

## Challenges of Integrating Academic Sources in Assessed Assignments: A Case of Arab EFL Learners

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### Abstract

Integration of academic sources is an essential component of academic writing. It adds authenticity to the work, indicates that the student has read extensively, and upholds academic integrity of the written piece. However, according to the author's experience of teaching undergraduate level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, using academic sources and citing references effectively is one of the most daunting features of academic writing. Therefore, this study investigates the challenges faced by students in citing academic sources while composing research based reports and, by the same token, the reasons behind them. It also considers teachers' observations about these challenges and the strategies that can be adopted to support students. A mixed method approach was used where data were collected through student questionnaires, student focus groups, interviews with faculty members, and students' assignment reports. The participants included 97 undergraduate-level Engineering students enrolled in three sessions of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course called *Communication Skills*. The paper reports on the details of the research-based assignment and the measures used by the author to support students in integrating sources in the report. It was observed that the students found integration of academic sources as the most problematic requirements and features of the assignment. The data revealed that these challenges are direct consequences of students' linguistic backgrounds; lack of appropriate writing skills; difficulty in comprehending articles due to the technical jargon used; and high word count of the academic papers. In response to that, the author strongly recommends the incorporation of academic literacies in the curricula of specialist courses as well as prompt, closer collaboration between language instructors and subject specialists. Though this study was limited to the students of a specific course, it is hoped that the findings will help other EFL and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors apprehend the crux of the issue and devise effective strategies to overcome the above-mentioned challenge.

**Key words:** academic sources; academic writing; source integration; English language Proficiency

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## 1. Introduction

Academic writing is of prime importance to tertiary level students, not only for the sake of mastering the English language as such but also to navigate successfully through other disciplines. Academic writing has a fundamental impact on learners' progress (Leki & Carson, 1994) as it is considered to be a thinking tool which helps learners think critically while learning all the disciplines (Bjork & Raisanen, 1997).

Incorporation of academic sources is an essential component of academic writing. This means that students are required to support their arguments citing previous work done by other researchers of the field and "locate their claims within a disciplinary framework" (Luzon, 2015, p. 52). Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue (2010) assert that "writing from sources looms large" (p.178) in university assignments and from the first year itself, students are expected to engage in critical reading of academic sources and integrating them in writing.

The reasons why academics use these sources are that they are credible; written by experts of the field; examine a topic fairly; are peer-reviewed; and checked for accuracy. According to Neville (2008), referencing is an integral part of academic writing since it helps in building a "web of ideas... like a spider building its web with carefully engineered connections between ideas" (p.7) as it connects and spreads knowledge further. Students' ability to use academic sources in their writing effectively is the key to academic success. However, the synthesis of academic sources with one's own voice requires mastery over a complex set of literacy skills (Zhao, 2015). Research and author's own experience with EFL learners reveal that citing references is the most challenging aspect of academic writing for EFL learners (Hivela & Du, 2013).

Apparently, integration or incorporation of academic texts might appear to be a single task, a deeper analysis reveals that it comprises "processes that involve reading, understanding, learning, relating, planning, writing, revising, editing, and orchestrating" (Campbell, 1990, p. 211). An EFL learner grappling with the basic requirements of writing composition is more often than not baffled by these requirements and often complains that the task has Herculean dimensions. The limited knowledge of academic discourse functions (Abasi & Akbari, 2008) very often leads students to indulge in patchwriting which is categorized as plagiarism.

Howard (1995) defines patchwriting as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one synonym for another" (p. 233). He, however concedes that patchwriting is necessary and is an important aspect of the developmental needs of writing and not dishonesty. In concurrence with this, Pecorari (2003) states that "today's patchwriter is tomorrow's competent academic writer" (p.338). Whatever justification might be given, patchwriting still cannot be termed as proper academic writing and, hence, the issue of improper citation still pervades.

Most of the research conducted in this area has focused on citation practices of Master and PhD level students (Lamptey & Atta-Obeng, 2012; Davis, 2013; Pecorari, 2006) with, unfortunately, lesser attention being given to the undergraduate EFL learners' source based writing (Luzon, 2015; Zhao & Hirvela, 2015). Some researchers have suggested the use of customized training to support students in source-based writing (Pecorari, 2008; Shi, 2010) where intensive

practice on summarizing, paraphrasing, citing and referencing should be given. However, there is little or no evidence on how such courses have actually benefitted learners and what the students' and faculty perceptions of such a course.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the challenges faced by undergraduate level Engineering students in integrating academic sources in their assessed assignment reports of *Communication Skills* course, capture the perceptions of students and faculty on the reasons behind these challenges, and provide some plausible solutions to tackle the issue at hand.

## 2. Literature review

A number of studies have looked at the EFL students' source based writing and a predominant observation is that the writing produced by these students often comprises long text fragments which are either copied or poorly summarized (Pecorari, 2008). They are usually examples of patchwriting which comprise incorrect use of sources where students borrow from various sources but show inefficiency at weaving them together with their own voice. Due to this, students frequently encounter academic integrity violations (Shi, 2004). Therefore, a lot of researches on source integration probe into the issues of plagiarism (Liao & Tseng, 2010). However, this paper will not probe the issues related to plagiarism, though they are referred to, since the author believes that it is not blatant plagiarism on the students' part. The author strongly supports that inappropriate use of sources does not in fact stem from the student's intention to deceive but from the challenges she/he faces and the factors leading to them (Howard 1995, Pecorari 2003). Hirvela and Du (2013) engaged undergraduate level Chinese students in paraphrasing academic sources. They concluded that, "while the procedures involved in paraphrasing source text material may appear simple, the enactment of those procedures is a complex and often elusive experience for second language (L2) writers" (p.87). Howard et al. (2010) found out that both native and ESL students struggled to demonstrate the expected level of academic quality and indulged in patchwriting. Shi (2004) also discovered that students frequently encounter plagiarism issues due to their misuse of source material. Hence, this literature review primarily focuses on two areas of concern: (a) the challenges faced by undergraduate level students and (b) the reasons behind them.

A large number of studies have quoted the lack of required language proficiency (Neville, 2008; Plakans & Gebriel, 2013) as the major reason behind the challenges of citing sources among L2 students. Lack of required language skills often steals students' confidence in their writing. Luzon (2015) analyzed a learner corpus carrying literature reviews of 35 third- year undergraduate level Spanish students. He found inappropriate source integration in most of the samples and quotes three main reasons which include: lack of awareness of the nature of academic texts; low level of academic literacy procedures which are required for paraphrasing and summarizing; and unfamiliarity with language of citations. Liao and Tseng (2010) also quoted similar reasons after conducting a study on ninety-five postgraduate and undergraduate students in Taiwan in which they involved students in paraphrasing and collected their perceptions through a questionnaire. The students stated that they were aware of the importance of paraphrasing and asserted that they had not committed any plagiarism offences. However, both undergraduate and postgraduate students were found to have committed plagiarism in the actual work. The authors believe that

this could have resulted due to inadequate, explicit instruction and practice in paraphrasing and the influence of Chinese citation practices. Moreover, they observed that the undergraduates faced more challenges due to limited cognitive development.

Although a recent study conducted by Jomaa & Bidin (2017) included doctoral students, the fact that the participants were Arab EFL students, the findings need a mention here. Interviews conducted with six male Arab students pursuing PhD in IT from a Malaysian university revealed that “challenges in citation included addressing the credibility of information in published sources, adopting a stance toward the citations, insufficient knowledge about using citations, and second language difficulties (p.177)”. In addition, confusion between academic writing conventions and the need to make their own points (Neville, 2008; Jomaa & Bidin 2017) are also cited as major reasons behind the challenge.

Another key factor that needs attention is the poor time management and lack of planning from the students’ end (Harris, 2004). Integration of academic sources is a daunting and time consuming task and students usually miscalculate the hours required for developing a writing piece supported with a substantial amount of literature. Most of the students are procrastinators and usually start their assignments at the eleventh hour.

Lack of awareness on the importance of integration of academic sources in their work is also one of the important reasons behind students’ lack of interest in this task. Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2010) report that “Students are under the mistaken impression that the only motive behind citing references is to avoid plagiarism and to earn good marks...only a requirement to show the titles of sources consulted in writing their papers (p.77).

An important observation made is that not many studies have collected student perceptions of the challenges concerning citation problems and the reasons behind them. A major concern raised by students is the inconsistencies among staff members (Angélil-Carter, 2000) in terms of their requirements regarding integration of sources which often leads to confusion among students. What is common knowledge to one tutor was not necessarily to another. Some tutors encourage personal opinions in assignments, whilst others do not (Neville, 2008). Another observation made by Lamptey and Atta Onbeng (2012) was that “faculty either took for granted that students knew how to properly cite or that faculty might be of the opinion that it was the responsibility of students to know how to cite correctly...” (p.77). However, Newton (1995) reports that students face these challenges due to their reliance on inappropriate source for instruction on how to reference. Approximately half the students she interviewed were aware that they are not on the right track but they hesitated going to the tutor and quite often sought help from inappropriate sources such as friends, parents or outdated handouts which mislead them. Thus, Newton’s conclusions prove supportive towards faculty members.

The review of existing literature indicates that lack of academic literacy skills in addition to low language proficiency, inconsistencies in requirements from faculty members, and lack of proper time management emerge as the major reasons behind the challenges faced by EFL students.

### 3. Research Questions

The main research questions guiding the study were:

- What are the challenges faced by students in integrating academic articles in their writing?
- What are the tutors' observations about the way students cite references in their academic papers?
- What are reasons behind these challenges according to students and their tutors?
- What strategies can be adopted to support students?

### 4. Research Methodology

To get a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the students in incorporating academic sources, the researcher used a mixed method approach by collecting data from both quantitative and qualitative instruments. This approach supported in triangulating the results yielded from different instruments; obtaining an unbiased understanding of the issue from various stakeholders; and gaining insights into various levels of analysis. The perceptions of students and the faculty members teaching the *Communication Skills* course were collected. Quantitative data were collected through a student questionnaire and qualitative data were collected through student focus group discussions and faculty interviews.

#### 4.1. Context

The study was conducted at a private college with a student population of approximately 6,000. The institution offers undergraduate and post graduate level Engineering, Business and IT programs. The medium of instruction in all these disciplines is English. To enter the undergraduate programs, students are required to have a minimum score of 5.5 on the IELTS exam, otherwise, in order to acquire the required level of language proficiency, the students are required to take the Foundation program. The major objectives of the English component of the Foundation program are: developing English language and study skills; enhancing students' ability to cope effectively in an academic context; providing academic preparation for higher learning; and motivating students to develop independent study skills. In addition to the Foundation program, students are enrolled in compulsory academic writing modules to provide continuous support during their tertiary level studies.

In the first semester of their bachelor course, students study a compulsory module called *English for Special purposes* (ESP) which is a pre-requisite to the *Communication Skills* module. ESP module orients students to research skills including data collection method, data analysis, locating relevant articles and drafting writing annotated bibliography. *Communication Skills* is a 100% coursework module where the students are assessed throughout the 15 week semester through assignments and quizzes with no final end of semester exam component.

The students are expected to complete most of the assignments by supporting their arguments with evidence from research. The first assignment was a group based assessment where the students were expected to solve a case on barriers related to communication. They were required to provide well-reasoned and responsible judgment, apply problem-solving technique to generate practical and creative solutions, provide evidence from literature, and present clear and coherent arguments demonstrating attention to writing conventions. For the second assignment, students were expected to research a topic, collect data through primary and secondary sources

and present their findings through a poster. The third assignment assessed students' oral presentation and public speaking skills by engaging them in informed debates.

#### **4.2. Participants**

The participants chosen for this study were 97 undergraduate level Engineering (58.51%) and Computer Science (41.49%) students enrolled in three cohorts of *Communication Skills* module during Fall 2017 semester. The sample comprised 100% students enrolled in the course. The full time sessions comprised 61% students while the evening session comprised 39% students. The female students formed 57% of the population and the remaining 43% were males. Regarding the medium of instruction at the school level, 82.29% students came from Arabic medium schools, 14.58% were from English medium, and 3.13% from other media. A small percentage (8%) of them were international students coming from the expatriate community living in the Sultanate of Oman.

The age group of full-time students ranged between 20 to 25 years while the part-time students were older ranging between the age group of 20 to 48 years. Most of the participants from the latter group were employed and approximately 50% of them had finished their diplomas about a decade earlier.

Teacher participants included two faculty members handling two full-time (morning) sessions and the author who taught the part-time (evening) session.

#### **4.3. Instruments**

Three instruments were used to collect data on student and faculty perceptions which included a student questionnaire, a student focus group, and faculty interviews.

##### *4.3.1. Student questionnaire*

A questionnaire was designed to get student perspectives on the challenges faced by them in citing sources and the reasons behind the challenges. They were informed that their responses will remain confidential. The questionnaire carried a total of 10 questions with some of the questions having further sub-sections. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic details which are discussed in the student participant details given above. The next section carried closed ended multiple choice questions. The last two questions focused on the student perceptions on the steps taken to support their writing. The open-ended question at the end sought suggestions on the kind of support tutors can provide to overcome the challenge. The questionnaire was checked by two experts of the field and piloted on a small sample. It was then uploaded on Survey Monkey so that responses can be collected online. The entire sample population answered the questionnaire since the faculty members made students understand the importance of the study and the way it will benefit them in future.

##### *4.3.2. Student focus groups*

Two focus group discussions, one with full-time and one with part-time students, were conducted with students ranging from high to low level performers. Focus groups provided deeper insights into the issue since they allowed interaction between the moderator and participants as

well as among the participants themselves. A list of questions was prepared in line with the research questions which guided the study. Students voiced their concerns freely as they were assured that their anonymity will be strictly maintained. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used in the findings section. Each group comprised 6 students. The discussions lasted for about 35 minutes for each group. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. Then the data were analyzed and categorized into emerging themes.

#### 4.3.3. Faculty interviews

Two faculty members who taught the *Communication Skills* course were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the way students cite references, the challenges students face, reasons behind these challenges and support mechanisms they adopt. Both interviews lasted for about 20 minutes each and were recorded. The data were transcribed and emergent themes were categorized. Descriptive analysis of data collected from various sources is presented in the section to follow.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data from the student questionnaire with a focus on percentages. Emergent themes from qualitative data collected through student focus group discussions and faculty interviews were categorized into main issues covered in the study. The findings from various sources are synthesized and presented in-line with the research questions posed above.

### 5.1. Student perception on importance of source integration

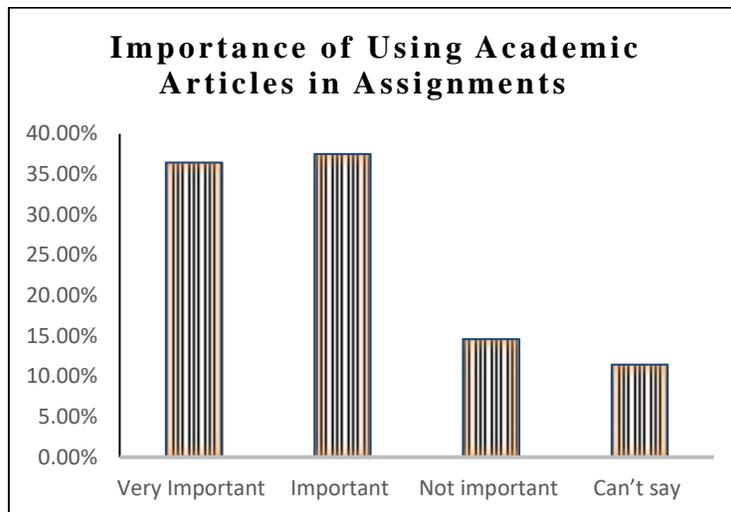


Figure 1 Importance of using academic articles

As shown in Figure 1, most of the students feel that it is very important (33.46%) or important (37.50%) to integrate academic articles in assignments. Focus group discussion revealed why the students do not take it seriously despite knowing the importance when a full-time (morning) session student, Mohammed said, “Of course it is important but we have reasons. All our major subjects are technical so we need language support. We cannot just read articles without language background”. He further justified on behalf of others detailing why other students do not take it seriously by adding, “ We are Computing and Engineering students and we feel that we do

not need experience in this since it is not something technical. We need technical knowledge, not this. Two hours of lab are amazing for us”.

A mixed response regarding the student perceptions on importance of using academic articles was received from the part-time (evening) students. Most of the part-timers do not consider it important. Ahmed mentioned, “Miss I think no because we lose time and it is not helpful for us- it wastes out time”. Abdullah added to this saying, “I think we are hardware students and it will not help us”. However, a female student Uroosa agreed that it is important and stated, “It is important for me and in future it can help us”.

From this, it can be safely deduced that although students agree that it is important but do not find it useful at this stage as they believe that they should focus on the technical knowledge related to their majors.

## 5.2. Most challenging assignment in the Communication Skills course

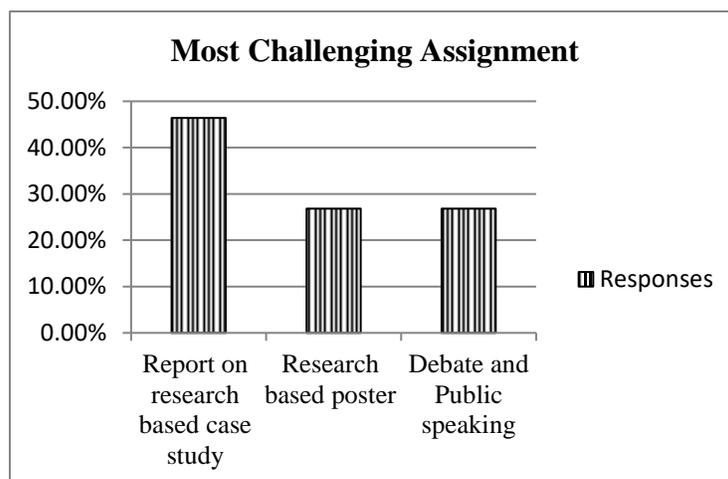


Figure 2 Most challenging assignment

As evident from the Figure 2, students found the research based report as the most challenging (46.39%) since it involved, reading, summarizing, paraphrasing and integrating academic articles. This was followed by research based poster (26.80%) and oral presentations (26.81).

The report on research based case study required students to analyze a case on communication barriers and provide logical and creative solutions. In addition, they were asked to support their arguments with existing literature and draft a report following proper academic writing conventions. Considering the issue at hand, the author finds it not surprising that the students found the requirements of the first assignment overwhelming.

Table 1 below is a justification to the fact that it is not just one step of source integration that students find challenging but right from searching the article to the integration of sources, each step is challenging for them. Ramez voiced the challenge involved, saying, “May be it is more

difficult to analyze the whole long article and then summarize. Sometimes how I will conclude and summarize what I read is a challenge. A lot of words I have to find and our English language is not that much like the article in front of me”.

It is important to note here that the students were taught the skills of searching articles, summarizing them, drafting annotated bibliography, and preparing a reference list during the pre-requisite module (ESP) and that these skills were reinforced during the beginning *Communication skills* module. Despite this, the students found the task still challenging. This is concurrent with the findings of Hirvela and Du's (2013) study, where Chinese undergraduate level students confirmed paraphrasing and source integration as the most challenging aspect of academic writing.

Table 1. Degree of challenge in various tasks related to source integration

	Very challenging	Challenging	Not challenging	Easy
Finding suitable academic articles	22.68%	56.70%	18.56%	2.06%
Understanding the main content of articles	18.56%	45.36%	32.99%	3.09%
Summarizing articles	21.05%	40.00%	32.63%	6.32%
Integrating sources in your writing	13.40%	35.05%	47.42%	4.12%
Citing articles properly	8.42%	37.89%	44.21%	9.47%
Preparing reference list	4.17%	26.04%	57.29%	12.50%

### 5.3. Reasons behind the challenges faced in source integration

#### 5.3.1. Student perceptions

The question on the reasons behind the challenge carried a number of the possible causes to choose from. As shown in the Figure 3, the most common reason was the length of the research articles, followed by difficulty in understanding the articles; time management issues since it is a time-consuming task; technical jargon used in the articles; lack of appropriate academic writing skills; and students' dislike towards reading research articles.

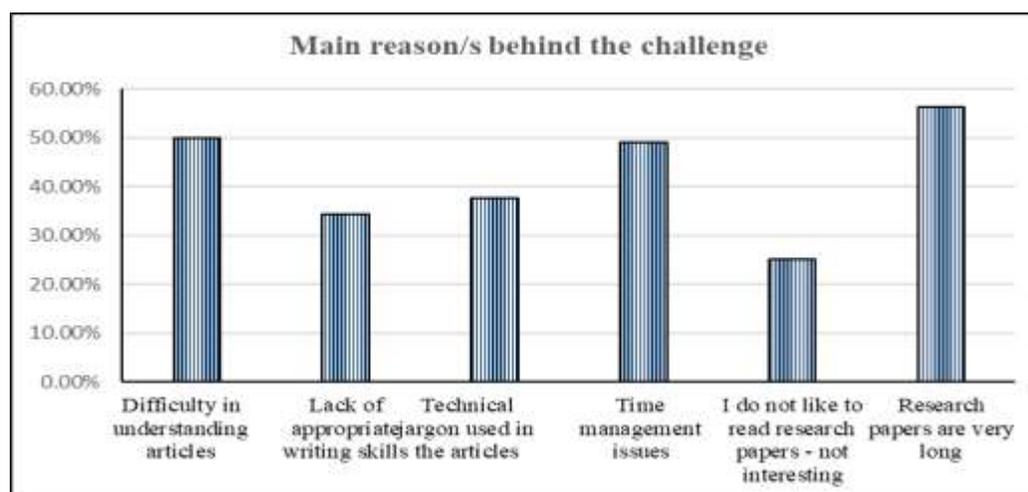


Figure 3 Main reasons behind the challenges faced in source integration

During the focus group, the same reasons were reiterated along with an addition of a few more. Searching for the right article is the first step and the struggle begins at this stage itself. Ahmed, a part-time (evening) student said, “Teachers ask us to go to Google Scholar but I don’t get simple information so I go to Google and then when I find a good article, it is usually paid”. Other students also raised this issue of payment. Many of them are still not well versed in using library portal where students are provided free access to a number of databases. This very much confirms the findings of Plakans and Gebril’s (2013) study which established that selection of appropriate sources plays an important role in source integration. High achievers were better at locating and integrating information as compared to low performers which was observed by the teacher participants of this study as well.

It is important to mention here that the researcher had assumed that the students would be proficient in searching articles since this is taught in ESP ignoring the fact that they are still undergraduate level students and there is a huge gap between ESP which offered in semester 1 and *Communication skills* which offered in semester 5. This echoes Lampthey and Atta Onbeng’s (2012) belief whereby faculty are often under the false impression that students are aware of the conventions involved in source integration.

Another important observation that was revealed during the focus group discussion, with the part-time (evening) cohort. Three out of six students mentioned that they did not study ESP since they were exempted from taking this course. The reason for exemption was that these students had already completed their diploma at other institutions where they had taken similar academic writing course/s and joined the present institution to pursue their bachelor degree. This urged the researcher to verify student demographics further. It was revealed that 15 students out of the total of 97 were exempted from taking ESP and that 11 out of the exempted students belonged to the part-time (evening) session. Hence 11 (34.37%) students out of a total of 32 students from this cohort had not studied ESP course. This revelation answered the researcher’s concern on why this section faced comparatively more problems in integrating sources since she was the one complaining the most regarding citation related issues among the three tutors who handled the three sessions of *Communication Skills*. The other two tutors were teaching the morning session where most of the students had studied ESP and were comparatively better at the task.

Another reason consists in the difficulty in grasping the content of the research articles because of the complexity of structures and the technical jargon. In the focus group, they expressed, “Wording is too difficult”, “Maybe we don’t read the articles really well.” and “May be these article are written by professors and we are students.” This confirms what Luzon (2015) diagnosed as lack of awareness of the nature of academic texts and low level of academic literacy which is often one of the reasons behind the challenge since reading is an important element of the process. Other students mentioned that they hate reading long articles. Abid voiced on behalf of all, “May be they look at the article and think it is very long and they cannot understand so there is no point in reading this”. They believe that just understanding the subject content for the core discipline should be their concern. Haleem, a part-time student said, “For me I prefer watching a two minute video and understand rather than read a long article”. They find academic writing

courses as an added burden. According to Mohammed, “This is an extra burden. When we have a language module we feel we have a lot of work and reading”.

Many students reported that they have issues with managing their time well. Ahmed said, “I think students just start one day before and they just find information on any website”. For the part-time students, completing tasks in the stipulated time frame becomes more challenging since they have full time jobs and most of them are married and have other responsibilities as well. One student mentioned in response to the open-ended question in the questionnaire, “The problem facing the students in part time- there are many assignment that should be finished in time and also too much hard working to finish all tasks in time”. Harris (2015) has also emphasized poor time management as a major hindrance in achieving the tasks especially the ones which are more time consuming since the students have a lot of assignments to complete in a limited time-frame.

Some students also conceded that their level of proficiency and lack of expertise regarding academic writing conventions adds to their worries. Some of them said that they manage to understand main points but struggle to write Mohammed stated, “It is easy to understand but difficult to write as we don’t know how to link between the subject and the paper”. These findings concur with what Currie (1998) arrived at while discussing the distress faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) students in integrating source texts as they are at the developmental phase of language proficiency and have other academic work to complete as well.

### 5.3.2. Faculty perceptions

The faculty members who taught *Communication Skills* shared their observations regarding the challenges of citations and the possible reasons causing them. They also revealed the strategies they use in their classes to support students.

Since both the faculty members interviewed were handling full-time sessions, where the issue was expectedly not as grave as the part-time session, they mentioned that around 50% students were able to somehow manage it although not to the expected level.

The main reasons behind the challenge of source integration quoted by the faculty members were similar to the ones cited by students except a few. However, the faculty considered lower level language proficiency and lack of desired academic writing skills as the major reasons. Mr. Majid, a faculty member mentioned that the research articles usually carry complex structures and difficult technical vocabulary which students find difficult to grasp. He further emphasized, “Low language proficiency was a major reason. Those who could somehow find articles, reading and summarizing was still a big challenge. So they just copied points from abstracts” (M. Suleiman, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018). These very observations have been highlighted by other researchers such as Luzon (2015) and Neville (2008).

According to Dr. Suzie, the faculty member, some students just copy pasted the idea and changed a few synonyms here and there (S. James, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018). The following concern from Mr. Majid echoes Lamptey and Atta-Obeng’s (2010) conclusion that some students just do it for the sake of scoring marks.

The students just took the points and put them in the introduction of the report and then later on they used their language talking about the cases but connecting the article to the case was difficult... Sometimes you do not find any connection. They are just putting that to convince that ok we have used the article because you have asked us to do this (M. Suleiman, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018)

The faculty members also mentioned that due to lack of the desired language skills, the students often indulge in plagiarism though it might not be done intentionally. They copy portions of text and change a few words here and there which is considered unacceptable according to academic writing conventions. This is similar to what Hyland (2001) noted,

After they mentally compare their texts with target 'expert texts', they may feel so overwhelmed by the distance between what they are expected to achieve and what they feel capable of doing, that plagiarism seems the most realistic strategy (p. 380).

Another concern raised by faculty members is the students' problems in searching appropriate research articles though they were taught this during ESP course. Plakans and Gebril (2013) also found issues related to appropriate article search among the participants of their study. According to a faculty member, students go to Google instead of using the library database which provides them free access to a number of databases. In addition, they are usually not willing to read and often complain that the articles are very long. Students also repeatedly complained about the length of the research articles.

Last but not the least important reason quoted by the faculty members was procrastination. According to them, the students lack the required skills in the first place and then they keep delaying the work to the last date. Unfortunately they end up either copying parts of the text or indulge in plagiarism, an issue which is discussed in this context by a number of researchers (Shi, 2004; Cumming et al. 2005; Plakans, 2008).

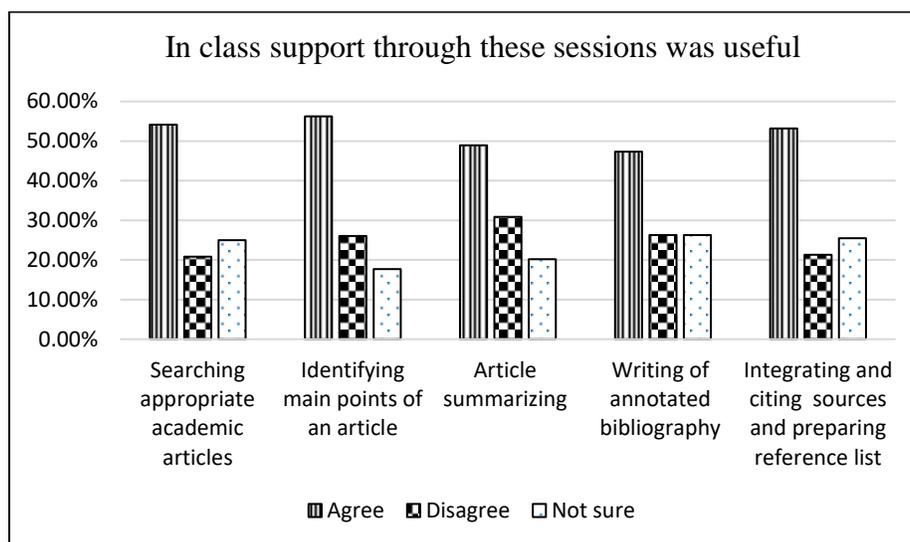
#### **5.4. Suggested strategies to overcome the challenge**

The faculty members mentioned a number of steps adopted by them to support students in overcoming the challenge in future. Mr. Majid believes that the first step in this direction should be raising awareness on importance of source integration since incorrect textual borrowing is categorized as plagiarism. "It is a legal issue-not only academic", he added. Amsberry (2009) strongly suggests implementation of awareness raising campaigns "through orientations, instruction, reference service, and web-based guides and tutorials" (p.31).

Mr. Majid mentioned that they had collective intensive reading sessions where they read two research articles together in class and located main sections of the paper which was useful. Dr. Suzie adopted peer-tutoring by using high achievers to support the others. Benefits of peer tutoring have been reported by a number of researchers (Topping, 1996; Beasley, 1997).

Dr. Suzie also emphasized on writing annotated bibliography as a preliminary step where students write a short summary of the research article and the rationale behind choosing it. This supports students while integrating sources in their reports at a later stage. Annotated bibliography writing is also recommended by McCollum (2011) who believes that it works as "a diagnostic tool to help instructors determine whether students comprehend the source material (p.80)".

A recapitulation on what was taught in the pre-requisite ESP module was also suggested. We as tutors assume that the students will remember all the steps by default, however, this does not seem to be true since, as mentioned earlier, there is a long gap between ESP and *Communication Skills*. Therefore, there can be shorter revision sessions on searching articles, summarizing, writing annotated bibliography and preparing reference list. In addition, conventions of academic writing should also be revised before engaging students in research based writing. Lastly, the faculty also suggested process based assignments where students submit parts of the assignment instead of the whole product at the end. This can be done by asking students to submit a brief proposal, an outline, summaries of articles read and drafts of their reports. These steps would most certainly relieve students' stress and reduce academic integrity violation issues.



*Figure 4* Student perceptions on the support provided in class

During focus group discussions and in the last question (open-ended) of the questionnaire, students were asked about the kind of support they expect from the faculty, a number of useful suggestions were revealed. Most of them feel that they need more practice in searching articles and language skills. The following useful comments were received by students in response to the open-ended question:

“We need to make practice to do searching in article and how can analyses it”.

“We need more practice on writing skills.

“As we work in ICT, most of our time we work in hardware so we lose our skills of writing and reading. So we need more practice.”

“Provide us with useful links so that the search becomes easier.

During focus group also they emphasized on language skills development and requested support in terms of article search. A useful suggestion which came from focus group participants is an example of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) approach. The approach is adopted by the Center for Academic Writing at the research site where the writing focused core modules are co-taught by language teachers and subject specialists. The students who brought about this had taken

such courses and wanted similar support in other courses as well. Ahmed, who requested for this, mentioned “When technical subject is merged with academic writing-the outcome is beautiful.” WAC has been established as a very useful approach to support writing requirements of students where language specialists and subject experts collaborate to strengthen students’ academic writing skills (Ambron, 2006; Ault & Joseph, 1994). Hence the author recommends strong collaboration between subject specialists and EFL tutors to achieve the desired outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to unveil and comprehend the challenges faced by undergraduate level Omani Arab EFL learners in source based writing and the reasons behind them so that appropriate preventive and supportive measures can be adopted to assist students in overcoming such challenges. Relevant literature was reviewed to find out the similar challenges faced by students in other contexts and the reasons leading to these challenges quoted by the teaching fraternity across the board. Most of the findings concur with the existing literature. The main reasons causing inappropriate textual borrowing revealed in the findings include, low level of English proficiency (Neville, 2008); unawareness of the academic discourse (Luzon, 2015); inability to search appropriate articles (Plakans & Gebril, 2013); lack of academic writing skills (Jomaa & Bidin, 2017) dislike towards reading research articles since they are long, contain complex structures and technical jargon; time management issues (Harris, 2015); and procrastination. The study confirms that inappropriate use of sources is not the result of students’ intention to cheat or plagiarize in the first place but their lack of mastery over academic reading and writing skills, a finding supported by Luzon, (2015). The paper ends with certain supportive strategies highlighted during the interviews which include, a session on searching appropriate articles; summarizing and annotated bibliography writing practice; locating important points of an article through collective intensive reading; introduce process oriented assignments with parts submission, for example, an outline, an article summary, an initial draft; and making use of peer tutoring. Moreover, the author recommends the incorporation of academic literacies in the mainstream courses and a strong collaboration between language instructors and core specialists.

## 7. Pedagogical Implications , Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This study adds to the current field of knowledge by examining Omani Arab EFL learners’ challenges. Though the findings cannot be generalized on all students, it can be safely assumed that the linguistic capabilities of learners in Arab and EFL contexts are considerably similar to the sample studied. Hence, the knowledge of challenges faced and their reasons provides insights into the issue to EFL teachers handling academic writing courses.

However, since this study was the first stage of a larger project where the challenges of integrating sources and their reasons were explored, it contained a number of limitations. Firstly, if the challenges and associated reasons are discovered at an earlier stage of the course, better planning can prevent the problem to a large extent. In addition, a closer investigation in the form of corpus analysis of student samples is required to provide necessary scaffolding to strengthen students’ source based writing. Finally, a larger student sample from different disciplines may undoubtedly enrich the findings and provide further insights into the challenges and reasons thereof.

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