Source-use expectations in assignments: The perceptions and practices of Vietnamese Master's students

Quynh Nguyen [a,b], Louisa Buckingham [b,*]

[a] University of Foreign Languages - Hue University, Viet Nam
[b] University of Auckland, 18 Symonds Street, Auckland, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative investigation into international Master's students' approach to using sources in read-to-write assignments. It investigates three stages of students' engagement with sources: understanding source-use expectations, identifying appropriate sources, and incorporating content from source texts into assignment writing. Data were compiled from text-based interviews with seven Vietnamese students, an assignment, and course-related documentation. The results provide insight into how students' perceive and respond to source-use expectations. We report on the type of information students attend to, the meanings they attach to this information, and manner in which they use source texts to support their academic literacy skills and develop their authorial voice. We further describe how electronic tools are used to identify, evaluate and interact with sources at the source-searching, reading and source integration stages, and note that students' perception of the use of text-matching software at this institution impacts the manner of their engagement with source content in their writing. We acknowledge that these students' successful performance in text-based writing assignments, despite marginal prior experience with this genre at undergraduate level, may have been facilitated by their overall above-average academic ability, their mature-student status, and prior disciplinary-relevant writing experience in the workplace.

1. Introduction

The ability to select appropriate bibliographic sources and engage with source content when composing a text is a vital skill at postgraduate level (Petrić & Harwood, 2013; Spack, 1988). This is particularly true in humanities and the social sciences, where text-based assignments entailing a substantial read-to-write component are common (Nesi & Gardner, 2012), and source use is an intrinsic feature of the display, construction and transmission of knowledge.

Students' perception of source-use requirements, and their form of engagement with texts in their writing is influenced by the type of assignment task and the assignment prompt (McCulloch, 2013; Plakans, 2010; Shi, 2004). Thus, a task which instructs students to produce an opinion or reflective essay is likely to result in forms of source use that are different from a task requiring discussion and analysis. The manner in which students interact with sources to complete assignments has been shown to have an impact on how the assignment is evaluated. Plakans (2010) and Yamada (2002) have shown that texts

produced by students who employ more higher-order reading strategies during a read-to-write task tend to be evaluated more favourably. Although two subsequent mixed-methods studies by Plakans and Gebril (2012, 2013) were less conclusive, lower scoring writers were still found to overly rely on the source text for both content and wording (Plakans & Gebril, 2013).

While the aforementioned studies offer important insights into source-use practices, the text-based writing produced in a controlled study is likely to differ from writing produced in naturalistic settings (Strømsø & Bråten, 2002). Such differences, as McCulloch (2013) previously noted, may include word length, task type, and extent of required source consultation. This is, arguably, particularly the case at Master's level, where one function of coursework assignments is to deepen students' understanding of the epistemological conventions of their discipline in preparation for the complex and sophisticated literacy demands of research writing.

Novice writers from both English-speaking and L2 backgrounds alike experience challenges in acquiring this sophisticated literacy. Whilst the more mechanical aspects of source use, such as citation styles and referencing conventions, may be addressed through explicit instruction or brief written guides, more complex rhetorical skills, such as synthesising from multiple sources and identifying shortcomings in previous lines of research, are less transparent (Pecorari, 2006).

An important component of text-based writing at graduate level involves formulating a reasoned argument that acknowledges and builds on previous work. For Master's-level students, differentiating between one's own contributions and those derived from consulted sources can entail tensions, as a miscalculation can invoke penalties. The process of negotiating one's position or staking one's claim to innovation or novelty involves acknowledging competing perspectives and expressing an appropriate degree of confidence through judicious lexical choices (Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; Loi, Lim, & Wharton, 2016; Parkinson, 2011). The resultant linguistic and rhetorical demands on L2 writers are potentially formidable, in particular for international students, who may not have been adequately initiated into the conventions of text-based assignment writing as undergraduates (Hayes & Introna, 2005; Pecorari, 2015).

Beyond the immediate literacy needs of Master's-level studies, the combined skills of written communication and critical thinking are also valued professional competencies (Litchfield, Frawley, & Nettleton. 2010). Whilst text types and communication styles inevitably differ, the skills developed during academic studies constitute a foundation for ongoing development (Moore & Morton, 2017). Master's students often possess recent professional experience relevant to their academic field (indeed, this may also be a requirement for acceptance onto some programmes). Thus, their awareness of the importance of written communication in their profession may positively influence their level of investment in written assignments, particularly as, at this level, assignments often request that students draw on their own experience, where relevant. This professional experience can also contribute to sensitising student writers to the contextual constraints or requirements of text production (e.g., material resources, time limitations, appreciation of readers' expectations).

Our approach in this study acknowledges that the form in which bibliographic sources are used in text-based writing is influenced by the student's understanding of the assignment's requirements, their ability to identify appropriate sources, and their rhetorical intentions. In light of this, we investigate main three stages of students' engagement with source use expectations in a university assignment: interpreting source-use expectations, identifying appropriate bibliographic sources, and students' engagement with content in their assignment. The three main research questions pursued in this study are as follows:

1. How do students understand the referencing expectations for their assignment?
2. What factors do students attend to when identifying appropriate sources for their assignment?
3. What factors influence the form in which students integrate source material into their writing?

2. Acquiring the skill of academic source-use conventions

Text-based writing assignments at Master's level presuppose a degree of familiarity with types of academic texts common to the discipline and the ability to engage with content to complete task requirements. The expectation that students draw on diverse and quite complex sources and produce an original rhetorically persuasive text necessitates a level of sophisticated literacy expertise that challenges student writers from English-speaking and L2 backgrounds alike (Cumming, Lai, & Cho, 2016; Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010; Hyland, 2009; Keck, 2014; Pecorari, 2003, 2006; Shi, 2004; Storch, 2009). Yet, L2 writers may experience a greater range of difficulties when commencing studies at western institutions (Wette, 2010).

Citation, as the surface-level acknowledgement of the intertextual nature of texts, embodies multiple layers of rhetorical and social meanings (Hyland, 2002). It allows writers to situate their claims within a wider disciplinary framework, and can be used to nuance the writers' alignment or divergence with previously voiced propositions. This evaluative interaction with sources encourages the emergence of writers' authorial identity and facilitates the transition from knowledge telling and display to knowledge transformation (Cumming et al., 2016; Dong, 1996; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Disciplinary norms differ with regard the inclusion, omission and the form of citations (i.e., integral or non-integral) (Hyland, 2004; Polio & Shi, 2012) and the preferred method of integrating source material into a text (i.e., through quotations or paraphrases).

The manner in which students engage with sources is influenced by the assignment task prompt and students' interpretation of the lecturer's expectations regarding source consultation (Allen, 2004; Li, 2013; Petrić & Harwood, 2013; Plakans, 2010; Ruiz-Funes, 2001; Wolfersberger, 2013). Students' approach to assignment tasks is also influenced by their educational background, previous experience with text-based writing assignments, and educational or professional aspirations (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Parks, 2000). Inevitably, their academic literacy skills also affect performance; not only may the quantity or

difficulty level of texts challenge less proficient students, but the task prompt may prove difficult to decipher (Abasi & Akbari, 2008; Currie, 1998; Delaney, 2008; Kim, 2001; Li, 2013), or may require a degree of independent critical engagement that surpasses students' current level of ability (Zhu, 2005).

Novice writers commonly employ particular compensatory strategies to address tensions involved in fulfilling source-related requirements in assignments. At the pre-writing stage, students may attempt to satisfy the requirement to select appropriate bibliographic sources by limiting their consultation to a modest number of texts or focusing primarily on those they perceive as central, authoritative or favoured by their lecturers (Li, 2013). Drafting strategies may involve attempts to demonstrate source consultation requirements by overusing citations, incorporating references to texts which have not been consulted ('dumping strategies'), or incorporating verbatim excerpts (Currie, 1998; Howard, 1995; Li, 2013; Petrić & Harwood, 2013; Stockall & Villar Cole, 2016).

Other strategies may be viewed as developmental if they are employed to support the development of academic literacy. For instance, novice writers may employ source texts as linguistic or rhetorical models or scaffolds by copying or closely replicating selected excerpts (Cumming et al., 2016; Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari, 2003; Wette, 2010; Zhu, 2005). Focused practice can help reduce the degree of close replication or writers' linguistic dependence on source texts (Keck, 2014; Wette, 2010).

Prior educational experience doubtlessly also influences students' approach to text-based assignments. Education systems which are strongly exam oriented are less likely to provide students with opportunities for the development of skills needed for text-based writing assignments such as source-searching, engagement with texts during writing and draft revision strategies (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Deckert, 1993; Kang, 2005; Matalene, 1985). Prior experience with text-based writing is likely to have involved a stronger emphasis on summarising tasks or knowledge display, rather than critical or evaluative engagement (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Kang, 2005). Hyland (2003, p. 38) notes that educational processes in Anglo-western contexts tend to reinforce "an analytical, questioning, and evaluative stance to knowledge" and encourage students to "criticize and recombine existing sources to dispute traditional wisdom and form their own points of view". While students who have progressed through this type of education system at the undergraduate level are likely to have been assessed according their performance on analytical literacy tasks, many Master's-level international students can be relatively inexperienced in this type of engagement with texts, and may consequently encounter greater challenges in adapting to the requirements of text-based writing in Anglo-western universities (DePalma & Ringer, 2011).

3. Study design

This study explores the perceptions of Vietnamese Master's students with regard to the source use expectations of an assignment and the reported strategies they employ to fulfil these. We employ a text-based interview approach (informed by Bazerman & Prior, 2004) to explore major steps in this process: students' understanding of the referencing expectations, selecting appropriate sources, and incorporating source texts into their writing. The text-based approach facilitates stimulated recall and has been previously employed in related studies (Harwood, 2008, 2009; Harwood & Petrić, 2012). The interview guide was informed by themes previously documented in the literature (e.g., Davis, 2013; Harwood & Petrić, 2012).

The study was conducted at the University of Auckland, a public institution with an emphasis on research and postgraduate studies in New Zealand, and with an enrolment of approximately 44,000 students in 2016. The annual enrolment of Vietnamese international students between 2011 and 2016 increased gradually from 72 to 98 students (Key Statistics 2011–2016, 2016). The university hosts a Vietnamese student association.

Volunteers who fulfilled the following four criteria were sought university-wide: (1) students were enrolled in first year of coursework of a Master's degree; (2) they had completed an undergraduate degree at a Vietnamese university; (3) they had never studied in an Anglophone country prior to commencing Master's studies in New Zealand; and (4) they had completed at least one text-based written assignment (of between 1000 and 3000 words, excluding the reference list) which included at least five citations, and which had received at least a 'B' grade (see Section 3.1 for further participant information).

The study employed the following data sources: a student essay, interview data, and assignment guidelines (these might also appear in course outlines). Prior to each interview participants selected and submitted to the authors a graded essay which met the aforementioned criteria. We examined the essays for conventional signals of source integration (i.e., quotation marks, and integral and non-integral citations), the number of references and citations, and their distribution.

Interviews lasting around 75 min were conducted in Vietnamese by the first author at a location chosen by the participant. These were audio-recorded and later transcribed (also by the first author), and each transcript was later verified by the respective participant. Participants brought to the interview other assignment-related documents, namely the course outline, assignment guidelines, reading lists, the marking guide, the graded assignment, and the scoring/feedback sheet. The essay and the documents were used during the interview to aid reflection, provide evidence of students' source use, and identify how students used available documents to construct their understanding of source use expectations. When responding to specific interview questions, participants were requested to re-read sections of their assignment and reflect on their source use. Guiding questions (see Appendix for interview guide) were used to explore the students' own understanding of their choice of source integration (i.e., paraphrase, quotation or summary).

We acknowledge that students' understanding of concepts, such as paraphrase and summary, may differ. Indeed, in attempts to define a paraphrase, previous studies have conceded that the degree of linguistic originality or linguistic faithfulness of a paraphrase (when compared to the original formulation) can vary considerably in both students' texts and published writing (e.g., Keck, 2006, 2014; Pecorari, 2003; Sun & Yang, 2015). Our intention in this study is to understand students' *own* accounts of their engagement with sources, and the data compiled are thus self reports.

Using NVivo 11, the interview transcripts were coded for themes (and sub-themes). The initial coding step focused on capturing the main themes. These were primarily stimulated by the question prompts in the interview guide. For the second and third research questions, the identification of themes was guided (but not constrained) by themes or categories previously identified in related literature. For question two, the framework in Thompson, Morton, and Storch (2013) informed the coding process, while for research question 3, categories from Petrić (2012) were considered initially useful. The second round of coding focused on identifying sub-themes; this included revising the relationship between main and sub-themes, as some topics (e.g., the use of technology) were relevant to more than one main theme. As an inter-rater reliability measure, 20% of the interview data was coded separately by a Vietnamese native-speaker research assistant who had received previous training in the coding procedure. No inconsistencies in coding the main themes were identified; however, the process led to the identification of additional sub-themes that had not been identified in the initial session (e.g., support for social media sites as sources).

3.1. Participants

We secured the participation of seven students (three females and four males) who fulfilled the stipulated criteria, and each provided written, informed consent for their assignment and interview data to be used for this study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to individuals.

All participants had been in New Zealand for longer than four months at the time of data collection, and this was their first visit to an Anglophone country (see Table 1). Enrolled in Master's studies in one of three different faculties, they were required to complete an original Master's dissertation. As international students, they are required to possess a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 (or the equivalent).

Table 1
Participants' profile.

Name gender and age	Field of Master's studies	Field of undergraduate study in Vietnam
Tu (f) 29	International Business	International Economics
Phu (m) 31	Public Policy	Engineering in Electronics and Telecommunications
Nga (f) 26	Politics and International Relations	International Studies
Viet (m) 29	Museum and Culture Heritage	History
Quyen (f) 27	Public Health	Pharmacology
Bach (m) 28	Public Health	Pharmacology
Hung (m) 27	Operation and Supply Chain Management.	Transport Economics

All participants were recipients of Vietnamese government scholarships and were required to return to Vietnam upon completion of their degree. They were all early-career professionals in Vietnam with between 3 and 7 years' prior work experience[1]: Tu, Phu, and Viet worked for government institutions, Nga and Hung were university lecturers, Quyen worked for a medical research institution, and Bach worked in health services for a multi-national corporation. As a consequence, all participants had needed to perform quite sophisticated literacy-intensive tasks as part of their professional duties prior to arriving in New Zealand, and they expected to return to the same work environment. Three participants anticipated that they would need to continue to produce research-informed article-type texts for publication (in-house or external), and four anticipated that they would need to continue producing research-informed reports.

4. Findings

We report firstly on the participants' prior experience with written assignments during their undergraduate degree in Vietnam. We then provide an overview of the use of citations by each participant in their assignment. We subsequently report on the findings related to the three research questions.

None of the participants had written assignments in English or received instruction on referencing conventions as undergraduate students in Vietnam. While they had used sources for their university undergraduate dissertation,[2] they claimed to have received no clear guidance on source selection or source use conventions, and had not known about established citation systems (e.g., APA). Five participants had first learned about such conventions in the academic learning skills workshops for incoming students, and two claimed to have learned from guidebooks and student peers.

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[1] To be eligible for a government scholarship, applicants need to be employed by a professional institution in Vietnam and have at least 2 years' relevant work experience. They are required to work in Vietnam for another 2 years upon completion of their degree.

[2] To graduate with an undergraduate degree in Vietnam, students are required to complete an original dissertation in their final semester.

We examined the assignment each participant selected with respect to length, the number of sources included in the reference list, and the number of in-text citations relative to the word count (or citation density) (see Table 2). No correspondence was found between the number of sources in the reference list and number of in-text citations used in the assignments. The two students who included the highest relative number of sources in the reference list (Tu and Bach) produced a relative number of in-text citations which was close to the overall average (14.3 per 1000 words). Thus, including more sources in the reference list did not result in a rise in in-text citations. Conversely, the students who produced the highest number of in-text citations (Hung and Quyen) did not include the greatest number of sources in the reference list. That is, students engaged repeatedly with the sources in the reference list, rather than cite individual sources on isolated occasions.

Table 2
Citation density and number of sources.

Student and assignment length[a]	No. of citations[b]	No. of sources[b]
Tu (1097)	13 (11.9)	12 (10.9)
Phu (1999)	14 (7.0)	10 (5.0)
Nga (3218)	29 (9.0)	24 (7.5)
Viet (2189)	22 (10.1)	13 (5.9)
Quyen (2509)	56 (22.3)	20 (8.0)
Bach (3298)	52 (15.8)	36 (10.9)
Hung (2663)	63 (23.7)	10 (3.8)

[a] The word count excludes the reference list.
[b] The total number followed by the number per 1000 words in brackets.

4.1. Perceptions of source consultation expectations

Students' understanding of source consultation expectations was derived from one or more of the following: the assignment guidelines (or related course documents); the marking guide; and lecturers' feedback on prior assignments. In each case, the information might be conveyed either explicitly or implicitly. This information influenced students' approach to source searching, their reading strategies, and their interaction with source material during drafting.

4.1.1. Assignment guidelines

Assignment guidelines (or related documents) were fairly idiosyncratic with regard to content, organisation and formatting. They often contained explicit mention, or at least clues, of the lecturer's expectations concerning source use. Explicit requirements included stipulations regarding the minimum number of sources, type, or citation style, and the fulfilment of these could verified objectively. All participants were able to identify one or more such requirements and demonstrate that they had fulfilled these. For instance, Tu noted that she had included the required minimum of six sources in her essay; Nga had included the minimum of four sources from the four journal titles provided; Phu had used a 'must-cite' reference (stipulated by the lecturer) as a central source in his work; and all referred to the requirement to use a particular citation system (e.g., APA). Participants considered that fulfilling such requirements was relatively straightforward, and addressed these at an early stage of assignment completion.

Implicit requirements entailed students' perceptions of source use expectations informed by the course reading list and their understanding of official policies on plagiarism. The reading list was the primary source of implicitly conveyed information. The format of such lists varied widely, ranging from a simple list of recommended sources for further reading to multiple categories such as 'background readings,' 'core readings,' and 'suggested readings'. The extent and manner in which participants used the list to prepare their assignment varied greatly, and they held similarly mixed views regarding its usefulness. Five participants claimed to consult the reading list frequently at the (typically initial) stage of source searching and they appreciated its practical or scholarly value. It was viewed as a clue as to the expected orientation of students' reading for assignments in terms of topics or content, and was also valued as a resource which would expedite the identification of key concepts or terms required for subsequent electronic catalogue searches.

The remaining two students ignored the reading lists (Tu and Hung) and undertook the source consultation component of the assignment independent of this. They viewed the reading list as a collection of sources for further reading or background knowledge for lectures and final exams, and considered it insufficient for the work needed for assignments.

4.1.2. Marking guide

Five students mentioned the marking guide as a source of guidance on source-related expectations. Viet highlighted the sentence in the guide which required students to contextualise the topic, to 'connect the topic in a broader view' as important to secure a high grade. He interpreted this as a requirement to discuss his topic within current bodies of literature to qualify for 'a successful paper'. Three students (Viet, Quyen and Bach) identified a category in the marking guide labelled 'reading and knowledge'. Both understood this as a requirement to demonstrate their breadth of disciplinary knowledge. This was interpreted as encouragement to cite as many sources as possible, as illustrated in Example 1.

Example 1. There's a section called "reading and knowledge", then my lecturer will look at my reference list to mark my use of sources. I will definitely avoid falling short there. (Bach)[3]

4.1.3. Lecturer's feedback

Students' responses to the questions regarding lecturer feedback demonstrated that feedback on previous assignments guided their behaviour on subsequent assignments. Students described how they adapted or continued certain source-use practices according to their interpretation of the feedback (or its absence). Students believed their lecturers tended to note visible features of students' source use such as quantity, variety or breadth of sources, and a publication's credentials. To establish this, students believed lecturers primarily referred to the essay's list of references.

Participants interpreted feedback they had received subjectively. General feedback on their work was commonly interpreted as a judgement of their source use with respect to quantity and quality. By 'source quantity', students referred to the number of in-text citations and sources in the list of references. Students believed that a high number of references in both cases would be perceived by the lecturer as a demonstration of their knowledgeability. By 'source quality' students meant the source author's credentials. From examples participants gave of lecturers' feedback, it was clear the concepts of quantity and quality overlapped. For instance, both Viet and Bach claimed they received the evaluation 'good' as feedback on their assignments, which led them to believe they had met lecturer's source use expectations with regard to citing a wide range of authoritative texts.

Conversely, negatively-worded feedback or low grades were interpreted as evidence of inadequacies in quantity or the quality of sources and this influenced subsequent practice. For instance, Quyen focused on quantity to fulfil the 'Reading and Knowledge' category in a major course assignment and included 28 items in her list of references. After receiving only a 'B' grade, she interpreted this number as being insufficient, as a peer had included 40 items and had received an 'A' grade for the same category. Similar sentiments are expressed by Bach in Example 2.

Example 2. I got good comments for the 'Reading and Knowledge' section [*of the grade sheet*]. It depends on the quantity and quality of my sources. I noticed that my lecturer pays attention to the number of sources, as I knew from his feedback on a classmate's assignment. She had a lower grade for 'Reading and Knowledge'. I'm also sure that my lecturer checked my reference list; as it's fine, I'll keep on citing many sources. (Bach)

With regard to the mechanics of referencing conventions, the provision of feedback was very inconsistent. Four participants claimed they had never received feedback on their use of the citation style system, although the assignments they had submitted contained numerous instances of incorrect usage. Of those who had received comments, these centred on issues such as the omission of page numbers and the in-text citation of website URLs. Regardless of whether they had personally received such feedback, all participants expressed the belief that inconsistent usage of the citation system constituted a minor flaw which did not affect their grade.

4.2. Approaches to source selection

Participants identified three main criteria they used during source-searching tasks for their assignment: authoritativeness, relevance, and recency. The main criterion concerned source credentials. An authoritative source was perceived to be reliable; drawing from and citing such a source was considered to have positive repercussions for the evaluation of their assignment. An author (or work) was considered authoritative if the name was mentioned by the course lecturer, included in the reading list, or widely cited in course readings. Other factors which could potentially bestow authority on a source included the author's affiliation, the publisher's status, or the inclusion of the text in databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, or the university library electronic catalogue.

On occasion, the rhetorical style of authoritative texts could disrupt comprehension; three participants (Phu, Nga, and Hung) described strategies they used to assist their comprehension of such texts. As these works were likely to be widely cited, the participants resorted to consulting secondary works on the same topic area (that is, sources which summarised ideas previously presented in the primary authoritative text). By using electronic in-text searches to locate keywords, they were able to focus their intensive reading on selected excerpts to extract specific details they required for their assignment. These secondary sources often provided an alternative formulation or summary of the original idea(s) that was more readily comprehensible. In most cases, just the high profile author (the primary source) was cited and not the secondary source.

All students expressed awareness of the potentially inappropriate nature of using Internet sites as sources, in particular private or non-institutional domains. One participant, however, pointed to the value of social media sites for accessing information on a socially sensitive topic in Vietnam, the Vietnamese LGBT community, in light of the absence of scholarly work on such topics within a Vietnamese context.

The second criterion was 'relevance' (a term students used themselves), which was related to the perceived utility of a source. Some students defined 'relevant sources' as those which provided content for the construction of arguments, such as

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[3] All interview excerpts were translated into English by the first author. Back-translation by a bilingual research assistant was used to ensure the original meaning had been conserved (as recommended in Brislin, 1970).

statistical data, direct quotations from an authority, or statements in a government document. 'Relevance' also referred excerpts from sources that could contribute to strengthening their own authorial voice. This could be in the form of a quotation or paraphrase that provided linguistic or rhetorical scaffolding to the students' text. For example, Phu expressed how he deliberately looked for 'relevant' excerpts that would help organise his discussion section. The students tended to seek content, whether ideas or factual information, that supported their views; they did not intentionally explore sources to identify counter views (Example 3).

Example 3. The very first criterion is that the content of the source text should be compatible with my viewpoint. For example, I cited Creswell, a famous author, and he had similar viewpoints with the ones I wanted to express in the Introduction, so I included him. (Phu)

To me, the most important criterion is relevance, which means the author's opinion is similar to mine. My discipline has so many debatable viewpoints, but if I find some good arguments that aren't similar to what I'm after, then I won't use them, I won't cite it [*the text*]. (Nga)

The criterion regarding recency appeared important for participants from Health Sciences and Business. These three participants claimed that a recent publication year was positively viewed in their disciplines. This had implications for both search searching and drafting stages. These students tended to limit their bibliographic searches to material published within the last few years, and recency of publication was considered an important factor when selecting sources for in-text citations (Example 4).

Example 4. The nature of the Business field is that it's changing daily. New ideas appear and I have to demonstrate my up-to-date knowledge in the assignment. The publication year is one of my important criteria when choosing what to cite. (Hung)

Personally, I look for most recent sources. Older publications are only possible if they're exceptional or in the reading list. I always set my search preference for a time range as recent as possible. (Quyen)

4.3. Source integration: quotations, paraphrases and summaries

Students claimed primarily to use paraphrasing to integrate content from sources. Quotations were reserved for specific rhetorical or linguistic goals, whilst original summaries were often avoided due to the literacy challenges these entailed. These points are discussed in turn below. Students' engagement with sources in their writing was also influenced by students' understanding of the institutional policies on source use. When describing their forms of engagement with textual borrowings, all students independently mentioned the institution's plagiarism policy.

4.3.1. Quotations

A range of reasons were identified for students' use and disuse of direct quotations; these could be classified into three of the four categories recorded in Petrić (2012): source-related reasons; writer's goals; and beliefs and fears. No mention was made, however, of examples which reflected the fourth category, 'external pressures' (i.e., the incorporation of quoted chunks to accelerate writing due to time constraints).

All students mentioned reasons for using quotations which were related to their evaluation of the source. These reasons included language use (i.e., whether it was viewed as sophisticated and succinct), the text's or author's credentials, and the degree of consistency of the quoted content with the students' own ideas or rhetorical aim. By quoting material that the student assessed as being authored by an authority, students believed themselves able to strengthen their own position. These students appeared more concerned with instances of alignment, and they did not purposely seek to incorporate quoted material which contrasted with the view they wished to promote. Quoted excerpts thus contributed to strengthening students' confidence in their emerging academic identity. The excerpts in Example 5 exemplify this motivation.

Example 5. This is a direct quote from a nation's minister, who also shares the same views as me. His statement is evidence to show that my argument is correct (Tu)

The author has a very clear and well-expressed idea, which is the same as what I want, so I quote it in order to echo his words, rather than using my own words. (Phu)

An example of how a quotation was used in a student's work appears in Example 6. Nga explained that the quotation contributed to illustrating the reasoning process underlying her claim, and she perceived that the authority of the source text ('a famous excerpt from a White Paper' and 'an official announcement') strengthened her credibility.

Example 6. Extract with quotation from Nga's assignment

China also prioritises the naval forces in its military modernisation as "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned" (People's Republic of China Information Office of the State Council 2015). (Nga)

Students' decision to quote was also influenced by their objective to attain a more succinct quality in their writing. The selective use of quoted excerpts helped students avoid the potential wordiness of a paraphrase and keep within the word limits of the assignment.

A final important reason for using quotations was students' insecurity regarding other forms of engagement with the source. All students expressed insecurities related to their evolving academic literacy skills. These entailed the fears of inadequate source text comprehension, particularly in the case of dense and abstract content, and of lack of confidence in their ability to paraphrase such excerpts. Commonly recurring phrases in students' interviews were "hard/impossible to paraphrase" and "can't express in my own language".

4.3.2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing was viewed as an indispensable skill in their assignment writing. The reasons students gave for selecting to paraphrase were principally twofold: confidence that their linguistic ability sufficed to retain the original meaning; and the belief that the excerpt did not warrant a quotation. Students might nevertheless rely on authors' original wording when paraphrasing, especially when working with source texts that were challenging due to their length, rhetorical sophistication, or the presence of terminology or unfamiliar foreign words. Students acknowledged re-using key terms to ensure the text's message was retained and to demonstrate their repertoire of disciplinary-specific expressions (Example 7a). An example of a paraphrase that Viet considered to illustrate his attempt to emulate an appropriate academic style appears in Example 7b. During their consultation of multiple sources on a similar topic, students identified a common discourse across texts that they endeavoured to emulate in their own writing, without needing to attribute this influence to any particular author. This is illustrated by Quyen in Example 7a.

Example 7a. When I read the sources, I find many authors talking about the same topics or with similar arguments or descriptions. Their vocabulary and writing style are excellent and very specific to my subject, so I learned to mix and reuse their writing so I can create a final paraphrased text that isn't the same as any of the sources I used. (Quyen)

I like the quote "Stand on the shoulder of giants" on Google Scholar's homepage. It's not only about inheriting knowledge from giants, but we also need to learn from their use of language, vocabulary, and style. In this way, we can develop our language expertise and writing skills. (Viet)

Example 7b. Exacted paraphrase from Viet's assignment

Venegas (2002) further argues that the notion of sexuality is not a relevant topic for family audiences and could be criticized by museums' existing audiences. (Viet)

4.3.3. Summarising

Students tended to avoid formulating summaries. This might be due to the limited length of their texts, the nature of the assignment prompt, and students' prioritisation of (and greater familiarity with) paraphrasing. Summarising from different textual sources also presents additional literacy challenges. The two students who had used summary writing in their assignments, Bach and Viet, each engaged with a single source text, and their comprehension of this was aided by either a visual aid or the use of their L1. In the case of Bach, the assignment prompt required the use of a particular model, and this first necessitated a brief summary of a diagram. In the case of Viet, the source text was in Vietnamese. Students did not necessarily need to produce original summaries, however. Two students, Quyen and Hung, scanned source texts specifically for summary-like sentences that could be re-used; in both cases, the students proceeded to paraphrase the summary sentence (Example 8).

Example 8. I usually see ready-made summaries; for example, some principles may have a very long explanation. In that case, I take the summaries the author has written and paraphrase them. […] So, instead of reading everything to summarise, I pick out the summary sentences written by the author to paraphrase. (Hung)

I don't summarise any particular source because I need to read a wide variety of books and articles, and there are so many sources out there for me to cite. Summarising a book or an article is too long. I only need specific sentences from these sources, so I use paraphrases. (Nga)

4.4. Perceptions of institutional policy

The University's official policy on plagiarism was presented in uniform terms in all assignment guidelines. In their explanations of their source use practices (particularly concerning quotations and paraphrases), participants' invariably referred to their perception of the policy and their understanding of the measures taken to enforce it. When prompted in a follow-up question to explain how they personally understood the policy, they all referred to both the need to reference sources appropriately and the threat of punitive measures. This could generate anxieties (e.g., Example 9).

Example 9. What worries me the most is not the ideas of my essay or poor quality of writing but the fear of plagiarism if I were falsely accused of it. Plagiarism is not as strict in Vietnam as over here […] I feel so much tension. (Nga)

Central to participants' understanding of plagiarism within their current context was their association of this with the text-matching software employed at the university, Turnitin. Their understanding of how the software functioned was largely anecdotal, however. For instance, Hung and Bach erroneously believed they might risk losing points if the software showed their work had a high similarity percentage (e.g., Example 10).

Example 10. I don't like quoting. It increases the similarity detection percentage on Turnitin. Although I know the lecturer will check if I credit the sources properly, I personally don't like that scenario. (Bach)

My essay will be submitted to Turnitin, and if the similarity results are over ten percent or so, my essay's score will be deducted. [...] I don't like it if the similarity percentage is too high on Turnitin, so I use paraphrases. (Hung)

Awareness of the plagiarism policy and how this was enforced through text-matching software influenced students' approach to source use in their texts. To avoid instances which might be construed as misappropriation, alternatives to verbatim textual appropriation (i.e., re-using words or phrases, or quotations) were often preferred, even when textual borrowings were used with appropriate referencing conventions. Unprompted, three students mentioned techniques to avoid using verbatim excerpts from the text (e.g., Bach and Hung in Example 10, and Quyen in Example 7a).

A second strategy involved the diligent use of author citations as a protective shield. There were two approaches to this. Students copied citations that appeared in a given text, or they relied on intuition (or memory) to associate certain sources with particular ideas. In both cases, students did not necessarily consult the cited source and, as a result, could not always be certain that the referenced content was attributable to the cited source.

The inclusion of a citation with almost every sentence (as expressed by Quyen and Bach in Example 11), indicates an over-reliance on other voices in the crafted text. By being overly cautious, students risked weakening the development of their own authorial voice. Alternatively, students may simply lack awareness of how to express authorial responsibility for propositions such as staking a claim or exercising a critique with an appropriate level of confidence or directness.

Example 11. I included as many references as possible, as many as possible, as much reading as possible. I use at least a reference for every sentence I wrote, and I never leave a sentence un-referenced. I feel that, if I write a sentence without any reference or source, it's not right, it's not justifiable, not wise. (Quyen)

I have properly referenced all the sources I cite [...] So I give each sentence a citation, otherwise it's plagiarising. This is how I secure myself against plagiarism. (Bach)

5. Discussion

Source-use expectations for Master's-level assignments may be both implicitly or explicitly conveyed to students. In most cases, assignment guidelines did not provide explicit guidance, and students relied on indications from various alternative sources of information (e.g., the coursebook, lectures, or previous grades and feedback).

Students' identification of clues to help fathom source-use expectations and the inferences they drew from these were largely subjective, but they were nevertheless influential in shaping students' beliefs and practices. For instance, feedback such as 'limited reading' or 'good range of reading and knowledge' was perceived as an evaluation of their reading breadth and the source credentials, rather than as feedback on their understanding of the content. Students considered that the lecturer's evaluation of their source use constituted a decisive factor in determining the grade of their assignments. In consequence, their perceptions of the lecturer's preferences for particular authors or publications shaped their approach to source searching and source use. In contrast with previous findings in Thompson et al. (2013), 'ease of understanding' was not identified by these students as a criterion that guided source selection. In the case of rhetorically sophisticated texts, some students employed strategies to facilitate reading comprehension, such as consulting alternative sources on the same topic area to broaden their exposure to different formulations of a particular idea or concept.

In consonance with previous findings (e.g., Davis, 2013; Harwood & Petrić, 2012; Petrić, 2012; and Stockall & Villar Cole, 2016), strategies employed by students in this study to enhance the evaluation of their assignment included maximising the number of sources and citations to foster an impression of extensive reading, and prioritising the citing of sources perceived as prestigious, or preferred by their lecturers. Electronic source searching made it relatively easy to inflate the number of references and citations. This online engagement expedited the reading stage of source selection, as students could reduce their reading to selected sections of a text identified through targeted in-text searches. While these strategies may have fulfilled their immediate goals (i.e., to attain a good grade), they may not necessarily have favoured students' ongoing development of higher-level skills related to source use. Indeed, prioritising the quantity of references is often associated with superficial reading comprehension and source text engagement (Harwood & Petrić, 2012).

While many of the aforementioned strategies may be viewed as largely compensatory, a differentiation between compensatory and developmental strategies is difficult, and these may partially overlap or co-exist. Indeed, compensatory strategies may also benefit students' longer-term literacy development. For instance, students compensated for their lack of in-depth knowledge of the literature by relying on the recurrence of particular author's names in course-related bibliographic material to identify authoritative or central works. The same practice could constitute a developmental strategy, if this initial identification of prominent names or works was used to generate an awareness of keywords, concepts and additional authors that could be used during subsequent source-searching activities.

Participants' accounts of their source-searching and drafting shed light on the importance of technology. The Internet was an important tool to locate potentially relevant sources and assess their credentials, and this tool enabled students to employ efficient and targeted searches. These went beyond the practices reported in McCulloch (2013) which depended on hardcopy texts. Participants manipulated the focus of their searches of selected Internet sites by experimenting with different keyword searches. Their evaluation of identified sources was informed by citation counts available from Google Scholar or Scopus. In-

text searches using keywords constituted an efficient approach to determining the potential utility of downloaded electronic texts and to identifying excerpts for subsequent intensive reading. The electronic format thus profoundly affected the manner in which students engaged with texts.

The ease and confidence with which participants integrated information technology into their source-searching (and reading) practices may be partially influenced by common approaches to information searching and text production in their respective work environments, as procedures that contribute to the efficacy of text production are valued in most professional contexts (Moore & Morton, 2017). While such practices may be considered superficial or compensatory reading strategies in an academic environment (e.g., Plakans, 2010; Yamada, 2002), they were nevertheless effective, as participants' assignments received the highest letter grade.

At the drafting stage, the broader educational context, which included students' perception of the university's policy on plagiarism and the technology in place to enforce this, influenced students' engagement with sources in their writing. In contrast to previous accounts of the inflated usage of quotations in student writing (Luzón, 2015; Petrić, 2012; Shi, 2004), quotations were infrequent in students' assignments. Participants voiced apprehension with regard to the verbatim inclusion of textual excerpts, as their identification by text-matching software might negatively impact the evaluation of their work.

Quotations were reserved for excerpts with particular linguistic complexity, or for ideas whose authorship would be immediately recognisable to the lecturer. This association of their own work with that of a prestigious published author has been previously documented as a strategy to lend authorial weight to the student's developing academic identity (Hirvela & Du, 2013). This behaviour displays a degree of reader awareness in that students strategically selected sources with consideration to how these might impact the reception of their assignment. Le Ha (2006) notes that cultural reasons underlie the propensity of Vietnamese students to employ quotations from well-known figures in the expectation that this will lead to a favourable evaluation of their work. Arguably, however, the practice of preferentially citing high profile authors is widespread in academia and is not necessarily limited to a specific cultural background or academic level (Case & Higgins, 2000).

Students' approaches to the integration of source texts in their own writing converged on paraphrasing and, confirming previous findings in Shi (2012) and Petrić (2012), the challenges this presented were largely due to the linguistic and epistemological complexities inherent in reformulating excerpts from a sophisticated text. Students' reports indicated that they prioritise linguistic faithfulness, in the sense that they seek to model their version on the original. A variation on this involved the re-combination of textual borrowings from multiple texts which are employed as a strategy to support the student's developing linguistic and rhetorical repertoire.

The relative absence of instances of summaries in this study echoes findings in Howard et al. (2010) in their examination of undergraduate text-based assignments. A possible reason for this avoidance is because the skill requires a high level of engagement with the source to ensure adequate comprehension of the targeted excerpt (Hirvela & Du, 2013; Kim, 2001). Previous studies have noted that students' avoidance of summaries is linked to difficulties in synthesising information from diverse source texts (Hirvela & Du, 2013; Howard et al., 2010; Jamieson, 2013). However, limitations imposed by the assignment itself, including length stipulations, the complexity of the assignment prompt, and source consultation requirements doubtlessly also influence this (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2016). It is also significant that a summary identified in this study was revealed to actually constitute a paraphrase of a summary extracted from a source. This finding suggests a potential weakness in relying solely on textual analyses of student writing (e.g., Loan & Pramoolsook, 2016), as the writer's actual intentions remain obscure.

Of additional interest is students' prioritisation of sources supportive of their line of argument and their avoidance of sources which might counter this. This suggests a preference for seeking accommodation or alignment and an avoidance of entering into controversy or explicitly rebutting claims made in source texts. While Loan and Pramoolsook (2016) claim this practice reflects the Taoist and Confucian heritage of Vietnamese culture, we attribute this to a variety of factors, among which cultural values may play only a subsidiary role. Students' avoidance of critical engagement may be explained by their lack of confidence in their position, in their mastery of disciplinary knowledge, and in their ability to formulate a refutation convincingly with an appropriate tone (Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; Loi et al., 2016). This view is supported by Hyland's (2002) cross-disciplinary analysis of published writing which found open refutation of another's work to be "a serious face-threatening act" (p. 129) that requires considerable rhetorical skill. A second potential explanation concerns the nature or wording of the task, as assignment guidelines may not necessarily prompt critical engagement (Miller et al., 2016). Finally, participants' prior professional socialisation may also offer a partial explanation. Whilst valued in academia, in-depth, analytical engagement with other texts is less commonly practised in the workplace, where expedient, albeit informed, decision-making is favoured (Moore & Morton, 2017). Thus, excepting perhaps the two early-career academics, participants' prior experience of workplace written communication may not have provided opportunities to develop critical rhetorical skills.

Participants in this study displayed a relatively well-developed understanding of source use conventions and had developed strategies to fulfil their assignment expectations successfully. Their level of ability appears more advanced than the practices and beliefs regarding source use described in Stockall and Villar Cole's (2016) study of undergraduate students in a bilingual programme in the US, and in other studies of undergraduate students at US universities captured in Duff's (2010) overview of academic literacy socialisation. As the participants in the current study commenced their Master's studies largely without prior experience of coursework assessment through text-based writing, their adaptation to the literacy expectations of their coursework is notable. This may be explained by the fact that, as holders of merit-based Vietnamese government scholarships, they were considered high-achieving students in their home context. Secondly, the completion of

undergraduate studies combined with their prior work history indicates they already possessed a degree of socialisation into their professional discourse community. Finally, during the initial orientation period, most had attended short workshops on writing expectations, library use, and electronic reference tool use, which, for students of this profile, appear to have provided adequate orientation. These factors, combined with their mature student status (they were on average five years older than the postgraduate students in Davis, 2013, for instance), may have facilitated their smoother adaptation to the literacy expectations at their host institution.

6. Conclusion

This study explored Vietnamese Master's-level students' interpretations of source-use requirements and their ensuing practices with regard to completing a text-based written assignment for Master's level coursework. Source-use expectations were both explicitly and implicitly conveyed in the assignment guidelines, marking guides, and lecturer's feedback. In the absence of systematic and transparent guidance, students subjectively interpreted information derived from these sources which they perceived as pertinent. While students varied in their perception of and response to these perceived expectations, the strategies students employed were successful in the sense that their assignment received a high grade. Students placed considerable importance in the selection and citation of sources which they perceived to be in accordance with their lecturer's preferences, and they tended to interpret the evaluation of their assignment largely in terms of their source-use performance.

Despite their relative inexperience hitherto with text-based assignment writing, these students demonstrated effective strategies to locate and select appropriate sources. Besides inferring the relative importance of sources through the recurrence of references in bibliographic material, strategic use was made of electronic resources (such as databases and citation counts) to ascertain the relevance and evaluate the importance of particular works. The electronic search function also influenced the manner in which students engaged with a text. This facility effectively lessened students' overall reading load as it enabled the efficient targeting of particular information within a text, and a comparison of the formulation of particular propositions across different texts. This strategy supported students' comprehension of ideas or propositions that might have been couched in fairly abstract or complex terms in the initial text consulted. The exposure to alternative formulations assisted in the task of paraphrasing, as key chunks (words of phrases) from different texts could serve as models or could even be reused in the student's own writing.

The use of text-matching software by the university also contributed to students' awareness of the ease with which the identification of textual borrowings (transgressive or otherwise) might bring discredit to their work. For instance, the impact of quotations on the similarity score encouraged students to limit these to instances in which the author's rhetorical adeptness or credentials were viewed as benefiting the student's own text.

Several pedagogical implications may be derived from our findings. Both assignment guidelines and assessment criteria (and in turn lecturers' feedback) can encourage the implementation of developmental strategies through greater explicitness regarding the level of engagement required with key texts or concepts (Hayes & Introna, 2005; Plakans & Gebril, 2013), and through guidance with source selection and expected quantity. Indeed, explicitness and transparency were recurring themes in the meta-analysis of source use pedagogy by Liu, Lin, Kou, and Wang (2016). We echo Miller, Mitchell and Pessoa's (2016) call for guidance on the expected usage of complex or sophisticated sources to facilitate students' comprehension of the linkages envisaged by the lecturer between such texts, the assignment prompt and the student's own writing.

Given students' concerns regarding their source-use practices and apprehension about plagiarism allegations, we recommend that assessment criteria include an evaluation of students' conceptual engagement with sources. Lecturer's feedback that primarily focuses on the number and type of sources referenced (as reported by students in this study) is unlikely to foster this type of engagement. In light of the pedagogical potential of text-matching software to support the development of text-based writing skills, we echo previous recommendations to facilitate students' access to originality reports (Hayes & Introna, 2005; Stapleton, 2012).

Finally, we note the importance of strategies employed by the participants to engage with texts electronically. We surmise that, increasingly, Master's level students with a strong professional profile will be adept at accessing and reading texts online. Indeed, a common writing strategy in many workplace contexts involves the identification, recombining, and re-contextualisation of content derived from previously published texts (Jones, 2015). We encourage the recognition of this skill in EAP courses. Tasks with a read-to-write component should include steps such as performing in-text searches in multiple texts to identify specific content, followed by a close reading of selected selections to produce paraphrases or summaries of key concepts, or to contrast differing viewpoints.

We wish to acknowledge several limitations to this study. Despite the use of texts to prompt recall, students' accounts of their source use practices represent a partial view, due to their possible lack of awareness of their actual practices, inaccurate recollection, or their desire to avoid disclosing certain information. Furthermore, we acknowledge in hindsight that our participant selection favoured high-achieving students. Prior to the commencement of data collection, we were unaware that Vietnamese international students at this university tend to be scholarship recipients. Whilst this may limit the generalisability of our findings, we nevertheless note that these students had not previously undertaken text-based assignments for assessment purposes as undergraduates, and they possessed negligible experience of academic writing in English before commencing their Master's degree.

Appendix

Questions about students' undergraduate degree in Vietnam

Introductory question:
Tell me about the written assignments you did during your degree at your university in Vietnam.
Text-based writing experience:

- How often did you write essays at undergraduate level?
- Were you required to incorporate other sources into these essays?
- How did you learn how to use sources in your essays at undergraduate level? (e.g., Were you taught how to do this? Were there any written guidelines?)

Questions about students' current Master's studies

Introductory questions:

Tell me about the written assignments you do in your degree at this university.
Tell me about your experience using sources in your assignments.

Sources in assignment materials:

Can you show me the part in your assignment guidelines that indicates the number of different sources you need to cite in your assignment?
Can you show me the part in your assignment guidelines that provides a list of key or recommended readings?
(If 'yes') How did you use these readings when writing your assignment?
How did you know where to find (other) source texts for your assignment? (e.g., Course materials, previous assignments etc.)
How did you decide if a source text was useful?
For each source you consulted, did you read the entire work or just parts of it?
How did you manage to read the more difficult texts?
How did you identify relevant information for your assignment in these source texts?

Using content from sources:

Can you show me examples of a quotation/paraphrase/summary in your assignment?
What would you call this example of source use? (i.e., quotation, paraphrase or summary)
Why did you use (*for example*) a paraphrase here, and not a quotation or summary?
What sort of difficulties did you have when trying to write this paraphrase?
How did you paraphrase ideas from the more difficult texts?
How did you learn to use the correct referencing style?

Lecturer feedback:

Tell me about the feedback you received on this assignment. Can I see it?
Why do you think you received this grade on the assignment?
Tell me about the feedback you received on previous assignments.

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Quynh Nguyen completed her MA in Applied Linguistics at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), with specific focus on academic writing. She teaches courses in ESL and linguistics at Hue University in Vietnam. Her research interests include English for academic purposes and second language acquisition.

Louisa Buckingham has taught academic writing at undergraduate and postgraduate levels for many years. In 2016, she published *Doing a Research Project in English Studies* (Routledge), a text which has a strong focus on the development of academic writing skills for international graduate-level students.