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Proficiency in Citation and Referencing by Postgraduate Students and its Effects on Academic Reputation in Selected Public Universities in Kenya

Lucy Wanene

Tumutumu Training College

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3100-2650>

Zipporah Wanjiku Gichuhi

Kenyatta University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6643-9898>

George Gitau Njoroge

Kenyatta University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4179-4815>

Corresponding Author: wanenel@yahoo.com

Abstract

Rationale of the Study – The study examines the citation and referencing skills of postgraduate students at selected public universities.

Methodology – The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population consisted of 200 postgraduate students, 60 lecturers, and three software administrators, all selected from Kenyatta University, Karatina University and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. The study employed a stratified sampling technique for postgraduate students, while purposive sampling was used to select lecturers and software administrators. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to postgraduate students and lecturers. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 25, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. The results are presented in tables and frequencies.

Findings – The findings show that, while the majority of respondents were familiar with citation and referencing tasks, only a few had received formal training in these areas, and others had no formal training, indicating a considerable gap in structured skill development. They also did not understand the importance of referencing and citation in preventing plagiarism.

Implications – The study recommends that, to improve students' capacity to generate original academic work, programmes should focus on practical experience with citation practices, referencing skills, and the appropriate use of digital resources, through regularly offering training on a range of topics, including how to strengthen academic writing skills, citation and reference abilities.

Originality – While other studies have focused on forms of plagiarism and its consequences, this research has focused solely on citation and referencing skills among postgraduate students.

Keywords

Plagiarism, writing skills, digital sources, research quality, academic integrity, referencing styles

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1 Background of the Study

Academic writing is a distinct communication style comprising a set of conventions and intentions, ranging from expressing personal opinions to contributing to a scholarly conversation, critically analysing existing knowledge, and presenting well-reasoned, evidence-based arguments (Barasa, 2024). Citation and referencing are crucial components of academic writing that help maintain the integrity, legitimacy, and scholarly value of academic work. Proficiency in these skills is crucial for postgraduate students, whose research significantly contributes to the university's academic reputation. Citation and reference proficiency is the ability to accurately and consistently recognise information sources while adhering to established citation styles, including APA, MLA, or Vancouver (Rezeki, 2019). Bautista and Pentang's (2024) research of sophomore English language students found that the majority lacked training and comprehension of the most recent APA version, resulting in frequent citation errors and an increased risk of plagiarism. Although this study was conducted on undergraduates, the conclusions are applicable to postgraduate education, where citation requirements are higher and more complex. High-quality sources increase the legitimacy of academic writing. Failure to acknowledge sources can lead to major academic and scholarly malpractices, with serious consequences. According to Washaya

(2022), plagiarism has become a significant concern for higher education practitioners in recent years, largely due to the poor citation and referencing of scholarly work.

Rezeki (2019) opines that referencing and citations are crucial when writing scholarly work. They promote academic integrity and the avoidance of academic dishonesty; they give credibility by showing that one's work is grounded in in-depth research and acknowledges the contributions of others; transparency by enabling readers to follow the research and validate the information presented; support for arguments by providing evidence to back up claims and by connecting one's work to the larger body of knowledge in one's field; In order to distinguish one's thoughts and arguments from those that have been borrowed from others, referencing and citation become crucial (Boglarka, 2019). By examining the context and content of the cited work, readers can quickly confirm the original information when sources are cited. Without citations, the concepts can be perceived as unsupported assertions rather than thoroughly investigated, well-informed insights (Dawe et al., 2021). This affects the work's quality since it enables editors and peer reviewers to determine whether the author is up-to-date on pertinent literature in the topic. Poor reference and citing practices can result in plagiarism, which harms the standing of the individual author and affiliated educational institutions

and has an adverse effect on a nation's future decision-makers (Miranda & Freire, 2014).

2 Rationale of the study

Universities are the origin of ideas, concepts, and practices that transform the way society functions. In an academic setting, proper citation and referencing are essential for maintaining academic integrity, fostering scholarly communication, and enhancing the credibility of academic work. Postgraduate students, who are at the forefront of scholarly work, require a high level of expertise in these fields. Universities have made several attempts to address the situation, including the acquisition of anti-plagiarism software, reviewing anti-plagiarism policies, and training in citation and referencing skills. However, there is a constant problem with comprehending and applying citation and referencing skills. This problem has affected the integrity of intellectual work and its effects on universities' reputations, hence the need for the study.

This study was guided by the research objective to determine postgraduate students' proficiency in citation and referencing in academic work.

3 Literature Review

When writing academically, referencing and citation are the process of recognising the sources that previous scholars have mentioned (Boglarka, 2019). Zimba and Gasparyan (2021)

pointed out that some students accidentally plagiarise because they lack the necessary citation and referencing skills. Proper referencing and citation make it easy for the reader of the work to recognise the sources and, if necessary, explore further. According to Gravett and Kinchin (2020), acknowledging the contributions of others to scholarly work is a noble academic practice. Students can acquire citation and referencing skills through a structured information literacy program to ensure proper citation and referencing. Information overload is a hallmark of the modern world, a circumstance that calls for abilities and proficiencies that enable information consumers to make the most of the wealth of information (Washaya, 2022). According to Bautista and Pentang (2024), more than 80% of students did not attend citation skills workshops or seminars, resulting in poor knowledge and execution of citation requirements. This gap is reflected in the research by Chism and Weerakon (2022), who found that the academic curriculum lacks sufficient formal instruction on citation, which can lead to plagiarism. Previous research in this field concentrated on undergraduate students, with little or no attention given to postgraduate students, whose citation requirements are more complex (Bautista & Pentang, 2024).

Rezeki (2019) believes that improving academic integrity in higher education requires the ability to find accurate information, cite,

and reference it from a complex information universe. Notably, there was an absence of information search strategies in the studies previously done, which is a necessary search tactic for academic writing. According to Lori's (2018) study on plagiarism at Cambridge University, the majority of the students (71%) were unable to properly cite and reference their work, whereas 29% were able to do so. This clearly depicts a scenario where a high number of students are unable to cite and reference sources appropriately and correctly, which not only spells doom for academic work outputs but also points to a lack of critical thinking and knowledge regurgitation. This implies that there has been very little or no development in the specific discipline(s), thereby stunting the accumulation of literature and knowledge. It is also very difficult to distinguish a properly written scholarly work from such cohorts of students, as this could be a replica of many other universities and colleges.

Postgraduate students may be very committed to the fundamental principles of authorship, which include originality, creativity, and innovation. Bautista and Pentang (2024) discuss the unique issues encountered in cross-disciplinary research, where integrating diverse disciplinary approaches frequently leads to confusion about citation guidelines and processes. The study found that collaboration across disciplines and sectors can lead to variations in citation standards, making

proficiency more difficult to achieve and maintain. Kanagaraj and Archana (2023) argue that higher education relies on strong academic writing and ethical research processes to shape the scholarly environment and advance knowledge. While striving for academic greatness, students may encounter problems that compromise the integrity of their work, particularly when it comes to citation and referencing. Granados et al. (2022) undertook a three-year longitudinal analysis of second language students' historical writing, focusing on lexical richness and writing skill. While the primary focus was not just on citation, the study found that specific writing instruction over time resulted in measurable, long-term gains in students' academic writing skills, which frequently involve citation and referencing as key components. The findings indicate that interventions like focused writing education can have long-term favourable benefits on academic writing skills.

However, there have been relatively few longitudinal studies that have tracked improvements in citation proficiency over time, making it difficult to assess the long-term impact of these interventions. Correct citation and referencing enable the reader of the work to identify the sources used and, if necessary, follow up on them. It is good academic practice to acknowledge others' contributions to scholarly work (Gravett & Kinchin, 2020). According to Panjaitan et al. (2024), while

competency in citation practices (such as correct APA citation) has been researched in educational contexts, these studies have been more focused on individual academic skills than on direct institutional reputation consequences. This demonstrates a lack of institution-specific studies that can be used to link citation proficiency to university reputation. This demonstrates a gap in empirical studies linking citation proficiency with measurable changes in university reputation. Additionally, there is a lack of research on how digital citation tools and software impact students' citation skills and academic integrity. Students frequently use digital citation tools like EasyBib to organise references, generate bibliographies automatically, and properly format references according to their preferred citation styles. Digital referencing tools simplify the process of numbering references, importing from databases, and modifying citation formats with a single click. According to a survey conducted at the University of Delhi, 77% of respondents noted automatic reference list generation as a significant benefit, while 63% regarded automatic numbering and bibliography creation, which saves time and avoids errors in citation formatting (Rezeki, 2019). Few studies examine how digital citation tools influence citation proficiency, academic integrity, and, by extension, university reputation.

Kumar and Mohindra (2019) argue that equipping students with the ability to use information creatively and lawfully, without violating copyright laws and avoiding plagiarism, is crucial for teaching them academic writing processes, citation, and referencing techniques when they write scholarly work. It is clear from Dawe et al.'s (2021) study that information literacy initiatives have not given citation and referencing skills the attention they require. Therefore, the citation and referencing skills imparted to students appear inadequate, as plagiarism continues despite ongoing training. The question that begs an answer is whether the university curriculum has an information literacy programme that helps build citation and referencing skills among students and scholars.

4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the theory of planned behaviour. This theory is based on three fundamental constructs: attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms, which predict one's intention to exhibit a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 2006). According to the theory, an individual's intentions determine whether or not to engage in a particular behaviour. The model illustrates the relationship between specific traits and ethical concepts, citation, referencing, and plagiarism. It encourages students to commit plagiarism under the assumption that they will not be caught. This theory can be used to explain and

predict postgraduate students' citation and referencing skills, which could affect the individual's and institution's academic reputation. The theory states that intentions influence behaviour, which is shaped by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Positive attitudes, strong social support, and a high perceived degree of control are more likely to result in increased intentions to use proper citation and reference skills, which in turn contribute to a positive academic reputation. Thus, the theory was deemed valid in terms of knowledge of citation and referencing skills.

5 Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This research design enabled the researcher to employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect, analyse, and describe data about individuals, organisations, or phenomena that revealed connections and characterised the world as it is, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. The study was conducted at Kenyatta University, as it is one of the country's first universities and has the most enrolment both nationally and regionally. Karatina University is one of the relatively recent public universities to offer a variety of postgraduate programs, and Dedan Kimathi University is one of the fastest-growing universities. The target population consisted of 263 from three selected public universities: 200 postgraduate

students, 60 lecturers, and three software administrators. Postgraduate students were specifically targeted because they are expected to produce high-quality scholarly work. The lecturers were targeted because they teach and supervise postgraduate students' proposals and theses, and the software administrators were targeted because they are the principal controllers of the software. The study used the stratified sampling technique to select postgraduate students. This sampling technique was crucial since the number of respondents from each university was calculated using a proportional distribution of the overall sample. The study employed purposive sampling to establish a sample size of 60 lecturers and three administrators. The study used self-administered questionnaires and interview schedules as data collection tools. The questionnaire was selected because it enabled participants to provide complete, truthful, and anonymous responses. The interview schedule was tailored to collect primary and in-depth data. A pilot study was conducted at Kirinyaga University. It was done to enable the researcher to restructure, modify and eliminate any ambiguity for items in the questionnaire prior to a larger study. Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm the instrument's reliability. A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained from the items in the study, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Quantitative data was analysed through computer-assisted (SPSS) application

version 25 employing descriptive statistics such as percentages, tables and frequencies. The qualitative data was analysed through content analysis. Tables and percentages were employed to present the findings. The study adhered to strict ethical standards, obtaining approval from the study institutions and the ethical consideration authority, as well as obtaining complete informed consent from all participants before the study commenced, all while maintaining strict confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary but crucial.

6 Findings of the Study

The study aimed to determine the level of awareness among postgraduate students regarding the use of citation and referencing skills and their effectiveness in preventing plagiarism. The survey achieved an overall response rate of 87.8%, indicating significant participation at all three universities. The majority of the postgraduate students (85.7%) reported being conversant with citation and

referencing skills, while 14.3% were not adequately acquainted with the skills. The data reveals that while 96(65.3%) of respondents reported receiving formal training in citation and referencing. When asked about the specific training received through a questionnaire, one respondent stated, "Learning proper quotation and placement of in-text citations," while another mentioned, "Training on specific referencing styles like APA and Harvard." Other students reported participation in "Workshops on using citation management software" and "Information literacy sessions on proper attribution of sources." "Training on identifying and citing different types of sources," and "Practical sessions on reference list compilation." The study focused on enhancing citation skills in the role of software administrators in information literacy programs. Students were asked to rate various aspects of the administrators' support on a five-point Likert scale. The following was the response from the postgraduate students.

Table 1: Students' Assessment of Software Administrators' Support in Information Literacy by Institution

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | Std. D |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|------|--------|
| Anti-plagiarism software is a very useful learning tool | 0% | 0% | 2% | 87% | 10% | 4.08 | 0.35 |
| Anti-plagiarism software is used as a tool to deter plagiarism | 1% | 0% | 14% | 78% | 7% | 3.9 | 0.53 |
| Anti-plagiarism software is used as an academic punitive tool | 0% | 1% | 50% | 45% | 4% | 3.52 | 0.59 |
| Anti-plagiarism software enables professionals to combat plagiarism with ease | 0% | 6% | 30% | 58% | 6% | 3.63 | 0.69 |

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | Std. D |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|------|--------|
| Anti-plagiarism software searches the web for duplicate textual content and assesses the similarity of content in research papers with already published literature and other types of information. | 0% | 3% | 37% | 57% | 3% | 3.6 | 0.609 |
| I can recognise particular information sources that are updated, accurate and relevant based on authorship, publisher, and date of publication. | 0% | 2% | 50% | 42% | 6% | 3.51 | 0.643 |
| I have the skills to filter information resources and cite the correct ones. | 1% | 6% | 38% | 52% | 3% | 3.5 | 0.703 |
| I am unable to use citations and references in thesis reports. | 6% | 14% | 42% | 38% | 1% | 3.14 | 0.868 |
| Average | | | | | | 3.61 | 0.623 |

Source: Research Data (2025)

Table 1 reveals strong positive perceptions of the role of software administrators in information literacy education, with an overall mean of 3.6 (SD = 0.6). The teaching of information literacy skills received the highest rating (Mean = 4.0, SD = 0.3), with 93% of students agreeing and 4% strongly agreeing with its effectiveness. Instructions on plagiarism deterrence received high ratings (Mean = 4.0, SD = 0.5), with 87% of students agreeing. However, guidance on citation styles showed more uncertainty (46% uncertain),

despite receiving positive overall ratings (Mean = 3.6, SD = 0.6). The relatively lower ratings for digital resource usage (Mean = 3.4, SD = 0.7) and continuous training (Mean = 3.5, SD = 0.7) indicate areas for improvement. This suggests that most postgraduate students struggle with proper citation and referencing, highlighting a need for enhanced support in these areas. The study used an extensive scale to analyse students' self-perceived skills in citation, reference, and information resource management.

Table 2: Students' Self-Assessment of Citation and Information Management Skills by Institution

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | Std. D |
|---|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|------|--------|
| I can identify or locate the information I need and cite it correctly. | 0% | 1% | 5% | 92% | 2% | 3.96 | 0.32 |
| I can understand the need to access and use information resources online or print to fill my knowledge gap, citing and referencing correctly. | 1% | 1% | 31% | 61% | 6% | 3.71 | 0.63 |
| I can use keywords to search for information resources on | 1% | 2% | 39% | 55% | 2% | 3.56 | 0.63 |

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | Std. D |
|---|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| the web and cite them accordingly. | | | | | | | |
| I have the ability to identify the precise information I need in a specific reference and information resource, and add it to my thesis without copy-pasting. | 0% | 10% | 38% | 50% | 1% | 3.42 | 0.69 |
| I can efficiently recognise when information accessed online is from a reliable source. | 0% | 8% | 37% | 50% | 6% | 3.53 | 0.73 |
| I can recognise particular information sources that are updated, accurate and relevant based on authorship, publisher, and date of publication. | 0% | 10% | 39% | 47% | 3% | 3.43 | 0.72 |
| I have the skills to filter information resources and cite the correct ones. | 2% | 9% | 38% | 50% | 2% | 3.41 | 0.74 |
| I am unable to use citations and references in thesis reports. | 2% | 13% | 42% | 38% | 5% | 3.3 | 0.85 |
| Average | | | | | | 3.54 | 0.66 |

Source: Research Data (2025)

Table 2 reveals varying levels of confidence across different skills, with an overall mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.66). The highest confidence was reported in identifying and citing information correctly (Mean = 3.96, SD = 0.32), with 94% of postgraduate students agreeing. However, the data shows significant uncertainty in several areas. For instance, 39% were uncertain about their ability to use keywords for web searches, and 38% were uncertain about avoiding copy-pasting. The findings indicated that proper acknowledgement of sources requires specific skills that many students are still developing. There is also relatively lower confidence in filtering information and using references in thesis writing (Mean = 3.41, SD = 0.74 and Mean =

3.30, SD = 0.85, respectively), which indicates that 71% of students struggle with proper citation and referencing. The high uncertainty levels across multiple competencies (ranging from 31% to 42%) are identified as gaps in students' ability to utilise mass information effectively.

Table 3: Students' Assessment of Gained Academic Writing Skills by Institution

| Response Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 19 | 12.9% |
| Agree | 121 | 82.3% |
| Disagree | 7 | 4.8% |
| Total | 147 | 100% |

Source: Research Data (2025)

Table 3 reveals that the majority of students (121, 82.3%) agreed that they had gained satisfactory academic writing skills, while 19

(12.9%) strongly agreed. This high level of perceived competence emphasises the importance of teaching students academic writing processes to enable them to use information resourcefully and legally. However, a small proportion (4.8%) disagreed that they had gained satisfactory skills through citation training in information literacy programmes, which has not been given the due seriousness it deserves. Therefore, it may lead to plagiarism by students.

The study found that the overall positive self-assessment (95.2% combined agreement) contrasts with earlier findings, which indicated that 71% of students were unable to perform proper citation and referencing. This discrepancy between perceived and demonstrated skills was identified as a potential gap between students' confidence in their abilities and their actual proficiency in

academic writing. The responses indicate a clear recognition of the multifaceted nature of plagiarism challenges in academic institutions. KU reporting (41.7%), KARU (38.1%), and DKUT (40.0%). This consistent pattern reveals a fundamental gap in academic writing competencies that transcends institutional boundaries. This fundamental gap may lead to plagiarism practices among the students. The findings also emphasise the critical nature of proper citation practices in academic writing.

As shown in Table 4, high plagiarism levels were the most prevalent concern across all institutions (64.8% overall), followed by poor citation and referencing styles (20.4%). The analysis revealed consistent patterns at KU (63.3% reporting high plagiarism) and KARU (61.1%), while DKUT showed an even higher incidence (83.3%).

Table 4: Common Issues in Students' Documents Reported by Lecturers

| Common Issue | KU Freq. | (%) | KARU Freq. | (%) | DKUT Freq. | (%) | Total (N=147) |
|--|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|------------------|
| High Plagiarism levels | 19 | 63.3% | 11 | 61.1% | 05 | 83.3% | 35 (64.8%) |
| Poor citation and referencing styles | 06 | 20.0% | 04 | 22.2% | 01 | 16.7% | 11 (20.4%) |
| Poor skills in using anti-plagiarism tools | 03 | 10.0% | 02 | 11.1% | 00 | 00.0% | 05 (9.3%) |
| Inadequate academic writing skills | 02 | 6.7% | 01 | 5.6% | 00 | 00.0% | 03 (5.6%) |
| Totals | 60 | 100% | 42 | 100% | 45 | 100% | 147(100%) |

Source: Research Data (2025)

The findings reveal consistent patterns across three universities, with high plagiarism levels being the most predominant issue identified by lecturers. At Kenyatta University, 19 lecturers (63.3%) reported high plagiarism levels,

followed by poor citation and referencing styles among six lecturers (20.0%). Inadequate academic writing skills were less common, occurring in 3 cases (10.0%) and 2 cases (6.7%), respectively.

Karatina University showed similar trends, with 61.1% of lecturers identifying high plagiarism levels as the primary concern, followed by poor citation and referencing styles at 22.2%. Poor skills and inadequate academic writing skills were reported by lecturers (11.1%) and one lecturer (5.6%), respectively. A student's inadequate academic writing skills may lead to plagiarism.

At DKUT, 5 lecturers (83.3%) reported high plagiarism levels, while 1 lecturer (16.7%) noted poor citation and referencing styles. No lecturer at DKUT reported issues related to academic writing skills, suggesting potential differences in student preparedness. The aggregate data show that poor citation and referencing styles were identified by 11 (20.4%) lecturers, while poor skills and inadequate academic writing skills were reported by 5 (9.3%) and 3 (5.6%) lecturers, respectively.

The findings highlight the need for institution-specific interventions that address the unique patterns of citation and referencing by each university. The study found that targeted training programs may be effective in enhancing students' understanding and improving their citation and referencing skills. In addition, lecturers emphasised the need for targeted training programs to enhance students' understanding of referencing and citation practices. Meanwhile, software administrators highlighted the importance of

"Continuous training of students and faculty members" (KII 001) and "Implementation of comprehensive anti-plagiarism policies" (KII 003).

7 Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicate that, while the majority of respondents claimed knowing how to cite and reference, only a few had undergone formal training, and a few others had no formal training, indicating a significant gap in structured skill development. The study's findings align with Chism and Weerakon (2022), who observed the importance of teaching students academic writing processes and citation skills to develop their ability to use information resourcefully and legally. Specific aspects covered by those who received training included in-text citation placement, referencing styles, paraphrasing guidelines, and reference list compilation. These diverse training options reflect institutional efforts to improve citation and referencing skills; however, the substantial proportion lacking formal training underscores ongoing challenges in ensuring comprehensive skill development. Students' perceptions of software administrators' roles in information literacy education were overwhelmingly positive. These findings contrast with Dawe et al. (2021) observation that citation skills training through information literacy programs is often neglected, but supports Lori's (2018) observation at Cambridge University that a significant percentage of postgraduate

students struggle with proper citation practices, suggesting inconsistent implementation of citation training across institutions. Despite positive overall ratings, guidance on citation and referencing styles was less specific. The comparatively low ratings for digital resource consumption and continual training identified areas for improvement, implying the need for specialised assistance in navigating changing information landscapes.

Self-assessment of citation and information management skills revealed varying levels of confidence in accurately recognising and citing content in areas where significant uncertainty existed. Examples include using keywords for web searches, avoiding copy-pasting, and citing sources in academic writing, such as thesis writing. This contrasts with the findings of earlier studies, such as those by Lori (2018) at Cambridge University, which found that postgraduate students were unable to perform proper citation and referencing. This discrepancy between perceived and demonstrated skills suggests what Ibegbulam and Eze (2015) identified as a potential gap between students' confidence in their abilities and their actual proficiency in applying citation skills, particularly in digital contexts. There was relatively lower confidence in filtering information and using references in the thesis.

Although most students believed they had improved their academic writing skills, lecturers identified inadequate citation and referencing skills as the most common

academic challenge. These findings highlighted the continuing challenge in translating theoretical knowledge into practical applications of academic integrity standards. Software administrators emphasised the importance of continuous training for students and lecturers, as well as the integration of information literacy programs into institutional frameworks. The study's findings concur with Dawe et al.'s (2021) view that citation and referencing skills training requires more emphasis and may be continuous for skill acquisition by both students and lecturers. Furthermore, the study's findings were emphasised by Ibegbulam and Eze (2015), who noted that faculty professional development opportunities may equip lecturers with the necessary skills to assist students in maintaining academic integrity.

8 Conclusion

The study sought to determine postgraduate students' citation and referencing skills in academic writing. The study concluded that citation and referencing proficiency revealed significant gaps between claimed abilities and demonstrated skills. The majority of postgraduate students from the three universities learned how to use citation and referencing skills after receiving training through information literacy, although it has not been given due seriousness. The study additionally concluded that intensive training and clear guidelines are required to

empower students and faculty members to navigate the challenges of proper attribution and original scholarly work.

9 Recommendations

The study suggests that postgraduate students and faculty need to be trained on the principles of scientific research writing, the concept of citation and referencing skills, aspects of plagiarism, and the negative effects it has on researchers, postgraduate students, and universities. They may be reminded about the ethical and legal consequences of infringing intellectual property rights through inappropriate citation and referencing. As scholars consider the future of citation, they must stay current with the latest developments in citation tools and technology. Researchers can ensure that they are using the best citation guidelines to enhance the credibility and transparency of their work. Researchers can become familiar with various citation styles and guidelines to develop skilled citation practices. This will help verify the correctness and consistency of their citations and referencing, eliminating potential formatting or style challenges. Researchers must establish effective citation practices from the outset of their research.

The study discovered substantial gaps in citation and referencing skills, particularly for digital sources. Universities could enhance their information literacy programs by addressing contemporary citation challenges,

such as accurately attributing social media content, processing AI-generated text, and managing digital resources. Libraries may arrange regular workshops focused on emerging citation difficulties and offer continuous assistance through specialised writing centres. Universities may also create thorough citation guides to solve contemporary academic writing issues. These programs may emphasise hands-on experience with citation techniques, referencing skills, and the proper use of digital resources to produce original academic work. Universities may encourage and promote the adoption of citation and reference tools like Zotero. Universities could organise regular sensitisation and orientation sessions to promote knowledge of citation and referencing skills, and a series of comprehensive, examinable plagiarism courses may be integrated into the curriculum.

10 Implications of the Study

Theoretical implications suggest that bridging the knowledge-practice gap reveals a disparity between students' perceived and actual citation skills, emphasising the need for LIS theory to explore the knowledge-practice gap further. Future LIS research should concentrate on theories that account for both self-efficacy and demonstrated competence, particularly in digital settings. The diversity of training experiences, as well as the requirement for ongoing skill development, suggests that existing information literacy frameworks

should be dynamic and adaptable. Theories should incorporate lifelong learning and digital literacy as fundamental components, reflecting the ongoing growth of information landscapes.

Regarding policy implications, the findings indicate that a considerable proportion of students lack formal training in citation and referencing skills, emphasising the importance of institutional policies that demand structured and thorough information literacy programmes. Policies should mandate regular, embedded training sessions for both students and faculty, providing uniform skill development across all departments. There should be integration of information literacy into the curriculum. The institutions should implement a policy that incorporates information literacy, including citation and referencing skills, into the core curricula rather than treating it as an optional or supplementary skill. Accreditation bodies and educational policymakers should recognise information literacy proficiency as a critical outcome for all academic programmes. The findings demonstrate the need for continued faculty development in citation, reference, and information management, enabling lecturers to better mentor students and maintain academic integrity. Policies should offer incentives and support to lecturers who participate in professional development linked to information literacy.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest an enhanced training programme where libraries and academic support units develop and provide customised training courses on citation, referencing, and digital resource management for both students and faculty. Training should be hands-on, scenario-based, and regularly updated to incorporate new citation tools and digital resources. Positive perceptions among software administrators indicate an opportunity to expand the use of citation management tools (Zotero, EndNote) and integrate them into training and coursework. Libraries should offer continuing support and tutorials for these technologies to help users negotiate the complexity of digital citation. On assessment and feedback mechanisms, there should be regular assessments of students' citation and information management skills, utilising both self-assessment and objective metrics. There should be a provision for individualised feedback and remedial assistance to address specific skill gaps, particularly in areas such as digital resource utilisation and thesis writing. There should be collaboration across departments among library personnel, faculty, and IT administrators to ensure an integrated approach to information literacy teaching. Joint workshops, resource development, and sharing best practices can improve the overall efficacy of training initiatives.

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Author Bios

Ms Lucy Wanene Mugera is a PhD student at Kenyatta University. She holds an MSc and a BSc in Library and Information Science from Kenyatta University and Kenya Methodist University, respectively. She is the Chief Librarian at Tumutumu Training College and the Head of the College Library Department, with over 25 years of experience in a library setting since 1998. She is a part-time Lecturer at Karatina University. She is a consultant at Outspan Global University and Fortis Medical Training College. She is an accredited counselling psychologist registered by the

Ministry of Health. She is also an opinion-shaper with the Daily Nation Newspaper. She has published several articles in the field of research, including utilisation of e-resources, awareness and incidence of plagiarism, challenges of knowledge management, pandemics and social media misinformation and disinformation, and digitising print and electronic resources.

Dr. Zipporah W. Gichuhi is a lecturer, trainer, consultant, and researcher in information-related disciplines, with a particular emphasis on knowledge management and records management. Dr. Gichuhi holds a Master's degree in Library Studies and a PhD in Library and Information Science with a focus on knowledge management. Dr. Gichuhi has, over the years, consulted and trained corporates, including religious bodies, on records management and other related information science programmes. Dr. Gichuhi is currently working to assist organisations in integrating KM in their day-to-day operations and in their strategic plans to boost productivity. As a lecturer, Dr. Gichuhi teaches courses in records management and knowledge management at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her areas of research include records management, knowledge management, library and information science, as well as inclusive education. She is currently a disability champion at the University of Nairobi.

Dr. George Gitau Njoroge is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Computing and Information Science. He holds a PhD in Information Science, with specialisations in information organisation, library management and automation, and knowledge management. His research focuses on information organisation and retrieval, as well as research data management within open science

frameworks. Dr. Njoroge contributes to educating future information professionals while advancing the field through research that bridges traditional information management practices with emerging technological solutions.