Research Article

Citation Mania in Academic Theses Writing: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study, premised on the assumption that students over-use citations in academic writing, investigated manifestations of over-citation in three PhD theses. A review of diverse pragmatic functions citations serve, helped in the identification of needless citations which lacked consonance with any of the functions. A content-context analysis of the pragmatic function of each citation in the three theses, revealed over-citation and superfluity in the theses. Manifestations of over-citation included: expressing general or common-sense information; using multiple citations to make a simple point; citing sources to express what the writer did; attributing own deductions and inferences to authors; not following-up on citations; repeating concepts and attendant citations in different parts of the thesis; making most thesis sections literature sections; citing individual words not ideas, unclear content of citation, independent citation of each source for the same idea, over-using a source within a paragraph or section, citing back to back, evincing citation density to the eye. On the basis of the varied manifestations of over-citation and the extent of its compromise on the quality of student presentations, the study recommends sustained efforts in developing sound academic writing skills even at postgraduate levels, and sensitisation of students to pragmatic purposes citations should serve.

Keywords: *academic writing; citation; citation practices; over-citation; plagiarism; source material*

1. Introduction

Source citation, which in this paper refers to direct quotations, paraphrases and any reference to an external source where author name and publication year are identified, is one of the hallmarks of sound scholarship in academic writing. Sound academic writing builds upon ideas of authorities in the field, upon which one's presentation, refinement and extension of one's own ideas is based. To distinguish one's own work from that of others, to accord credibility and authority to one's knowledge and ideas, to contextualise one's ideas within a broader intellectual and academic discourse, to allow readers to establish the veracity of source material, to demonstrate the depth and breadth of one's reading and scholarship, to make apparent one's original contribution to the subject in relation to studies that preceded it; citation is obligatory.

Despite the indispensability of citation to academic writing, an overuse of citation belies insufficiently developed academic writing skills and inability to engage with the subject. The researcher's experience assessing students' academic essays and editing students' theses accounts for the assumption that students generally over-employ citations, manifest in bloated reference lists, hence; the need to systematically identify manifestations of over-citation. The prospect to rid academic writing of citation over-use and citation abuse lies in uncovering its manifestations and

sensitising students about them. Proceeding on the premise that students' academic writing is riddled with over-citation, and that the manifestation thereof is little known and appreciated within the academic community, this paper documents manifestations of over-citation in three PhD students' theses as a microcosm of its manifestation generally, in academic writing. That citation practices in academic writing are governed by universal standards accords this study, based on citation practices of PhD students in South African universities, global application. The question the study sought to answer, which is the extent to which each citation served a pragmatic purpose in a thesis, is one that has global relevance.

Plagiarism, defined as lack of attribution of external sources, has been accorded disproportionate attention in student handbooks, style guides, departmental websites, and lectures, at the expense of other inappropriate use of external sources. This creates the impression that no plagiarism equals appropriate use of sources. McCulloch (2012:56) cites anecdotal evidence to the effect that "… inexperienced students may be surprised, having gone to great lengths to avoid accusations of plagiarism by citing meticulously, to be told that peppering their writing with quotations is also unacceptable." The multi-dimensionality of challenges associated with student citations have not been sufficiently considered. This is not to discount the various studies that have advanced our knowledge of factors that affect, even the amount of citation a writer would use in an academic piece of writing.

2. Factors Influencing Citation Patterns

The integral role of source citations in academic writing explains the increase in the studies on citation patterns. Bornmann and Daniel (2008) chronicle studies that have explored the relativity of citation patterns to:

- Time; where current pieces of academic writing are prone to greater citation owing to the presence of a more voluminous body of research and ideas to draw from (Burrell, 2003; Rabow, 2005),
- field and sub-field within a particular discipline; where some fields and sub-fields merit more citations than others (Klamer & Van Dalen, 2002),
- the nature of the article; whether it is a methodology, review, research article or a chapter/book (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1996),
- the language the piece of writing is in (Kellsey and Knievel, 2004; Van Raan, 2005), and
- free online availability of publications (Lawrence, 2001), among others.

Whatever factors and combination of factors account for the citation patterns in academic writing, there should be sound justification for every citation made. A general obsession with citations reduces a piece of writing to a compilation of authors' quotes and ideas. This paper seeks to address the dearth of research into manifestations of over-citation in academic writing. In this paper, over-citation or citation mania (mania as in obsession, compulsion, fixation, fascination, preoccupation, urge, not as in lunacy or insanity) is not a quantitative phenomenon computed as the number of citations per page or some such quantitative computation. It is more a question of citation superfluity in terms of citations being needless or not being duly integrated into the argument thereby rendering them excess material. This paper seeks to respond to the question; what are the dominant manifestations of over-citation in academic theses writing? A further theorisation of citation behaviour is important in order to respond to the question.

3. Theoretical Framework

Although two citation theories seemingly compete to explain citing behavior, they are both instructive to the present study. Two citations from two sources in Bornmann & Daniel (2008) aptly capture the premise of the two theoretical positions. The normative theory on one hand posits that,

…reference serves both instrumental and symbolic functions in the transmission and enlargement of knowledge. Instrumentally, it tells us of work we may not have known before, some of which may hold further interest for us; symbolically, it registers in the enduring archives the intellectual property of the acknowledged source by providing a pellet of peer recognition of the knowledge claim, accepted or expressly rejected, that was made in that source" (Merton, 1968, p. 622).

The social constructivist view on the other hand asserts that,

…authors typically show how the results of their work represent an advance on previous research; they relate their particular findings to the current literature of their field; and they provide evidence and argument to persuade their audience that their work has not been vitiated by error, that appropriate and adequate techniques and theories have been employed, and that alternative, contradictory hypotheses have been examined and rejected (Gilbert, 1977, p. 116).

The two theories taken together, provide a fuller understanding of the rationale for citations than exclusive reliance on either of them would. The instrumental function of citations (meant to inform the reader and place the work within its given context), the symbolic function (which serves to avoid plagiarism) and the persuasive function (where the writer seeks to give credibility to their work) all provide sound rationale for citation. The challenge would be considering one (particularly the symbolic function) at the expense of the others. Where citation behavior is solely actuated by a desire to avoid plagiarism, by giving credit to authors for even common or general knowledge utterances, that constitutes over-citation.

Bornmann and Daniel (2008) build upon Garzone and Mercer's (2000) scheme for classifying citations according to function. They identify the following pragmatic functions of citations:

- affirmational citations where the external source's ideas are in concert with the writer's own,
- assumptive citations where the source material provides the background or context,
- conceptual citations which provide definitions, examples as well as conceptual and theoretical frameworks,
- contrastive citations which present a disjuncture or disconnect between the source findings or ideas and the writer's own,
- methodological citations which employ the methods, procedures, design and techniques of the cited source,
- negational citations which dispute aspects of cited work,
- perfunctory citations where the relationship of the citation to the ideas is either absent or redundant, and
- persuasive citations where the aim is more about bringing in material from a respected or leading authority to lend ceremonial credibility to one's writing.

Such theoretical classification is invaluable for the recognition of superfluous citation in academic writing. In this study, perfunctory and persuasive citations were not considered as serving any pragmatic function as they did not advance the writer's argument conceptually, factually, or methodologically. Citation is referential if source material contributes to the ideas or discussion. Citations which only played the source acknowledgement function were also not considered relevant.

Dehkordi and Allami (2012:1895), citing Myers (1990), envisage the purpose of the writer's citation of authors' ideas as one of delineating the current state of knowledge with a view to positioning one's claims "…within the larger disciplinary framework, and establish(ing) a narrative context." Maroko (2013) equally sees citation as justifying the novelty of one's position by grounding it within the present state of disciplinary knowledge. How the writer's own work fits into what has already been written on the subject can be established through effective citation, and is a criterion for judging the worth of a citation.

McCulloch (2012:56) advises that "[S]ource material should not simply be reproduced and reported, but rather reshaped and put to the service of one's own unique argument." Such

reconceptualisation transcends mere paraphrasing and involves an interpretive and evaluative stance on the cited source to bolster one's argument. The external voices do not represent 'the' knowledge since knowledge is a social construct which is forever evolving. For PhD theses in particular, the advancement and extension of the knowledge frontiers is key. The writer's authorial identity in the piece of writing is established in the way he or she recontextualises or reconceptualises the external voices to advance his or her own ideas and argument. The intertextual and dialogic nature of academic writing requires that external voices be not just invoked, but developed and interrogated.

4. Methodology

The present study utilised a descriptive case study methodology describing the manifestation of a phenomenon within its real context. The case for the present study comprised 3 PhD theses the researcher language-edited. The unit of analysis was the necessity or otherwise, of citations in the theses. The pragmatic functions of citations discussed earlier also served as propositions against which the necessity of each citation was rated. Following Baxter and Jack's (2008) recommendation for the provision of sufficient detail upon which the reader can assess the credibility and validity of the study, some citations deemed unnecessary are presented for exemplification purposes. Although three theses did not merit statistical generalisation, they allowed for what Yin (2009) calls analytic generalisation emanating from the study's application of theoretical propositions which can be implicated to citations' use in any other academic context. Within the case study methodology, document analysis, which Bowen (2009) sees as applicable to qualitative case studies, characterised by thick descriptions of a single phenomenon, was used. Documents' lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity make them reliable sources of information which enhances both the credibility and replicability of the studies. In the document analysis, content-context analysis (in the form of placing citations into relevant categories) and thematic analysis (through recognizing patterns and emerging themes within the data) (Bowen, 2009) were used.

4.1 Sample

Only three PhD theses the researcher had edited were used for analysis of manifestations of over-citation. The use of PhD theses over other pieces of academic writing was actuated by the assumption that the theses represented the best efforts (seeing the thesis quality was the sole determinant of the award of the doctoral degree for the student) of postgraduate students studying at the highest level in the field, who are supposedly adept at academic writing from their long experience with academic writing. The PhD theses also represented the input of seasoned academics who supervised the students. If over-citation could be found in these cites, it would even be more manifest at the lower levels of study and for less high stake pieces of writing students had no guidance from lecturers or supervisors. This would underscore the need, even for academic writing courses, normally provided in the first year of undergraduate study, prior to students embarking on their Masters and PhD theses write-ups. Unlike journal articles whose word limits are low and strict, PhD theses are longer and more flexible in length which renders them prone to over-citation and superfluity, hence their choice over journal articles. Research is replete with studies of citation behaviour of undergraduate student writers (Amsberry, 2010; Li & Casanave, 2012; Shi, 2010) at the expense of the assumed proficient postgraduate student writers. There is, therefore, a dearth of knowledge on the authorial presence of the assumed proficient academic writers.

4.2 Procedure of analysis

This study employed citation content and context analysis where both the content of the citation and its context were analysed to determine its pragmatic value in the thesis. Lin, Chen and Chang (2013) define citation context analysis as "... essentially a content analysis of citations involving careful

reading of the text surrounding a citation so as to determine what functions it serves for that paper." Although Harwood (2009) and Cronin (2005) cast doubt on the efficacy of determining the functionality and motivations behind citations using content and context analysis, owing to the subjective nature of citations and the need for specialist knowledge in the discipline to make the determination, I argue that the responsibility for making apparent the relevance and function of the ideas of authors enlisted in the piece of writing devolves on the writer. The reader should not even conjecture the purpose a particular citation serves in a text. Excusing the obscurity of citation functions and motivations on the private and subjective nature of the writing process would render the writer of the piece of writing its readership as well. I agree with Harwood (2009) though, about not judging the functionality of citations on the basis of pre-conceived checklist of motivations.

For each thesis, each citation was read within its preceding and subsequent context to determine its necessity or otherwise. The checklist approach was avoided as it erroneously implies exhaustive knowledge of manifestations of over-citation in academic writing risking losing sight of subtle manifestations of over-citation. Questions guiding the analysis were: Is this citation really necessary? What would be lost without it? Does it extend the argument, clarify the issues or add any such value to the presentation? If it does, how? If it doesn't, why? The authorial and epistemological stance manifest in the citation was analysed. Only the examples of citations deemed needless were reported and the nature of their superfluity discussed.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Anonymity of theses writers was assured by non-disclosure of their names, their theses titles, their institutions or any such aspects that could identify them or the theses. The writers were named writer A, B and C. Informed consent was granted for the use of their theses. The only thing that potentially could reveal the source were the citations. In his editing role, the researcher had recommended the removal of the superfluous citations and, if the writers considered the recommendations, such citations should have been eliminated in the final document to ensure no trace to the thesis writer. Citation examples that could betray the thesis identification were avoided and in some cases ellipsis were used to replace words that would possibly lead to thesis identification. Instead of repeating the authors cited by the writers, only years of publication are reported to avoid any trace to the theses.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

From a citation by citation analysis, citations deemed needless were categorised in accordance with reasons for their superfluity in the thesis. For each category, the nature of the category is explained, examples of citations falling in the category are given and explanations for them belonging to the category are given. The categories are discussed next.

5.1 Expression of general information not meriting citation

This category represents instances where the idea expressed was too common-sense to warrant citation. Writer A habitually prefaced definitions by saying; *"… is difficult to define"* and then bracketed three or more sources for such a general statement. At another point Writer A cited three sources *(2008; 2010; 2007)* just to say the term…is not uniformly defined. Different sources are then used for the definitions which means the three sources were only invoked to make the point that the term is not easy to define. Writer C's citation of three sources to note that *the concept … is not a new one (2011; 2013, 2014),* hardly merits authorial support. Other general statements for which authorial support was needlessly invoked included: noting the importance of considering ethical issues in research (3 sources cited by Writer C); independent hotels being privately owned (2 sources cited by writer C); there being several advantages to the use of … (3 sources cited by writer C). All these citations could have been made without invoking authorial support.

In some instances, a general statement was cited and the substance assumed by the general statement not given. Writer B noted that, *"Literature presents ambiguities about the concept (2008; 2011)"* and the ambiguities were not mentioned. On another occasion, the same writer said "*... has been assigned different meanings (2003; 2008; 2004)"* and those meanings are not explicated in the subsequent sentences. The purpose the citation served in such instances was lost.

5.2 Using several citations to make a simple point

In this category, the citation could be warranted unlike in the previous category, but the over-citation came in using too many sources to make the point. Writer A cited *(2000; 2010; 2007)* only *to* say "...the meaning of ...has long been contested." The writer then went on to cite other sources apart from the three to define the concept. These included a *2011* source (twice), another *2011* source (twice), *2013 and 1934* sources. Having three citations just to introduce the idea of the contestation, and six subsequent citations as follow up (without even making apparent the contestation for that matter) was over citation. The sources making the contestation apparent are the only ones which should have been cited and the contestation made apparent. Similarly, Writer A cited *(2007)* just to say *"three dimensions impact ..."* and then identified the three as technical, political and cultural and cites *(2010; 2009; 2008)* for that identification. Four citations just to say technical, political and cultural factors affect ... was over citation.

Writer C cited 3 dated sources *(1998; 1998; 1999)* just to say what theoretical framework is. The writer had several sources just to define chapter headings like Literature Review. The writer cites *(1991; 2004; 2007; 2007; 2003; 2006; 2004; 2003)* just to make the point that resources give organisations competitive advantage. In a later section and in consecutive sentences, he cited *1995; 1995; 2000; 2003; 2007; 1995; 1995* (note the 1995 sources are 4 different sources) just to buttress the same point in different words. The latest source could have been cited to take care of that point and focus moved towards explaining how resources are key in guaranteeing competitive advantage.

5.3 Citing sources for what the writer did

Writers also cited sources for what they did themselves. This tendency was most manifest in the methodology section. Guilty of this kind of over-citation was writer B who said *I investigated ... (2011; 2014)* and Writer A's *"The 85% return rate was quite high (2005, 2008, 2009)."* Similarly, Writer C wrote, "*The number of focus group participants ranged from ... (2007, 2010, 2003).* These citations were descriptive of what the theses writers did and it was unclear what authorial support was being invoked. Writer A should have read about the acceptable return rate level for the questionnaires from the cited sources, and writer C should have read about the recommended number of participants in the focus group discussions. In the presentation, they could not incorporate that material in a manner that separated what obtained in their study and what the author(s) said. Writer B could have said "*The number of focus group participants ranged from ... This was in keeping* with *the focus group sample sizes recommended in the literature* (2007, 2010, 2003). Even after making the distinction between what is happening in the study viz what literature says, three citations would still have been needless for the point.

5.4 Writers attributing own deductions and inferences to authors

Related to the previous category, was a tendency for writers to make their own deductions, either from the literature or study findings, which they then credited to particular authors. Writer A wrote, "*From the above broad descriptions, ... can be viewed as ... (2002; 2005)* as if the deduction was made by the authors cited. Referring to his own research procedures, Writer B noted; *"This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (2011; 2010; 2003)"*. Writer C similarly had, "*The above definitions therefore, imply that ... (2007; 2004; 2007)* and *"Based on the literature review above, it can*

be concluded that… (2000; 2000; 2011). Such citations rendered the writer voiceless in the argument. They left the reader with the question; for what was the author cited?

5.5 Lack of follow-up on citations

One key determinant of the necessity of a particular citation was the extent to which it was integrated within the text and the discourse. Citations which followed each other consecutively without the writer showing how they fitted into the discussion solicited the question, so what? More often the writers' paragraphs began and ended with authors' voices rather than their own. The sandwich approach to citation use, where the writer begins with their idea, incorporates the ideas from the author(s) and interprets the ideas in light of their own idea, was conspicuously absent.

Writer A's consecutive definitions of what training is and involves were not followed up on to draw the reader's attention to key features of the concept. The first part of the uninterrupted series of definitions was; "*Training refers to … (2009). According to (2010), training refers to …. According to (2013), training is one of* …and so on. Absence of the writer's voice reduced the presentation to a collection of citations which heightened the over-citation feel. Often, such consecutive citations led to unsubstantiated claims as no follow-up is done to show the veracity of claims made.

5.6 Concept repetition in different parts of the text

Although academic writing is a recursive process, blatant repetition of concepts in different parts of the thesis led to more citations on an aspect than would have been the case had the concept been exhaustively dealt with in one part where it was supposed to be addressed. Writer A defined 'role' in the introduction chapter and made reference to 5 sources in that section; defined it in the literature chapter using 6 sources (3 new and 3 used in the introduction) and also defined the term in the discussion of findings chapter, using 3 sources; two of which were appearing for the first time. The employment of 14 sources just to define a single concept led to citation overload which could have been eschewed had the writer decided in which part of the thesis the conceptualisation was supposed to be made. Writer B repeated information and made citations for each rephrasing thus, "… motel is coined from the words motor and hotel (2007) and it is a contraction of the words motor and hotel (2001). The idea expressed is a general one and re-wording it and appealing to two sources, aggravated citation overuse. Writer C's introduction chapter (Chapter 1) was almost a summary of the literature review/ theoretical framework chapter and the methodology chapter differing in the amount of detail given. As such, there was much verbatim repetition of the same citations within the three chapters courtesy of the copying and pasting function.

5.7 Use of all known or read authors who make reference to an idea

One characteristic feature of the theses analysed was the citation of several authors at the end of an idea, rather than the citation of the one who presented the idea forcefully or who originated it. Writer C had "*Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986, 1997, 2001, 2004 and 2005) states that…* The reference list would then need to incorporate all these sources meant for just one idea. In similar fashion, Writer B cited Creswell and bracketed *(2003; 2007; 2013; 2014)* to make a point about the research design. Why the point was not made using just one source is not clear. One would be excused to think that if the writer had known that the author had other publications like the 2009 one, they would have cited all over them. It also begs the question whether all these sources were really consulted. It even appeared as if the writer equated a bloated reference list with evidence of scholarship and extensive reading. All the Creswell sources then made it to the reference list.

5.8 Converting almost all thesis sections to literature sections

There was a tendency to overuse literature even in sections of the study which did not warrant much literature use, if any. For writer B, the 'report on findings' section was almost a rewriting of the literature with new sources being used for every observation made as in: *"…role ambiguity, role strain, role conflict and role overload occured (2010; 2013; 2011; 2011; 2014).* Appealing to five sources to say that concepts authors made reference to in their works were manifest in the study context was over-citing, and the relevance of those citations was neither explicit nor implicit.

The first paragraph of writer A's thesis introduction has 6 sentences, with 55 of the198 words being authors' names. Such citation density right in the first paragraph of an introduction chapter, whose focus is not specifically on reviewing literature but introducing the problem, signaled citation overload from the onset. Writer C's methodology chapter had almost degenerated into a textbook on research methods meant to educate the reader on research methods rather than explaining and justifying the methodological decisions taken in the study.

5.9 Citations totally irrelevant to the study

Some citations were superfluous because the information they presented had no bearing on the study. They were not consistent with, and contributory to, the writer's main argument. In such cases, both the citation and whatever follow-up was made on it were rendered irrelevant and superfluous. In a study which did not warrant an exposition of types of knowledge, in which the knowledge base of the professionals being studied was not even relevant, Writer A had 6 citations about the different types of knowledge, none of which had relevance to the study. In the methodology section, which most writers, Writer C had elaborate definitions, use of, advantages and disadvantages of different paradigms, research approaches, research instruments. She cited liberally from the literature on each of these aspects, only to identify the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative approach and the interviews and document analysis as the paradigm, approach and instruments used respectively. Why the writer belabored the points on the positivist paradigm, the quantitative approach and mixed method approach and the formulation and advantages of questionnaires is questionable. It goes back to the aspect of turning the methodology section and a research methods textbook.

5.10 Citing words not ideas, when the words are not unique in any way

Some citations drew the reader's attention to just a word or short phrase when that word or phrase is not unique or used in an unusual way. In the citation, *"There is need for 'learner talk' (1990; 1995) in the classroom",* Writer B borrows from the author, words which do not even represent an unusual and powerful presentation of the common knowledge that the sentence presents. The same phrase was brought in the recommendations and the same citations made. Writer B cited "*role ambiguity*" *(2010; 2013; 2011)* in the discussion section of the thesis when the writer had used the term severally throughout the earlier sections of the thesis. One would think the term was coined by the cited authors and was not in normal usage.

5.11 Content of citation unclear

For some citations, it was not clear exactly what the writer was borrowing from the author. Writer C has a citation, *"Despite the efforts by the Government (2012) and the private sector, the sector has suffered …"* where the efforts are not mentioned and what was cited remains unclear. Writer B wrote *"A considerable amount of research exists on … as alluded by 2000; Metcalfe and Miles, 2000; 2001; 2001 and 2003".* The writer does not say what that research is about and does not tell what exactly is being cited. Writer B wrote "*Reasons for drop-outs (Lau, 2003) have been noted*" but did not give the reader an idea of what exactly the content of the citation is. Both the material before and after the citation

does not give an indication of the content of the citation.

Writer A's citation "*Concerns about… (2006; 2005; 2006) included whether…"* does not help the reader to know what was really borrowed from the authors. What follows is a bulleted list of the concerns each with a source or two which surprisingly did not include the three initial sources. That pattern where three or four sources are cited to introduce a list of things and then each item on the list is unpacked through different citations from the ones which introduced the items continued throughout the thesis, raising citation density within the text.

5.12 Back to back citations

In this paper, I use the term back-to-back citations to refer to a citation being bracketed at the end of an idea and the next statement beginning with another citation. This compounded the problem of lack of follow-up on citations and rendered the thesis a collection of citations. A paragraph in writer B's thesis reads *According to (1990) the … is built upon the resource based theory. X (2001) observes that … of this process (1990). Y (1990) also ….* The citations are placed back to back which makes the paragraph a collection of citations. The obsession with citations is most marked in the quote *X (2001) observes that … of this process (1990)* which leaves the reader wondering whether the citation was from X (2000) or from (1990).

5.13 Making independent citation of each source for the same idea

There were instances where, rather than expressing a point and bracketing several authors who made the point, writers cited different sources using different words for the same point. While the use of multiple authors on the same idea was meant to increase the variety of voices and perspective on the same idea, the independent citation of each source for the same idea evinced lack of management of the different voices on the same idea and drowned the writer's own voice. Writer B identifies a key term in his study and gives three authors who use different terms to refer to that concept in three different sentences when one sentence would have sufficed. Four similar definitions were given by Writer A for the same concept using different words when a single consolidated definition from two of the authors would have sufficed.

5.14 High citation density apparent to the eye before considering citation purpose

Just a look at most pages of the theses evinced citation overload. In writer C's thesis, six sources are used to define innovation in 2 consecutive paragraphs of one chapter with no follow up. In the next chapter, three other sources are used to define innovation with one source being cited twice. Writer C's *2.3.6.3 section* has 10 paragraphs, 8 of which start with a citation with 5 of the 8 ending with citations as well. The whole page is strewn with bracketed author names and publication years which give the feel of over-citation even without going to the content or context of the text.

Writer A's thesis reads like a book on research methods. A description of aspects of methodology prior to sampling, data collection instruments and research procedure constitute 24 sources and 35 citations. The interview instrument alone, that is discussed later, takes 18 citations as the writer defines even the interview types not used in the study, chronicles their advantages and disadvantages, and discusses the need for an interview guide. Just to define population, 4 citations are used, 9 citations for sample and sampling. Triangulation is a section on its own taking in 6 citations. In most of writer A's paragraphs, every sentence is appended by a citation as in;

> *This dimension relates to … (2011). As mentioned above, curricula are implemented in socio-cultural settings… (2011; 2009). This demands that … (Gilbert, 2011). This idea is also confirmed by (2010) who argues that…. Similarly, (2013) assert that….*

The five sentences have six citations evincing citation density to the eye. This is citation density is buttressed by the voluminous reference list. For the three theses, averaging 285 pages excluding appendices, contents page and pages preceding the first chapter; the reference list averaged 28 pages. This is close to 10% of the thesis.

5.15 A source dominating a paragraph or section

This category documented instances where the writer over-used one source for the predominantly in a paragraph or section and kept citing the author and year. Overreliance on a source could have been avoided with better citation management. In writer B's thesis, the source (*X, 2001*) is cited 8 times in three consecutive paragraphs with its consecutive citation interrupted only once when *(Y, 2000)* is introduced. The next 2 paragraphs are dominated by *(Z, 2008)* appearing 6 times, *(A, 2000)* twice, and *(X, 2001)* once. In the 5 paragraphs there is *(X, 2001)* x 9 *(Z, 2008)* x 6 and *(A, 2000)* x 3.

Writer A listed five "*factors that affect …"* and cited *(2013)*. The writer then went to address each of these factors and for each, the same source was cited. In the 13 sentences that unpacked these factors, the source *(2013)* appeared 8 times. This is over and above the other citations that were incorporated. This evinces lack of planning of the writer's own writing where the writer was supposed to determine what ideas needed to go where and what authorial support would be needed where. It now appeared as if the paragraphs were arranged, not according to the ideas expressed, but rather according to the authors used. The writer would deal with an author and then when they are done they would take another one like that.

6. Discussion

From the analysis of citation use in the three theses, it was manifest that their use was largely actuated by the desire to credit authors' ideas to avoid the much frowned upon plagiarism (the source acknowledgement function). Citation then became a perfunctory exercise based on copyright dictates to give credibility to the work (thesis) and ensure it is not questioned or rejected, rather than a means to strengthen one's argument.

Several factors could have accounted for the incorporation of citations which did not advance the thesis argument. Writers most likely opined that all relevant sources on a subject merited acknowledgement, not just the original or discovery paper or the few which presented the idea in the most forceful manner. They also wanted to show that each and every one of the ideas they gave had the blessing of one or more authors. Consequently, a string of citations was incorporated to make a point where one or two could suffice. The desire to give a semblance of research currency possibly explains writers' preference for both original and secondary sources with later publication dates. Citation quantity could have been confused for depth of scholarship and research rigour, to the extent that writers employed convenience citation where easy to find material was strewn all over the paper. The advice for writers to err on the side of citation where they are unsure about whether the idea presented warrants citation or not, also accounts for the abuse of citation where writers no longer stop to think and try to establish the general and common-sense nature of particular information within the field before committing to citation. There was also a sense in which some reputation citation was employed, where works of reputable scholars in the field were cited even for general knowledge statements, with the hope that the citations from such renowned authors would bolster the piece of writing's worth in the reader's eyes.

Lack of follow-up on citations and their integration into the writer's argument gave a copy and paste feel to the presentation. Failure to locate the citation within the main argument drowned the writer's voice where the citation appeared. The presentation became an extended rendition of authors' voices to the extent that it appeared the writer was the one complementing the author's ideas, with the former devoid of original thought and dependent on the author's ideas. As McCulloch (2012:55) rightly observes, failure to manage sources is more reflective of a pedagogical than a moral

deficiency, and posits the nature of the pedagogical lack as "symptomatic of weak authorial stance and apparent lack of a clear argument."

Like Abasi et al.'s (2006:11) international Masters students at a Canadian university who envisaged their sources as "repositories of knowledge that could not be contested", there was manifestly very little interrogation of sources by the writers in this study. The sense of the "dialogic nature of writing and the rhetorical functions of citation within it" (McCulloch, 2012:66) and "…the discursive practices and strategies that balance voice effectively in high-grade postgraduate writing" (Cheung, 2015:63) were evidently missing in the theses analysed. What came out more in the different thesis was the authors' stance on the subject than the writer's interpretation and evaluation of it. The writer's responsibility to manage the interaction between the author, writer and the reader was lost. The writer left the author and reader to interact with the responsibility of making sense of the author's ideas in relation to the writer's argument being ceded or abdicated to the reader. The creation of intertextuality between the writer and author's text, which is the writer's responsibility, was lost in the manifest over-citation in all three theses. Textual or discourse appropriation is where authors' texts, words or ideas are incorporated and re-contextualized into the writer's own writing (Shi, 2004).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The foregoing data presentation and discussion support the conclusion that there was manifest preponderance of needless citations which did not serve any pragmatic purpose apart from persuading the reader that the writing was preceded by extensive reading. Much of citation use evinced the writers' inability to manage citations in academic writing. The superfluity of citations in the theses took a variety of forms and affected the quality of the presentations in diverse ways. It was apparent from the findings that mastery of effective management of citations could not be assumed even at the highest level of study (PhD).

Following these findings and conclusions, the study recommends a sensitisation of university students at all levels to the pragmatic functions of citations so that before enlisting a citation they establish what role the citation plays and communicate that to the readers. The same emphasis that is given to plagiarism should be extended to the other aspects of improper use of citations. Academic writing courses and workshops which, in my experience as a teacher educator, are normally the preserve of the initial year of undergraduate study, should at least be extended to the entire duration of undergraduate study, and at most even to undergraduate study. PhD workshops, which are a feature of some South African universities, where research design and methodology skills are developed, should include specific problematic academic writing skills particularly to the students about to write-up their theses. There is need for instruction on the employment of source material in academic writing even at postgraduate level with a greater focus on citations' rhetorical functions in the generation and communication of meaning. There is need to move away from the impression that all that is needed is adherence to technical or formatting guidelines in order to successfully utilise source material. The issue of source citation transcends mere avoidance of plagiarism and needs to be problematized on a broader spectrum than has hitherto been the case. Sometimes writers lack what McCulloch (2012) calls linguistic dexterity and the understanding of the dialogic nature of writing. For example, style guides provide extensive and detailed information on punctuation, formatting and the order of elements, but make little mention of the rhetorical function of citation.

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