

## LEARNING CITATION CONVENTIONS THROUGH TEACHING APPLICATION: FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *Undergraduates' writings are found to be deficient in the sense of citation conventions. This lacking engages students in an inadvertent plagiarism which causes them to have no academic integrity. Therefore, an effective intervention is required to address this problem. Teaching application is believed to be the best answer that would fit 21<sup>st</sup>-century teaching and learning. This study is conducted in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Since UTM uses APA citation conventions in their academic writing, this study developed an APA citation application (ACA). The application contains nine modules in which each consists of an instructional video, assessment, and questionnaire. Students need to complete the first module, as a prerequisite for unlocking the subsequent modules. The purpose of this study is to investigate the undergraduates' perception of using ACA in helping them to use correct citation conventions in their academic writing. The respondents were 67 undergraduates from five Advanced Academic Writing classes. Findings suggest that students found ACA to be helpful for them to understand the correct way of writing citations and to apply the skills in their term paper writing. This study is believed to equip students with necessary citing skills when writing their Undergraduate Final Project which is a compulsory university exit requirement.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching App, APA Citation Application (ACA), Citation Conventions, Undergraduate Students, 21<sup>st</sup> Teaching and Learning*

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### Introduction

The vast online platform has greatly influenced the teaching and learning system at all education levels. Educators are now shifting to the usage of gadgets and applications to enhance their teaching effectiveness. Undoubtedly, technology now provides flexible ways to access the abundant hub of knowledge and learning resources. Educators can maximize their in-class

content delivery and utilize technology in the form of educational applications to enrich students' understanding of a particular skill. At tertiary level especially, teaching apps have been increasingly used among educators to support their classroom curriculum. This is in line with the tertiary education nature that is student-centered based. This current trend seems to benefit teachers from the instructional perspective. This includes the teaching of writing. Besides writing content, tertiary academic writing requires students to be efficient in citation skill as it is one of the most important ingredients for excellent academic writing products. Without a good understanding and application of citation skills, students are more likely to be accused of plagiarism which is one of many serious academic offences.

In most tertiary academic writing classes, citation conventions would be integrated as one of the academic writing topics. However, since this topic is not content-related and takes up only a small portion of the syllabus, most educators seem to not put much emphasis on it. Plus, teaching students to use citation conventions effectively can be demanding and time consuming (Mages & Garson, 2010, p. 138). This behaviour has caused the students to take citation in writing for granted. As this topic is a skills-based topic, the presence of educators is not that necessary because students can obtain the skills by practicing on their own as long as they are given the luxury to access to the input. This is the reason why this particular topic is application-appropriate. Therefore, this study sees a teaching app as the best platform to equip students with the necessary citing skills.

### **Literature Review**

Citation is commonly utilized by academic writers to position their current research within an existing literature, as well as to provide supporting evidences in their research writing (Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011). There are hundreds of citation styles, the more famous of which are American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Oxford and Harvard. Among the sources that are cited by writers are books, journals, magazines, newspapers, websites and so forth. Citations are crucial to protect authors' intellectual property rights. Moreover, the information produced will have credibility as the sources can be traced and authenticated (Damarell et al., 2005). Students, particularly undergraduates are found to plagiarize because they are not familiar with the documentation of academic sources in tertiary academic writing. This might be because there has been no exposure to citation conventions at primary or secondary writing so they do not really understand the mechanics behind it and how to write academically (Heckler & Forde, 2015). Therefore, when they are at the tertiary level and receive exposure for the first time, it is impossible for them to be fully proficient. Being able to cite correctly is a skill that requires time and practice.

The lack of citing sources in writing has led students to not being aware that they are plagiarising. As stated by Murray (2006, p. 22), the writers' ignorance of such conventions "has led to accusations of plagiarism". There are also cases where some students have cited the sources, but are still considered as plagiarizing because of the inaccurate citation of sources (Brown et al., 2008). Kendall (2005) in her study on undergraduates and postgraduates citing behaviours, found that among the errors made in referencing were writing the title before the author's name, the place of publication and publishers' details were not included and the title of the article cited was not in italics according to the format adopted by the institution. Her respondents were given online tutorial besides the usual in-class instructions to assist them with citation skills and the results from the study show some improvement in the students' citation performance.

Evidently, there is a crucial need for students to be well-equipped with citing skills in order to address the issue of plagiarism. Plagiarism hampers with students' academic integrity (AI) because students submit another's ideas and work as their own (Cronan, Mullins, & Douglas, 2018). However, the duration spent on teaching and learning how to cite is insufficient to help improve students' citation skills. This is where the use of technology, such as a teaching application is needed to help the students. One such application is an online tutorial introduced by Mages and Garson (2010) which proves that teaching application can help revamp students' citation difficulties and thus improve their capability to communicate in academia. It is believed that with the guidance of instructors, students can exercise app competency for learning and attain the proper citation skills (Castek & Beach, 2013).

In the context of this study, students are presented with American Psychological Association (APA) style of citing (UTM Thesis Manual 2015) as it is the citation format required by the research institution, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. APA Citation Application (ACA) provides students with an explicit content of citation conventions based on deductive instructional approach with the inclusion of quizzes. Feedback column is also provided for students to comment about ACA. This input-tutorial-feedback application allows students to cite sources properly according to the rules set by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001). This is because the students are expected to be able to express and communicate effectively in academic writing settings with good citing knowledge and skills.

### **Research Objectives**

The ACA is designed by researchers to see how an online citation application can benefit students' citing skills. Therefore, this study aims to:

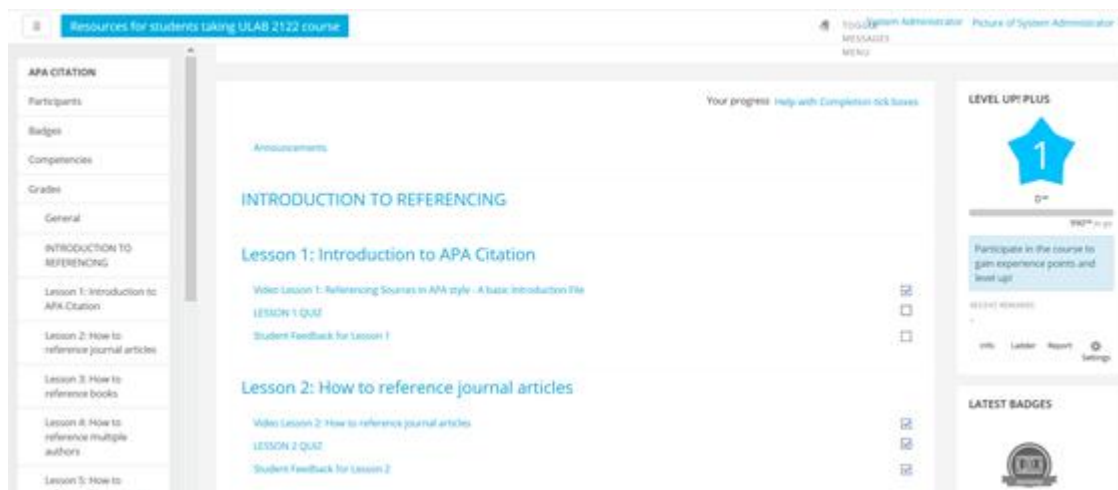
1. investigate whether students found ACA to be helpful in improving their understanding in citing sources correctly according to APA style.
2. examine students' feedback on the use of ACA as a reference guide tool.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative-qualitative approach to collect data. The study was conducted at one public university in Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) involving 67 tertiary students from five Advanced Academic Writing classes consisting of students from six different faculties. The majority of the students were in their second year (93%). There were 32 (48%) male and 35 (52%) female students who took part in this study voluntarily. The data was collected via a survey which was developed using the questionnaire module in Moodle 3.4. Quantitative data were collected through closed ended questions in the survey while qualitative data were collected using a few open-ended questions in the same survey.

In order to setup the APA Citation Application (ACA), the researchers rented a webserver space from one of the web hosting companies in Malaysia and bought a domain name, <http://languageacademyutm.info>. We installed the popular Learning Management System (LMS), Moodle version 3.4, on one of the subdirectories of the domain. The reason for using Moodle as a platform is because our students are familiar with its conventions because they are already using it as an e-learning platform for almost all subjects that they are taking. Moreover, they are also exposed to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's MyLine system, a self-access English resource website maintained by the university's language academy staff, which also uses the Moodle platform.

Once we installed the platform, we also installed the contents of ACA. There were 8 lessons and each lesson consist of one short video (less than three minutes), one quiz to test students' understanding of the contents of the video, and one short questionnaire to elicit students' feedback on the quality of the video lesson and the quiz. Figure 1 below shows a snippet of the ACA interface.



**Figure 1: The APA Citation Application (ACA) interface**

The platform APA Citation Application (ACA) contains eight lessons (Lesson 1: Introduction to APA Citation, Lesson 2: How to reference journal articles, Lesson 3: How to reference books, Lesson 4: How to reference multiple authors, Lesson 5: How to reference newspapers and newsletters, Lesson 6: How to reference websites, Lesson 7: How to reference eBooks and Lesson 8: How to reference a citation within a citation in APA Style). These eight lessons were designed for students to gain input related to APA Citation Conventions before they can start answering a list of questions testing their understanding on each lesson.

The video lessons were not developed by our team. We know that there are already many professionally made videos on APA referencing skills readily available on social media hubs such as Youtube. Therefore, we took some time to search for and view these videos to find the most relevant ones for our purpose. We made sure to search for videos with *Creative Commons* license so that we can make use of the videos legally without any copyright infringements. **Figure 2** below shows our search using 'APA referencing style' as the search key phrase with the filter 'Creative Commons' license.



**Figure 2: YouTube search on ‘APA referencing style’ filtered by creative commons license**

In order to create the quiz questions, we used the software *Articulate Quiz maker 13*. The software was chosen because of the wealth of question types that it offers with the added capability of calculating marks and giving grades to the quiz taker. In articulate Quiz maker, many types of questions could be designed such as multiple choice, true/false, multi response, fill in the blank, word bank, matching drag and drop, matching drag down, sequence drag and drop, sequence drop down, numeric, and hotspot. We took advantage of this robust capability of the Quiz maker software by creating many types of questions in our quizzes. Once our questions were created, we transformed them into SCORM packages to that they could be used by Moodle.

For student feedback questionnaires which were given at the end of each lesson and the final questionnaire given to students after they complete all the lessons, we make use of the questionnaire module in Moodle. The questionnaire/survey module in Moodle is useful because not only can it be used to ask the questions but it could also automatically calculate the responses and churn out a comprehensive report.

In order to motivate our students further and encourage them to learn APA referencing style, we also added three elements of gamification on ACA; badges, ranking, and level up. The last two element are separate modules which need to be downloaded and incorporated into the Moodle that we installed. Once all elements were in place, we tested ACA for about two weeks before registering our students who volunteered to go through the lessons. We gave our students two weeks to finish the lessons and collected their feedback though the questionnaires after each lesson and the final questionnaire at the end of all the lessons.

## **Findings and Discussion**

***ACA is helpful in improving students’ understanding in citing sources correctly according to APA style.***

An agree-strongly agree trend is formed from the students’ responses in all eight lessons as shown in Appendix A-H.

Lesson 1 presents students with the introduction to APA. The students found the use of video and quizzes to be helpful to distinguish in-text citations and reference list. They also strongly

agreed that they had better understanding on how to cite both direct and block quotes correctly. Additionally, they were able to understand on how to cite sources with missing information. The video at the same time, helped them understand on how to correctly format their in-text citations and reference list. Students reacted positively to the lesson because as stated by Sarrafzadeh and Khaleghi (2017), they had enough exposure to different learning materials and an online instructional video causing them to understand better the different skills needed to cite a secondary source

Lesson 2 focuses on how to reference journal articles. A majority of the students found that both input video and quizzes had helped them understand how to correctly cite journal articles in general and also how to cite journal articles with missing information such as the author's name and date of publication. Lesson 3, on the other hand, centers on how to reference books. Students found that the video and quizzes helped them understand how to correctly cite books in their reference list as well as how to correctly cite different styles of book materials. As asserted by Kendall (2005), even though both journal articles and books are among the most cited materials, students are found to always miscited them. Based on the responses of respondents, these two lessons have helped in attending to the mentioned problems.

Lesson 4 teaches how to reference multiple authors. A majority of the students agreed that both items have helped them understand how to correctly cite multiple authors (2, 3-5, and 6+ authors) in both in-text citation and reference list. This is particularly noteworthy as Kayla (2015) mentioned in her study, 84% of students' writings had errors in their in-text citation when citing multiple authors. Therefore, mistakes regarding citing multiple authors could be reduced with the help of ACA. Lesson 5 concentrates on citing and referencing newspapers and newsletters. Students agreed that both the video and quizzes helped them understand how to correctly cite both print and online newspapers, newsletters, and magazines. The lesson also helped them to correctly cite the newspapers sources with no author or publication date.

Lesson 6 focuses on referencing websites. Digital sources cause citation difficulties among students (MacDonell, 2005; Murray, 2006) and this application is believed to alleviate students' concerns on this issue. This is because, students were able to understand how to correctly cite websites in general as well as how to cite websites with missing information. Hence, when the skills are clearly exemplified, students can cite a website with no hesitation. Similar to Lesson 6, Lesson 7 also deals with digital information. This lesson is on how to reference eBooks. Students strongly agreed that they had better understanding on how to correctly cite e-books in their reference list as well as citing e-books with or without DOI upon watching the video and attempting the quizzes. This is because in the context of writing, digital media has better power to provide students with understanding on the digital information (Mages & Garson, 2010).

Finally, the last lesson centers on how to reference a citation according to APA citation Style. Students stated that the video and quizzes had helped them to understand the topic matter. They were able to correctly cite secondary sources in their in-text citations and reference list. As claimed by Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2012), many students even at the postgraduate level were found confused in citing in-text citations and references, therefore, this particular lesson would help to clear their misunderstandings and confusion.

#### ***Students' perspective on the use of ACA as a reference guide tool***

Students' perception on the overall use of ACA as a reference guide tool was examined based on their responses towards 13 statements as shown in Appendix I.

A majority of the students reacted positively to the 13 statements. Seventy six percent of students reported that all eight lessons were useful for them to learn the proper way of APA style citing. More than 70% percent of students agreed that both inputs, videos and quizzes, have aided them to be better at citing sources. These findings suggest that online materials in the forms of videos and quizzes manage to provide students with skills to cite various types of sources according to the required citation format. This 'online' behavior of the learning materials supports the learning that students have in class (Sarrafzadeh & Khaleghi, 2017). This is because, the online platform is a place to strengthen students' knowledge and test their understanding of a topic learnt in class. As for whether the APA citation style information provided by ACA is relevant to their assignments or not, 75% of students had responded 'Yes'. ACA is similar to the online tutorial introduced by Mages and Garson (2010) as it allows a good exposure to APA mechanics. This allows students to have "the rational and communicative intent of proper citation formatting." (p. 144)

In addition to that, about 80% of students claimed that both videos and activities in all lessons are well-organised and arranged according to their level of complexity. This is why 73% of the students agreed that the activities provided in each lesson had helped them to reflect on their understandings of the citation conventions. To add to this, the adequacy of the samples and resources in each lesson before students completing the activities have resulted in 79% positive response from students. The activities in the lessons are of the right level for students since 78% of students responded 'Yes' to the statement. The activities' instructions as well are found to be clear by majority of the students. These two technical qualities of ACA have given more practical benefit to the application which simultaneously motivate the students to use the application.

The nature of the module which is mobile has made the learning more convenient and possible anytime and anywhere. This is seen in students' responses to a statement "I can use the module any time I want' which 76% of them had agreed to this. This mobile nature of the application has caused the students to always be on the "ready-to-learn" mode. A significant number of students believe that ACA can help them in producing better term paper. This is because the application has paved the way for better communication among writers in writing. It is believed that after the ACA intervention, there would be no mistake or less mistakes from students when citing sources. Schuetze (2004) also found a similar finding in her study in which after the citation intervention, the students' performance in term paper writing improved. As they see how much ACA has helped them in understanding the topic of citation, about three-quarter of students claimed that they would like to recommend the application to their friends.

All the students agreed that their experience using ACA has been valuable. Besides its instructional function, ACA perfectly fits the 21st century learning culture as the students now are very technology well-versed (Courts & Tucker, 2012). Therefore, with the incorporation of this teaching application in the classroom curriculum, it would allow 'a happy ending' for both students and instructors because at the end, they are the end-users of a classroom. Moreover, these findings can help instructors to have better vision of the effective use of ACA in advanced academic writing classrooms. This is because with proper guidance, students can maximize the use of the application to acquire the needed skills on citation (Castek & Beach, 2013). Overall, it could be said that the students perceive ACA as a great tool to help them in enhancing their knowledge and skills in citing. This feedback from students is deemed important since getting

feedback from students who are the application users would help in recognizing the weaknesses of the application and useful for future improvement of the application (Mages, 2009).

### **Conclusion, Limitation of the Study and Implications for Future Research**

This study suggests the inclusion of teaching application in advanced writing classes to maximize the learning of citation conventions among tertiary students. The study concludes that students found APA Citation Application (ACA) to be a great instructional and reference tool to equip them with citation skills needed for their advanced writing classes. As the students are the end-users of the application, their opinions on the use of ACA are important to ensure successful advanced writing products. This study underlines students' improved performance to communicate in writings after the ACA intervention. This study provides insights into the use of teaching application to ensure students' immediate improvement on the topic of citation conventions. ACA helps instructors to focus on delivering knowledge content rather than emphasizing on teaching citation conventions during class time which is very time-consuming. Students as well are provided with a luxury of time to use ACA to self-learn citation conventions. This speeds up the learning process as it happens asynchronously outside of the classroom walls. This application is also found to be handy to UTM students especially the ones who are currently writing their *Undergraduate Final Project*. Since, this study is only limited to one tertiary institution, it is not to be generalized to a wider audience or other tertiary institutions. Therefore, it is recommended to extend this study to other universities to get a more comprehensive view on the effectiveness of ACA in providing students with the knowledge and skills of citation conventions.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Student Feedback for Lesson 1

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

(1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to distinguish between in-text citations and reference list	<b>40%</b>	24%	4%	11%	21%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite direct and block quotes.	<b>37%</b>	27%	7%	11%	18%
3	This video has given me the understanding on how to cite sources with missing information.	<b>37%</b>	27%	6%	10%	21%
4	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly format my in-text citations and reference list	<b>37%</b>	28%	6%	12%	17%
5	This Quiz has helped me to distinguish between in-text citations and reference list.	30%	<b>32%</b>	6%	15%	17%
6	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite direct and block quotes.	29%	<b>32%</b>	10%	12%	17%
7	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite sources with missing information.	<b>34%</b>	28%	6%	15%	17%

**Appendix B: Student Feedback for Lesson 2**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite journal articles in general.	<b>38%</b>	36%	5%	7%	14%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite journal articles with missing information (author/date)	<b>36%</b>	<b>36%</b>	7%	7%	14%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite journal articles in general.	32%	<b>39%</b>	8%	5%	15%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite journal articles with missing information (author/date).	<b>38%</b>	30%	12%	7%	14%

**Appendix C: Student Feedback for Lesson 3**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite books in my reference list.	<b>45%</b>	26%	12%	5%	12%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite edited books, chapters in books and books with editions and volume numbers.	35%	<b>37%</b>	11%	8%	9%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite books in my reference list.	<b>35%</b>	<b>35%</b>	14%	5%	11%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite edited books, chapters in books and books with editions and volume numbers.	<b>37%</b>	32%	14%	5%	12%

#### Appendix D: Student Feedback for Lesson 4

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite multiple authors (2, 3-5, 6+ authors) in my in-text citations	<b>41%</b>	30%	11%	6%	13%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite multiple authors (2, 3-5, 6+ authors) in my reference list	<b>38%</b>	31%	11%	5%	14%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite multiple authors (2, 3-5, 6+ authors) in my in-text citations.	<b>39%</b>	31%	11%	5%	14%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite multiple authors (2, 3-5, 6+ authors) in my reference list.	<b>39%</b>	28%	14%	6%	13%

#### Appendix E: Student Feedback for Lesson 5

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite both print and online newspapers, newsletters, and magazines.	32%	<b>37%</b>	16%	3%	11%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite both print and online newspapers, newsletters, and magazines with no author or date of publication.	32%	<b>37%</b>	16%	3%	11%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite both print and online newspapers, newsletters, and magazines.	31%	<b>34%</b>	19%	6%	10%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite both print and online newspapers, newsletters, and magazines with no author or date of publication.	<b>34%</b>	29%	21%	5%	11%

**Appendix F: Student Feedback for Lesson 6**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite websites in general.	<b>41%</b>	36%	7%	3%	12%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite websites with missing information (no author/no date of publication)	<b>43%</b>	34%	5%	7%	10%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite websites in general.	<b>43%</b>	26%	14%	7%	10%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite websites with missing information (no author/ no date of publication).	<b>41%</b>	34%	7%	7%	10%

**Appendix G: Student Feedback for Lesson 7**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite e-books in my reference list.	<b>42%</b>	33%	9%	5%	11%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite e-books with or without DOI.	<b>40%</b>	35%	9%	5%	11%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite e-books in my reference list.	<b>39%</b>	28%	14%	9%	11%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite e-books with or without DOI.	<b>40%</b>	25%	18%	7%	11%

**Appendix H: Student Feedback for Lesson 8**

<b>No</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite secondary sources in my in-text citation.	<b>39%</b>	32%	12%	7%	11%
2	This video has given me the understanding on how to correctly cite secondary sources in my reference list.	<b>37%</b>	23%	25%	5%	11%
3	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite secondary sources in my in-text citation.	<b>39%</b>	28%	14%	9%	11%
4	This Quiz has helped me to correctly cite secondary sources in my in-text citation.	<b>37%</b>	32%	12%	11%	9%

### Appendix I: Students Feedback on ACA

Please tick (✓) your option for each statement below. Tick 1 for YES, 2 for NO, or 3 for MAYBE

No	Statement	1	2	3
1	The lessons in the module have helped me to understand the proper way of writing citations.	<b>76%</b>	7%	16%
2	The instructional videos are helpful to equip me with necessary citation knowledge and skills.	<b>73%</b>	10%	16%
3	The activities in each lesson are useful in helping me to understand the proper way of citing other people's work.	<b>79%</b>	9%	12%
4	The information on APA citation style provided by the module is relevant to my assignments.	<b>75%</b>	6%	19%
5	The instruction of each lesson in the module is clear.	<b>76%</b>	4%	19%
6	The lessons and activities are organised according to the complexity level.	<b>78%</b>	6%	16%
7	The activities provided in each lesson have helped me to reflect on my understandings of citation conventions	<b>73%</b>	9%	18%
8	The activities in each lesson are supported by adequate samples and resources.	<b>79%</b>	3%	18%
9	I can use the module any time I want.	<b>76%</b>	6%	18%
10	The activities are of the right level for me.	<b>78%</b>	9%	13%
11	I would recommend ACA to other students.	<b>69%</b>	9%	22%
12	With the help of ACA, I can submit a better term paper to my lecturer.	<b>76%</b>	6%	18%
13	I think my experience in using this ACA has been valuable.	<b>100%</b>	0%	0%