducting research independently. To produce novelty in research, students need data from similar research that has been done before. Therefore, citations are needed to build academic arguments to strengthen research positions (Borg, 2000). Various supporting and relevant references are then constructed as a strong theoretical foundation. Citation is the process of taking over one or several statements of scientific work to prove or strengthen or even reject previous research arguments. As Borg points out, citations can reinforce or refute existing academic ideas. Citation is the most distinctive feature in academic writing, especially in terms of quoting and referring to other authors' studies as a basis for persuasion and acceptance of academic arguments and avoiding plagiarism (Badenhorst, 2018; Jomaa & Bidin, 2019; Aksnes et al., 2019).

Citations have various functions, namely: (1) as a tribute to the work and ideas of others; (2) as a rationale, explanation, or analysis; and (3) to guide the reader regarding the literature that we use (Lipson, 2011). Budi & Yaniasih (2023) express different views regarding the pattern of citation writing in the academic world. Budi & Yaniasih highlight the rare citation function used to show polarity and comparison. Most citations

are made to support and build relationships with previous research. Three things must be considered to correctly write a citation: layout and structure, content, and verdict (Wilding, 2011). Layout and structure are related to the technicalities of writing citations, content is related to the credibility of the statements quoted, and verdict is related to the interpretation of the statements quoted. Zhao et al. (2017) added that citation writing needs to consider the level of importance of the reference concerning building arguments. Therefore, Zhao et al. strongly recommend removing references that do not significantly contribute to academic argumentation.

Even though it looks simple, the fact is that writing citations has its complexities. Several studies have been conducted to examine students' difficulties in writing citations. Research conducted by Lamprey & Atta-Obeng (2013) states that the most severe difficulty in writing citations is the various styles of citation writing that make students feel less confident. Student literacy is also very low, so they rely heavily on books, lecturers, and librarians to check the accuracy of their citations. Jomaa & Bidin (2017) in his study stated that students faced several challenges in writing quotations, namely: identifying the credibility of information, making attitudes towards quotations, lack of knowledge about the use of quotations, and difficulty

understanding foreign languages. Rezeki (2018) revealed that students' problems in writing citations lie in indications of plagiarism and citations that need to be reported or accompanied by sources of reference. Meanwhile, Kongpetch (2021) points out the difficulties students experience in writing citations related to integrating reference sources into their writing. It is caused by two factors: lack of familiarity with the language of citation and ignorance of the dialogic nature of academic writing.

Based on the studies conducted, the researcher is interested in studying the problems of Sriwijaya State Buddhist College students in Tangerang (STABN Sriwijaya) in writing citations with a broader method and sample. This research was motivated by the findings of previous researchers, which revealed that the digital literacy competence of STABN Sriwijaya students was included in the high category (Suntoro et al., 2022). Researchers assume that students with good digital literacy competence can use technology to write citations well too. In addition, previous research conducted by Lamprey & Atta-Obeng (2013), Jomaa & Bidin (2017), Rezeki (2018), and Kongpetch (2021) using a sample of student academic papers with a number that varies between 6 to 16. Therefore, researchers are interested in exploring students' problems in writing citations in an enormous scope. Researchers combined quantitative and qualitative methods in this study to obtain more comprehensive research findings.

METHODS

This study uses a mixed-method research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative designs. The combined research method flow step by step using the *quan à qual* model, namely collecting data quantitatively and then elaborating with qualitative data. The quantitative data collection instrument used a questionnaire comprising closed and semi-open questions. Closed questions determine students' perceptions of the difficulty level in writing citations. In contrast, semi-open questions are used to explore the types of difficulties students experience in writing citations. The questionnaire

was distributed to 68 students from semesters 2 to 8 who had received citation writing material. Meanwhile, qualitative data collection used documentation in the form of 10 student research proposals. Data analysis was carried out by analyzing quantitative data first by describing the difficulty level and type of difficulty in writing citations in percentage form with the help of SPSS. The results of the quantitative data analysis were then elaborated using student proposal documentation to conclude.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the respondents' answers, it was found that writing citations were complex material. As many as 3 students (4%) said it was not easy, 29 students (43%) said it was not easy, 27 students (40%) said it was pretty easy, nine students (13%) said it was easy, and no students said it was straightforward. Students' perceptions of the difficulty level in writing citations are illustrated in the following figure.

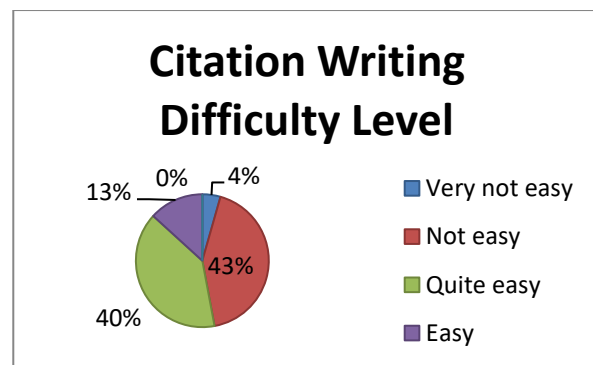


Figure 1. Citation Writing Difficulty level

Referring to Figure 1, students generally experience difficulties in writing citations. There are several difficulties experienced by students when writing citations, namely related to technical citation writing, finding and finding relevant reference sources, identifying and evaluating credible and non-credible references, paraphrasing citations, synthesis and analysis of citations, and determining the attitude or position of the author of several citations made. The complete types of students' difficulties in writing citations are described in the following table.

Table 1. Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Writing Citations

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Student Difficulties Writing Citations ^a	Citation writing techniques	22	20.8	32.4
	Determine and find relevant reference sources	23	21.7	33.8
	Identify and evaluate credible and non-credible references	28	26.4	41.2
	Paraphrase the citation	6	5.7	8.8
	Synthesis and citation analysis	14	13.2	20.6
	Determine the author's attitude or position from several citations made	13	12.3	19.1
	Total		106	100.0

Based on Table 1, students' difficulties in writing citations from the largest to the smallest are identification and evaluation of credible and non-credible references (26.4%), determining and finding relevant reference sources (21.7%), technical citation writing (20.8%), synthesis and analysis of citations (13.2%), determining the attitude or position of the author of several citations made (12.3%), and citation paraphrases (5.7%). Meanwhile, 22 students (32.4%) had difficulties related to technical citation writing, 23 students (33.8%) had difficulty determining and finding relevant reference sources, 28 students (41.2%) had difficulty identifying and evaluating credible and non-credible references, 6 students (8.8%) had difficulty in paraphrasing citations, 14 students (20.6%) had difficulty in synthesis and analysis of citations, and 13 students (19.1%) had difficulty in determining the attitude or position of the author from several citations made. In detail, students' difficulties in writing citations after analyzing the proposals written by students are as follows.

Citation writing techniques

The citation technique ranks third at 20.8% on the list of students' difficulties in writing citations. These difficulties lead to reference writing which still needs to be done manually without the help of reference management such as Mendeley, EndNote, and Zotero. Students also need help with foreign languages such as English, Pali, and Sanskrit. In addition, many quotes were found that needed to be reported or provided with sources. The students still need clarification about when and in what cases to make a citation.

Determine and find relevant reference sources

So far, references in student scientific writing have been dominated by sources from

collections of books, theses, and printed journals in the library. Meanwhile, the reference collection in the library relevant to the research topic needs to be improved. Under these conditions, many students take advantage of references from online sources. Students need help to define and determine appropriate and relevant scientific reference sources. The most obvious indicator is the number of references from scientific journals in student thesis proposals of at most 20% of the total references used. In addition, the number of references used to explain a concept or theory still needs to be increased. In fact, in each sub-topic, sometimes there are only one or two supporting references. Students do more searches by utilizing keywords on the Google search engine. As a result, various sources of information, such as personal blogs and websites, campus repositories in the form of theses, and online journals, appear simultaneously. New problems arise: 1) Students must accurately identify and evaluate credible and non-credible references; 2) Students have yet to identify online sources that provide scientific references in online journals, proceedings, or books.

Identify and evaluate credible and non-credible references

Students' difficulty in identifying and evaluating credible references ranks first, with a percentage of 26.4%. The clearest indicator for identifying these difficulties is that references are still sourced from personal blogs such as Blogspot and WordPress, as well as Wikipedia in student citations. References from personal blogs are generally used to present facts and data, but not a few are used for theory. Personal blogs cannot be categorized as trusted reference sources because the contents can be the author's opinion. In addition, every article published does not go through a scientific assessment and testing

process like a journal.

Paraphrase the citation

In general, students can paraphrase well for each written citation. Students can change the wording and develop each statement from the source. Students can apply both direct and indirect quoting techniques well. Variations in using direct and indirect citations in writing are also excellent.

Synthesis and citation analysis

The difficulty of performing synthesis and citation analysis ranks fourth, with a percentage of 13.2%. Students tend to quote a lot but need more analytical acumen. Many of the quotations made by students still require further explanation. In addition, there is a tendency for each quote to be made separately because no synthesis is carried out between the citation.

Determine the attitude or position of the author

After analyzing and synthesizing, the writer will usually take a position or attitude toward the concepts and theories that have been cited. The author's attitude is critical to confirm the theories and arguments that are supported or rejected, as well as the author's position regarding the research being carried out. Students rarely do this, so there is still vast room for discussion on each topic. Many sub-topics in the theoretical basis end with citations without any conclusion from the author.

The findings of this study are generally in line with the results of research conducted by Jomaa & Bidin (2017), Rezeki (2018), and Kongpetch (2021). The challenges faced by students in writing citations, such as identifying the credibility of information, making attitudes towards citation, lack of knowledge about the use of citation, integrating citation in writing, and difficulty understanding foreign languages, were also found in this study. The researcher identified that the main problem is the ability to determine, find, and identify reference credibility, which still needs to be improved. Library sources still dominate reference searches, while online searches have yet to be carried out in a structured and systematic manner. With limited references, students need help analyzing and synthesizing the citation.

On the other hand, researchers did not find problems related to self-confidence in terms of writing citation variations as expressed by

Lampthey & Atta-Obeng (2013). Students can make varied citations by using direct citations and indirect citations. Researchers found problems related to indications of plagiarism and citations that should have been reported or accompanied by reference sources, as found by Rezeki (2018). The researcher identified this was more due to students' need for knowledge about using citations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion results, several things related to students' difficulties writing scientific paper citations. First, writing citations is considered by most students to be quite tricky material. Second, the percentage of student difficulties in writing citations from the largest to the smallest includes (1) identification and evaluation of credible and non-credible references of 26.4%. Students cannot distinguish the credibility of references, so they still find many references from Blogspot, WordPress, and Wikipedia; (2) determining and finding relevant reference sources of 21.7%. Students have difficulty determining and finding reference sources that are relevant to the topic of study, so books in the library dominate the references used, while the number of references from scientific journals is tiny; (3) technical citation writing of 20.8% which is more caused by writing citations manually without using reference management software. Students also need help understanding foreign languages such as English, Pali, and Sanskrit. In addition, many citations are not accompanied by sources; (4) synthesis and citation analysis of 13.2%. Students tend to refrain from carrying out in-depth analysis and synthesis of sources that have been cited so that it seems as if these sources stand alone; (5) determine the attitude or position of the author from several citations made by 12.3%. Students must take a clear position about the theories cited, leaving gaping discussion space; and 6) citation paraphrasing of 5.7%. This problem is not so significant if we look at the citation made by students. Students have been able to paraphrase to avoid plagiarism.

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