



The use of references: A study among Indonesian and Cambodian students in writing a research project

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Abstract. The problem of this study was that university students are required to complete research projects as part of the course, such as theses or academic reports, to demonstrate their academic literacy. However, creating a well-structured academic report can sometimes be challenging for University of Bengkulu Master of English Language Education (MELE) Program students, especially when it comes to using appropriate referencing conventions. This was aimed at identifying the challenges MELE students face when writing a reference for a research report. The study used a qualitative, longitudinal research design for one semester. All MELE students enrolled in courses were taken as the population. Through voluntary participation, a sample of twenty-five students was chosen. Of the twenty-five students, six were international students from Cambodia. Two procedures were used

to gather the data. First, document analysis of their research reports to find formatting errors in reference lists and in-text citations. Second, open-ended interviews. This interview was used to investigate students' perceptions, especially regarding challenges in writing. The results showed that students often challenged the international academic writing standards, maintaining consistency in reference formatting and accurately citing sources. Students from Cambodia and Indonesia both faced language barriers and challenges comprehending the typical format of research reports. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge or competence in using reference management became an issue. So, it suggests that to improve academic writing competence, systematic, ongoing guidance should be provided. For example, providing academic writing instruction, especially in teaching citation styles and the use of reference management software.

Introduction

In higher education, one of the fundamental skills is writing. This skill is commonly called academic writing. Nowadays, academic writing is becoming a mandatory course for students at the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels (Hermaditoyo et al., 2025). As part of their graduation requirements, university students should ideally be able to produce research reports or articles that are coherent, well-structured, and properly referenced. The Master of English Language Education (MELE) program at the University of Bengkulu's Faculty of Teacher Training and Education prepares its students to become effective writers and scientific researchers. This is the expectation of its graduation as scholarly literature, exhibiting academic literacy, and contributing to the scientific community. The students must finish their coursework at this level by publishing research articles in a journal that is accredited by Sinta 4, in addition to completing their thesis. However, this process often poses challenges, as not all students enjoy writing, particularly in academic papers

(Gloria & Mbato, 2023; Hermida, 2024). In academic settings, writing takes a central role. In this setting, the students can express their unique ideas and demonstrate their grasp of a subject. Additionally, to become skilled writers, we need to encourage critical discourse (Pratama et al., 2024). This skill helps students think more deeply and create arguments that make sense. Besides, students must be motivated to develop their academic writing competence (Campbell, 2019; Listyani, 2022; Julmukya et al., 2025). Besides, to develop communicative competence and achieve the goal, students must learn preferred and commonly used word sequences used by proficient users of that language or register.

Sometimes the lecturer asks students to write an article or an argumentative essay, so students must construct their ideas well and communicate the concepts effectively (Atkinson & Corbitt, 2023). As a result, the focus for finding solutions is typically on customized programs that emphasize improving writing skills. Since then, the individualized perspective has been questioned by an academic literacy approach to writing, which has moved the emphasis from learning how to write to acknowledging writing as a social practice (Purnadewi & Widana, 2023). Furthermore, writing is more challenging for. If students can develop habitual, and sometimes distinctive, working methods, they will be able to write well and achieve academically and professionally (Atkinson, 2020).

Writing is not only about sharing what comes to mind, but also about sharing the flow of thought, both meaningful and effective, given the context (Atkinson & Corbitt, 2022), for example, a research report. Additionally, they write to communicate their feelings, ideas, and opinions. The development of writing skills, by fostering students' confidence and self-efficacy, is therefore necessary for effective written communication in their topics (Hairul, 2023). Moreover, the ability to write in higher education differs significantly across and within academic fields. The present research defines quality assurance as the steps writers take to ensure the efficacy of resources and academic accountability while advancing social justice goals (Cox et al., 2022). Quality is essential for sustainability, as it determines a resource's longevity and evolution. Therefore, becoming a skilled writer requires work (Jayanti et al., 2025). Many students find it difficult to arrange their thoughts coherently and to format their work correctly (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the reference style is important because it can provide insight into the author's writing quality. A key component of effective academic writing is the growth of an authorial personality (Liu et al., 2025). It goes on to outline other requirements for referencing, such as citing preceding studies on the subject, contextualizing new research within the framework of previous publications, and offering source information to support the writer's claim. In detail, there are four main justifications for the need of citing sources, i.e., (1) to support assertions made in a work and give information credibility; (2) to enable readers to confirm the accuracy and veracity of the author's ideas; (3) to enable readers to locate cited sources and utilize those same sources as support for their own writing; and (4) to lessen the likelihood of plagiarism. The competence of writing a reference is an important means of integrating claims into current knowledge, either by positioning the new work atop existing facts or by disputing those facts to carve out a new stance. Successful texts must address two rhetorical challenges: establishing the author's authority and positioning themselves within their topic and discipline community (Hyland & Jiang, 2019).

Writing has traditionally been recognised as a cognitively demanding endeavour. It requires strong linguistic, memory, and cognitive skills (Kellogg, 2022). Writing long-form works often requires several sessions over days, weeks, months, or even years. Diligence can be tough both emotionally and cognitively. In the academic curriculum of the Master of English Language Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training, University of Bengkulu, an academic writing course is required to enhance students' writing capabilities, particularly in preparing a thesis at the end of

their studies. In writing a research report, students are not only required to identify problems but also to construct relevant theories. The theories must be based on the latest research, preferably from journal articles. To write well, some references must be cited from international journals. But students frequently make mistakes when quoting someone in their article and neglect to include the author's name in the reference list. Indeed, there are situations in which several names are listed in the reference list but do not appear in the body of the text's paragraph descriptions.

In the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework, a master's degree is categorized at level 8, indicating that graduate students are expected to demonstrate knowledge and skills that go beyond those required at the professional, undergraduate, and diploma levels. Within the MELE Study Program, which positions itself as a professional academic program, strong emphasis is placed on the quality of students' academic writing. Pre-writing, planning, drafting, reflection, revision, editing, additional research, idea development, final review, and eventual publication are just a few of the interrelated processes that govern academic writing in addition to formal rules of structure. However, graduate-level writing seemed to receive little attention within the parameters of this study through organised skills-based interventions or ongoing academic literacy initiatives. The supervisor-student dynamic at the university greatly influenced graduate writing instruction, and students' writing challenges were frequently discussed in class. According to [Andika et al. \(2025\)](#), Academic writing presents significant challenges for Indonesian postgraduate students, especially in organisation, language, coherence, clarity, and plagiarism prevention. The only workable option was to create an extra course because there was no integrated institutional writing program. In line with the tenets of academic literacies, the course sought to present a succinct model of graduate writing pedagogy that emphasised writing as a process, valued dynamic discourses, and integrated disciplinary practices ([Widana & Ratnaya, 2021](#)).

According to [Jayadinata et al. \(2022\)](#), the Director General of Higher Education in Indonesia issued Circular No. 152/E/T/2012, which outlines strategic efforts to increase the quantity of academic publications in higher educational institutions, seen as a diplomatic strategy to improve the quality of education and science. The circular stipulates that undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students produce scientific publications. University students spend significant time researching and writing essays for publication ([Ardi et al., 2025](#)). [Lesmana & Ariffin \(2020\)](#) found that academic English writing has become a difficult skill for Indonesian EFL postgraduate students to master, as it requires not only strong writing but also a thorough understanding of the subject matter and research methods.

In fact, many MELE students, both Indonesian and foreign (such as those from Cambodia), continue to have difficulty with academic writing. Prior research on Indonesian EFL postgraduate students has revealed ongoing challenges in writing academic articles in English, including issues of organisation, coherence, clarity, referencing, and adherence to academic standards. Preliminary observations over the last two years in the MELE program have revealed poor command of academic writing structure, frequent mistakes in citation formatting, and inconsistencies between in-text citations and reference lists. The typical format of a research report (introduction, literature review, methods, findings/discussion, conclusion) is unclear to some students, and many seem unfamiliar with reference management tools.

Given these obstacles, the current study is urgent because it has the potential to pinpoint and characterise the real academic writing challenges that MELE students encounter at the master's level, a challenge that runs counter to the expectations for graduate-level academic competence. Students risk publishing poor work, unintentionally committing plagiarism, or failing to effectively communicate their research if these problems are not addressed. According to the literature, some

studies suggest structured institutional support to enhance students' writing skills, such as academic writing courses or workshops, reference management instruction, and methodical writing practice.

However, few studies have focused specifically on a mixed cohort in a master-level EFL program in Indonesia that includes both domestic and international students (e.g., from Cambodia), combining document analysis of their written output with their self-reported experiences. This constitutes the novelty of the present research. Why do MELE students, despite having completed undergraduate studies and formal academic writing courses, continue to make fundamental errors in academic reports and research articles, especially regarding referencing and overall structure? What types of difficulties do they face in academic writing, and what factors underlie these difficulties?

Method

Research Method and Design

This study employs a qualitative longitudinal research design that is outlined by [Creswell & Creswell \(2018\)](#). The extended duration enabled researchers to capture gradual changes, monitor participants' learning progress, and conduct a deeper analysis of the evolving phenomena in the natural classroom.

Participants

The participants were the students who enrolled in the Master of English Language Education (MELE) Program of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at the University of Bengkulu. Those students were required to complete academic writing assignments in English across all subjects, which made them relevant to the study's objectives.

Sampling Technique and Sample Selection Criteria

Based on their voluntary consent to participate in the study, the respondents were chosen by a total sampling technique. 25 MELE students participated. Six international students, including two from Cambodia, were among them. Their involvement provided a varied representation of students in the program, especially regarding their writing experiences and academic English backgrounds.

Location and duration of research

The Master of English Language Education (MELE) Program of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at the University of Bengkulu was selected as the research site. The MELE program had enrolled students from Cambodia for two years. So, it necessitated a detailed examination of the data spanning more than one semester, or roughly 1.5 years. The longer time frame guaranteed that the findings were accurate, dependable, and representative of the real learning environment in the study setting.

Research procedures

There were three primary steps in the research process. *First*, the researcher gathered the students' academic records, particularly the articles they published each semester. *Second*, the articles were examined to find citation formatting mistakes and students' referencing habits. *Third*, semi-structured interviews were used to analyze the causes of the students' difficulties with referencing and their comprehension of appropriate citation styles.

Data Collection Techniques and Research Instruments

An open-ended interview allowed participants to provide detailed answers and viewpoints. One popular research technique is interviewing people to find out how they interpret social events in their environment ([Dunwoodie et al., 2022](#)). Participants can share their ideas, biases, opinions,

desires, and attitudes about a variety of phenomena they come across in the workplace or other organisational settings during interviews. Researchers can gain insight into how people interpret their social experiences through qualitative interviews. The questions centre on three main indicators: *first*, how frequently students make errors when writing references; *second*, how aware they are of these errors; and *third*, the causes of these errors. These indicators were used to classify each participant's response. The gathered statements were then validated and analysed to produce insightful conclusions.

Data Analysis Techniques and Criteria

The data was analysed using a qualitative descriptive method. The analysis began by organising and reviewing the students' article documents in order to identify recurring citation errors and patterns of referencing behaviour. The accuracy of in-text citations, completeness of reference list entries, adherence to formatting guidelines, and consistency of citation style throughout the manuscript were among the established academic referencing standards that were used to evaluate each article. The errors were then categorised into several groups, such as incorrect citation format, missing bibliographic elements, mismatched in-text and reference list citations, and improper punctuation or capitalisation.

The interview data were also used in a thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental reasons behind these mistakes. To produce themes that represented students' perspectives, difficulties, and knowledge of appropriate referencing conventions, the interview transcripts were coded. Triangulation was carried out by comparing document analysis results with the themes that emerged from the interviews to ensure credibility and dependability. The qualitative data interpretation guidelines proposed by [Creswell and Creswell \(2018\)](#) were adhered to throughout the analysis.

Results and Discussion

In assessing the use of references in the research report, some problems were found. A lack of source citations by students needs to be solved immediately. For example, when students read a piece of writing by another author, the author usually mentions data from other sources. Students sometimes acknowledge the author whose work they first read rather than going directly to the primary source. This technique poses a serious issue since it exposes the student without a way to confirm that the author they are quoting has accurately conveyed the information from the original or main source. This compromises the integrity of scholarly work by allowing for mistakes in interpretation and the distortion of the original concepts.

[Datum 1: ...I am looking for the references of how to make the correct references based on the style in Google, but when my lecturer sees it, my references are still incorrect.]

[Datum 2: ...And the most important thing is, it is hard to find the sources when we want to cite the ideas. So, it will influence how we write the references since we cannot find the proper sources.]

The next issue arises when students read scholarly works, extract quotations from them, and cite the source as though they had consulted it directly, even though they have only read it through a secondary author's work. The second issue arises when students read scholarly works, extract quotations from them, and cite the source as though they had consulted it directly, even though they have only read it through a secondary author's work. The students assumed that the author(s) who cited from others have cited correctly from the primary source. Of course, this assumption is absolutely incorrect. It cannot be guaranteed, nevertheless, that the secondary author accurately or appropriately interpreted the quotation. Students risk spreading errors or misunderstandings by

avoiding direct interaction with the primary source, further undermining the validity and reliability of their academic writing.

[Datum 3: ...Because there are two main reasons why most students don't find the original resources (a book, journal, etc.). It takes time and is hard to find the source that]

[Datum 4: I try to see on Google how to write the correct references, but my references are still wrong...]

Then, many students still aren't using reference management software. Thus, they do not know how to properly "Insert Citation" in accordance with different referencing styles, such as APA, MLA, and other formats commonly used in scientific writing. This lack of familiarity complicates their ability to accurately cite sources and increases the potential for errors in citations. This lack of familiarity makes it harder to identify sources and increases the risk of citation errors, leading to incorrect work and possible plagiarism. Hence, students may struggle to meet academic standards for correct source referencing, leading to incomplete or incorrect citations in their written work, ultimately reducing its credibility and quality.

[Datum 5:

Based on my experience, I have difficulties in writing references because of their styles, such as MLA, APA, and others. Second, the sources that I usually use are just books and journals, so I rarely use other sources such as websites, newspapers, and e-books. Third, I rarely use reference applications such as Mendeley, EndNote, and others. Fourth, I do not know the exact convention of reference, such as the space between the characters, the italic word, such as the name of the book or journal.]

[Datum 6:

Writing a reference is a little difficult because there are several APA styles. Sometimes I am still confused about distinguishing APA 6 and APA 7. In each source, such as books, articles, websites, etc., they are written in a different form.]

One way to guarantee the quality of writing is by citing sources of intellectual integrity and honesty. It will also increase a text's reputation. An accurate reference helps readers find the sources of information and supports any assertions made. The purpose of citations in academic writing is multifaceted; they create authority, demonstrate interaction with other scholars, bolster arguments, and uphold academic integrity.

Academic writing has attracted considerable attention due to the enormous expansion in the use of English in academia worldwide over the past few decades (Subandowo et al., 2025). Academic writing is a difficult task because it necessitates the skilful accomplishment of a complex combination of subtasks, such as generating and selecting relevant ideas based on disciplinary knowledge, translating these ideas into a written form in a way that is relevant to the purposes of the task, and revising the text to arrive at an end-product that fulfils the aims of writing (Alamri, 2021; AlMarwani, 2020). EFL postgraduate students must establish themselves in academics by demonstrating appropriate critical thinking and academic literacy skills. EFL students have obstacles when writing formal academic literature in English, including selecting, evaluating, reporting, summarising, paraphrasing, concluding, arguing, selecting vocabulary and grammar, and avoiding plagiarism.

In both Indonesia and Cambodia, English is used as a foreign language rather than as a second language. This distinction is essential to comprehending the difficulties students encounter when writing academically. Local languages are widely spoken in daily life in Indonesia, although Bahasa Indonesia is the country's official language. Formally, English was first introduced as a subject in

the education system and become the academic requirement. However, outside the school environment, students have only a small chance to practice English, since English is not used in daily life communication. This condition meant students had few opportunities to practise English outside the classroom, as it was limited to academic, professional, and international contexts. As a result, writing academic texts in English becomes a challenging task because it forces students to use a language that is not part of their daily communication.

Similarly, Cambodia used Khmer as its official language. Moreover, English has gained importance in education, business, and international relations, particularly after the country's integration into ASEAN and broader globalization processes (Hashim et al., 2014). Moreover, 17 million people who live in Cambodia represent the linguistic and ethnic diversity. When Cambodia introduced English in 1997, starting in Grade 4 of primary school, it has since been incorporated into basic education programs (Zein, 2022). Although using English in communication can improve a person's proficiency, Cambodian people still do not use it in their daily lives. So far, English is still taught formally in schools and universities. The situation is like that in Indonesia. English is frequently seen as a crucial prerequisite for both academic and professional success. Thus, academic writing in English is viewed by Cambodian students as a foreign language (Ngel, 2022), which makes the task both linguistically and cognitively demanding.

Therefore, common problems occur for Indonesian and Cambodian students when they try to write academically. In this case, both Indonesian and Cambodian students engage in the complexity of academic discourse. This is caused by limited exposure to English in their daily environments. The case will be different for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. In this context, English is commonly used in both academic and social interactions. Despite EFL and ESL having different contexts, students in both countries must rely heavily on classroom instruction, self-study, and institutional support. This foreign-language context explains why academic writing becomes a high-stakes, challenging endeavor for learners in both Indonesia and Cambodia.

In academic and professional writing, referencing is important. A reference connects the ideas to the larger corpus of information. The reference section provides crucial information for readers to locate and identify the sources used (Elston, 2019). By citing the relevant literature, authors can demonstrate that they have carefully and thoroughly read it, ensuring that their work is based on the finest available research. Ideas in scholarly discourse are rarely developed in a vacuum; rather, they develop by engagement with other people's writings.

References can be made in a variety of styles. It is a technique for showing your readers that you have read and searched the literature comprehensively and relevantly. On the other hand, acknowledging the usage of other authors' ideas and written materials in your own work is known as referencing. It's crucial to save every piece of information in any kind of research project. These particulars are required to provide precise references and to make it possible for you to find the information again later, if needed.

Scholars who properly reference their work not only honor earlier contributions but also situate their own findings within a larger academic discourse. Every referencing style has its own set of rules and formatting guidelines. Some of the most frequently used styles are Harvard, Chicago, MLA, and APA. These four types were established by particular publications or organizations and used in different fields of study, such as MLA (Modern Language Association) for the humanities, especially in literature and cultural studies, and APA (American Psychological Association), which is generally used in the social sciences (Gibaldi, 2009). Harvard is frequently used for law and economics, and Chicago is used for the humanities and sciences (Imperial College London, 2023).

In displaying the scope of a writer's research, the references are essential. When researchers quote the works of others, the readers can thoroughly research the literature and draw on the most relevant resources. References highlight the most prominent publications on the topic and serve as a road map for future researchers. Citing reputable sources helps writers align their work with recognized experts, thereby increasing the persuasiveness of their own contributions. Furthermore, good references help readers to check assertions, review sources, and conduct additional research on the subject (Belcher, 2019). In contrast, poor references can lead readers astray in academic research and have serious consequences for academic writing.

Authority in academic writing is shown by grounding arguments in a credible, well-founded theory drawn from reliable sources, such as a reputable journal. It makes citing sources in academic writing crucial. Exactly, references do not merely serve as background information but function as the authoritative framework upon which scholarly claims are constructed. By drawing upon prior research, writers demonstrate that their perspectives are situated within a broader academic discourse rather than being based solely on personal opinion or anecdotal evidence. In this way, proper citation practices contribute not only to the persuasiveness of an argument but also to the integrity and credibility of the overall research work.

References are a way to build an argument. It shows that the author has the same ideas as other authors (s) in arguing the research finding. On the other hand, citations might demonstrate that a writer is incorporating the perspectives of other writers to add their own. It also makes it easier for readers to locate the original information and serves to support or exemplify a point that the writer wishes to convey. Citing references strengthens the writer's credibility by showing that they have done extensive research. Citing trustworthy sources is a good way to understand the writing. As defined by Imperial College London (2023), referencing is a way for a writer to acknowledge the usage of other authors' ideas and writings in their own work. Similarly, acknowledging sources in one's writing is another approach to offering appreciation to authors (UNSW Sydney, 2024).

When an author recognizes the source of the information that he/she has utilized (referred to) in a work, he/she is doing so through the use of referencing. The reader will have a better understanding of how you have utilized the work of others to construct your own thoughts and arguments if you illustrate this for them. For example, quoting directly from a book, summarizing a concept from a journal article, illustrating a point with an image, or paraphrasing an opinion from a newspaper article are ways to give credit to the original author of the work.

In academic writing, thoughts and experiences affect writing competence (Krisbiantoro & Soali, 2024). Furthermore, it uses concepts and research derived from other sources, such as books, journal articles, websites, and so on. Another possibility is that the author is discussing, analyzing, or criticizing other sources, or using them to support the views they have presented. When an assignment contains ideas from other sources, referencing is used to let the reader know where those ideas came from.

Iskandar & Patak (2019) noted that the misuse of information as a resource occurs among students, such as failing to provide source references and citations, which leads to plagiarism. This is due to a lack of understanding and awareness of many regulations and norms governing the usage of information resources. There are several reasons why it is essential to properly cite sources. First, the reader is shown that you can locate and use information to construct a convincing argument. It gives credit where credit is due to the people who came up with ideas, hypotheses, and research findings. Second, the reader can see how your argument fits into the bigger picture after reading it.

So, when authors of any form of paper quote from other sources in their manuscripts, it is very necessary for them to provide the appropriate credit to such sources. [Mali \(2023\)](#) proved that in Indonesian higher education, undergraduate students in English Language Education Programs must create a research proposal before beginning their research, collecting data, writing a thesis, and completing their studies. Moreover, many people felt that the article published with high quality could be recognized by how well the authors used and prepared the reference lists ([Mammola et al., 2021](#)). There are many instances in which this is not the case, and the quality of a document is frequently harmed by an incorrect, improper, or unsuitable reference. Problems with inappropriate citations can cause significant worry. Depending on the circumstances, these issues may be focused on the personal level or affect the research community as a whole. Among these are the possibility that the individual's academic aptitude or academic honesty is called into question, as well as the possibility of plagiarism. The elimination of all these problems is possible through meticulous source referencing.

When conducting an investigation, the ability to pay close attention to detail throughout the inquiry is a defining characteristic of a professional researcher. In addition to the fact that paying attention to detail makes it easier to develop good habits, the care that is required throughout the process of referencing and preparing a bibliography draws attention to the research methodology as a whole. It improves research reporting and advances scientific ideas and analysis. It is important to pay attention to details when citing sources, such as ensuring that the page numbers are correct, that the authors' names are spelled correctly, and that the facts pertinent to the work are conveyed accurately.

The inability to properly reference sources might be interpreted by an editor or reader as an indication of intellectual laziness, confused thinking, and erroneous writing. Citing sources appropriately ensures there is no doubt in your audience's minds about the argument you are making. When a reviewer decides not to accept a manuscript for publication, it is typically because of omissions. It is possible to accuse writers of not having conducted a comprehensive literature review or of having insufficient understanding of their subject matter if they do not cite a critical or well-known study that is already present in the scientific literature. A reviewer can even conclude that the work contains elements of plagiarism as a result of this.

The reference is consulted by reviewers for several significant reasons. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to pay close attention to linguistic elements like grammar and spelling. Consistency in citation style, whether Harvard, Vancouver, or another format, is equally important, and it must closely adhere to the target journal's author guidelines. Additionally, it may indicate that the author has not thoroughly reviewed recent, pertinent literature if the majority of the references cited are older than 5 years. Concerns regarding self-promotion, self-plagiarism, or the purposeful selection of sources that only support the author's own claims rather than offering a fair scholarly foundation can also be raised by excessive self-citation.

Plagiarism is a significant issue that arises throughout the academic process. It is also one of the most prevalent factors that can compromise the author's academic integrity. Sources must be attributed in the appropriate format. Without providing appropriate citations, it is against the law to copy, use, or otherwise misappropriate the ideas, words, or concepts of other individuals. Altering the order in which words are used in a phrase is not allowed, and neither is the placement of synonyms. Referencing and references are indicators of the quality of the work, provide specifics about the key sources, and indicate the amount of material that is available on the subject. Proper referencing will eliminate any possibility of plagiarism. Each academic paper submitted is subjected to multiple rounds of review before it is finally accepted for publication. Editorial assistants will discover sources in the bibliography and confirm that the citations are accurate after the article has

been accepted. The process begins with editors, continues via reviewers, and continues even after the article has been accepted. Providing that all references are contemporaneous, that they refer to a primary source, and that they have been accurately and correctly mentioned, your article has a far better chance of surviving the rigorous review process with minimum criticism and favorable comments.

To address these challenges, students can adopt several strategies. *First*, they should make use of reference management software such as Mendeley (Zahro & Nugraha, 2021), EndNote, or Zotero (Rafi' et al., 2025). Initially developed in the 1980s, such tools have continuously evolved to support researchers in organizing and citing sources efficiently. Reference managers enable users to search, store, and retrieve research materials, and to generate bibliographies in various citation styles, including APA, MLA, and Chicago. *Second*, students need to familiarize themselves with widely used referencing styles. Numerous online resources, such as official style guides and video tutorials, are available to support this learning process. *Third*, students are encouraged to participate in training sessions or workshops offered by libraries and academic institutions to enhance their writing and reference management skills. *Fourth*, consulting academic writing manuals is highly beneficial, as they provide detailed explanations and examples of proper citation practices. *Fifth*, it is crucial to document complete bibliographic information during the research process, including the author's name, publication year, title, and publisher, to simplify the compilation of a final reference list. *Sixth*, regular practice is necessary for mastering citations across different styles. *Seventh*, using templates designed for specific referencing systems ensures consistency and efficiency. *Finally*, when in doubt, students should seek guidance from lecturers or academic supervisors to ensure accurate and reliable referencing.

Conclusion

Academic citations highlight the connections between research and literature and show the progress of knowledge. Rhetoric is a tool writers use to build on earlier work and set themselves apart. The results demonstrate that MELE students from Cambodia and Indonesia face comparable challenges in successfully implementing reference rules in their academic writing. A thorough evaluation of their research reports revealed recurring mistakes in reference formatting, source credit, and adherence to recognised academic reference standards. As long as the student or researcher can recognise the expertise of others and support their claims with the writings of eminent academics, they can be experts on any topic. The crucial function of reference is to support the opinions that emphasise or reinforce the author's points. By providing a citation, a writer allows the reader to verify the accuracy of the information and assess the strength of the proof. It is also simpler for readers to find the original information sources in an academic article that has been properly referenced. This is especially crucial in academic writing, as readers may want to verify the authenticity of the data presented or explore a specific study further.

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