An investigation of first year university students' confidence in using academic literacies

Shashi Nallaya, James E. Hobson and Tamra Ulpen
University of South Australia

Commencing students in universities today are very diverse with regards to their academic preparation, language, and cultural background. Some of these students are also first in family to attend university. With such diverse student profiles and previous learning experiences, it is possible that some students may not be confident to employ the academic literacies required in their study program. This paper reports on a mixed-method case study undertaken at an Australian university, to explore commencing students' confidence in using academic literacies at the start of their study program and after they had completed two semesters of instruction. Data were collected from 120 students at Time 1 and 54 students at Time 2 of the study. The study found that some students were uncertain of completing some task types such as case studies, article reviews and critical reflections. Students also lacked confidence employing discipline-specific vocabulary, critical thinking, and critical writing skills. Although, students' confidence levels in employing academic literacies improved overall after two semesters of instruction, confidence in writing critically appeared to remain low. Furthermore, students with English as an additional language (EAL), those studying externally and students who had taken a break from their studies, identified challenges in multiple areas of academic literacies.

Introduction

The widening participation movement that sought to make higher education more equitable and accessible for under-represented groups has contributed to diverse student profiles in universities (Bradley, 2008; The University of Edinburgh, 2016). Today, students commence studies with varied academic preparation, financial disposition, linguistic and cultural background. Many students are also first in family to attend university (Groves & O'Shea, 2019). Students' ability to manage transition to university significantly affects their chance of completing their study program. Students who are ill-prepared for university studies have higher drop-out rates (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Lecturers indicate that students who enrol with a literacy deficit are more likely to withdraw (Hale, 2020). With such a wide diversity of profiles and previous learning experiences, it is possible that some commencing students are challenged by the need to employ academic literacies in their studies (Dooey & Grellier, 2020). Academic literacies can be defined as "the ability to communicate competently in an academic discourse community" (Wingate 2015, p. 6). This includes conversancy in "forms of oral and written communication—genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures; interactional patterns—that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalised, or ritualised" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). Commencing students are not only challenged with transition issues but also the expectation to acquire and use a new form of 'language' labelled as academic literacies. Students who confidently commence in their study program, appear to experience more positive learning outcomes, use higher order-thinking skills, and generally perform better

(Putwain & Sander, 2016). Self-confidence is "the belief in one's ability to accomplish a goal or task" (Porter, Morphet, Missen & Raymond, 2013; p.84) and impacts on achievement (Farrand, McMullan, Jowett & Humphreys, 2006).

Although universities worldwide have invested in support mechanisms such as post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) to identify students at risk and central units that offer individual support, literature on commencing student's academic literacies challenges continue to be published, highlighting a problem requiring ongoing investigation. External and generic support mechanisms are often avoided by students for fear of being labelled by peers as being incompetent and/or not having time outside their studies as they juggle study commitments with work. Students also find generic study skills support irrelevant to the discipline specific academic literacies required in their study program. As universities are made up of different discourse communities, the development of academic literacies, ideally, should occur in students' disciplines and be undertaken by experts teaching in those disciplines. To become proficient in the academic literacies of their discipline, students require "(1) an understanding of the discipline's epistemology—the ways in which subject knowledge is created and communicated, (2) an understanding of the sociological context, i.e. the status of the participants and the purpose of the interactions occurring in the community, and (3) a command of the conventions and norms that regulate these interactions" (Wingate 2015, p. 7), besides being proficient in the English language, in contexts where English is the medium of instruction. As commencing students' confidence impacts on their success in the study program, investigating this phenomenon from their perspective is important as they may withdraw from their studies if they cannot meet stipulated study demands. It is also important to identify if students meet staff expectation that they commence demonstrating proficiency in academic literacies (Hale, 2020).

This paper reports on a case study undertaken to investigate commencing students' confidence in using academic literacies at an Australian university at the start of their study program and after completing two semesters of instruction. The findings of this study identify whether students are confident employing academic literacies when they begin their studies, if academic literacies acquisition improves with instruction, current gaps in academic literacies development and how this could be improved. The findings also inform teaching and learning practices. Although this study was limited to a specific Australian context, the findings are applicable to all universities as the development of commencing students' academic literacies appears to be a continuing challenge as identified by literature.

Student diversity and attrition

University students today vary in their age, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, previous learning experience and individual learning needs. Students coming to university from socio-culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, who are mature aged, first in family and speak English as an additional language (EAL), have increased in the past 20 years (Dooey & Grellier, 2020). This diversity suggests that students may also demonstrate differing

degrees of confidence to engage in their studies. One reason students drop out of university is the inability to cope with the academic demands of their study program. A study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), found that undergraduate students confirmed lack of academic progress among the reasons they withdrew from their studies (Calvo, Cellini, Morales, Martinez & Utrilla, 2019). Students who enrolled with low literacy and numeracy skills as well as low tertiary admission scores drop out at higher rates than their peers (The Productivity Commission, 2019). In 2017, the attrition rate in Australia was approximately 15%, 9.6% in the UK and 17.5% in the United States (Australian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2017; Pittman & Moodie, 2017). This demonstrates that student attrition is a global problem.

Universities aspiring to increase student retention rates should focus on opportunities for students to develop support networks (Groves & O'Shea, 2019). With growing diversity, some students may withdraw from their studies if they find that tertiary study is the wrong choice for them (Hale, 2020). However, considering that student confidence significantly impacts on their learning experience and satisfaction, it is important to investigate this phenomenon.

Definitions of academic literacies

Despite the continuous interest in academic literacies in higher education, it is difficult to find a common definition (Dunham, 2012). We argue that without clarity on academic literacies, it would be difficult to identify appropriate assessment, instruction and support resources. It is also difficult to identify the aspects of academic literacies that students are challenged by. Students are often expected to alternate between different text types, discipline genres and lecturers with dissimilar expectations (Lea, 2017). Writing and reading are complex, context specific social activities that are not easily transferable, as is often assumed (Street, 1996). It is possible that for some students, staff expectations of students' command of academic literacies may be misaligned (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Literature identifies that students commencing in higher education are expected to be proficient in the English language for different purposes (Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2014; Cummins, 1999; Murray & Hicks, 2014). Table 1 categorises the English language proficiency and purposes expected of students as defined by scholars in this area.

From the definitions in Table 1, it can be concluded that in English medium universities, commencing students require proficiency in English language for everyday communication with their peers, lecturers, and other staff, for social and academic purposes. They also require proficiency in discipline specific academic literacies, which involves knowing what is required in different genres of their discipline, their structure, components, vocabulary, academic language, and conventions. These will vary according to the different disciplines. Students are also expected to develop their professional communication to meet employers' expectations when they graduate. It is also a requirement in universities that students demonstrate critical thinking in assessment tasks. McPeck (1981) defined critical thinking as "the judicious use of scepticism, tempered by experience, such that it is productive of a more satisfactory solution to, or insight into, the problem at hand [online]."

Table 1: Types of languages students in higher education need to be proficient

Author(s)	Identified language categorisation
Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson (2012, p. 13)	• **General and social communication language ability in English language** - for readiness to commence higher education. • **Disciplinary academic, workplace and social communicative language ability in English language** - for engagement in disciplinary teaching, learning and assessment tasks. • **Professional and social communicative language ability in English language** - for workplace readiness and further study.
Cummins (1999, pp. 3-4)	• **Basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS)** - for conversational fluency in a language. • **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP**) - for access to and command of the oral and written academic register of the educational setting.
Murray & Hicks (2014, pp. 173-174)	• **General English language proficiency** - to express and accurately understand according to the context which comprises generic skills and abilities including grammar, phonology, vocabulary development, general listening, reading and writing skills, communication strategies, fluency, pragmatic concerns around politeness, implicature and inference. • **Discipline specific academic literacy practices which students of that discipline need to become conversant to develop and perform effectively** - meet literacy demands of the curriculum involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields, and disciplines. • **Professional communication skills** - use a range of skills and strategies that bear on communicative performance in professional settings including intercultural competence, interpersonal skills, turn-taking, conversancy in discourses and behaviours associated with professional domains of use and leadership skills.

Student confidence and academic literacies

Confident students experience better learning outcomes and are more likely to complete their studies than those who are not. There is a positive link between self-efficacy, academic motivation, and achievement (Chesser-Smyth & Long, 2012). Self-efficacy refers to a student's confidence in their ability to perform a defined behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Self-confidence plays an important role in making valuable decisions (Taylor et al., 2010). Students who are confident can successfully meet their study requirements, experience better learning outcomes, employ higher order thinking skills, achieve better grades and are less likely to withdraw (Putwain & Sander, 2016).

Confidence also plays an integral part in assuming more responsibility for learning (Coates, 2005). Conversely, studies suggest that students who are overconfident at the start may lose confidence as they progress (Schunk & Paiares, 2009). Therefore, investigations of this nature are important to identify students' confidence at the start and whether this changes as they progress, since confidence impacts on student success.

Method

This investigation has been approached using a case study method (Yin, 2018). The authors explored events unfolding within their own context with the aim of improving understanding of student confidence in their ability to employ academic literacies and identify potential improvements to organisational practice. We sought to address the following research questions:

1. How confident are undergraduate students at employing academic literacies in their study program when they begin their studies?
2. How do confidence levels among commencing undergraduate students change after experiencing two semesters instruction in their study program?
3. How do confidence levels vary among commencing undergraduate students of different cohorts?

For our study propositions, we intended to capture a realistic picture of commencing student capabilities that could be compared with staff expectations, to identify areas of significant misalignment. Investigating how confidence changes after two semesters could identify possible contributing factors to student attrition, and avenues to counteract these. We also aimed to identify areas that challenge the diverse groups studying at university. The case for analysis was chosen as first year students from a Bachelor of Teaching program, as this provided responses from students with a common, discipline-specific understanding of academic literacies and who were experiencing similar expectations from their lecturers.

The authors used a mixed-methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, to allow identification of common patterns among student responses and relate these to a conceptual framework (discussed under Research design), which served as the logic linking data to propositions, and established the criteria for interpreting the findings. This approach also enabled identification of confidence levels in different areas of academic literacies, as well as challenge the authors' own perceptions in the light of participants' responses and develop insights for future action. Utilising these methods together allowed for triangulation of data and reduced the potential for biases in the data collection method.

Research design

A deductive analysis process (Redmond, Abawi, Brown, Henderson & Heffernan, 2018, p.186-188) was used to develop a conceptual framework that guided the design of research methods (Figure 1).

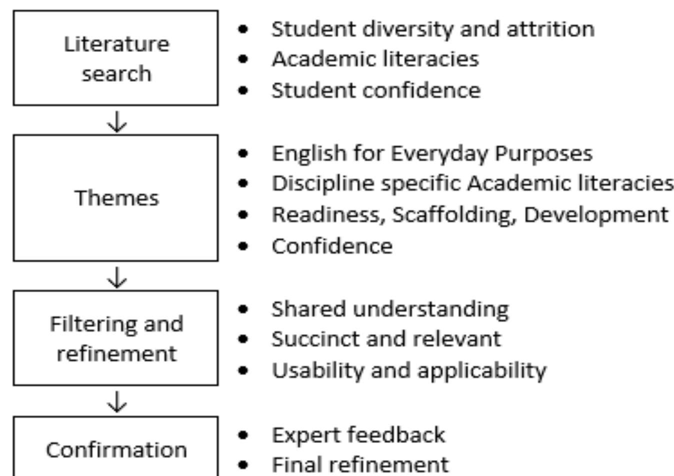

Figure 1: The deductive process

This process was used to go from key topics identified in the literature (including types of language identified in Table 1) to a set of themes that could be filtered and refined before expert feedback was sought for confirmation. The six-stage process is summarised in Figure 2.

Stage 1	Researchers explored the literature to find terms and ideas related to the key themes (summarised in Table 1)
Stage 2	Researchers filtered the terms and ideas to refine themes
Stage 3	Refined elements to make clear links to research questions
Stage 4	Initial framework created
Stage 5	Discipline expert feedback was sought on themes of interest
Stage 6	Adjustments were made according to the feedback received

Figure 2: The six-stage process for framework development

The final conceptual framework comprised the different types of language relating to student confidence in the use of everyday English and discipline-specific literacies, as well as issues of interest relevant to the university in developing students' capabilities in this area. These were mapped to survey questions for investigation (Figure 3).

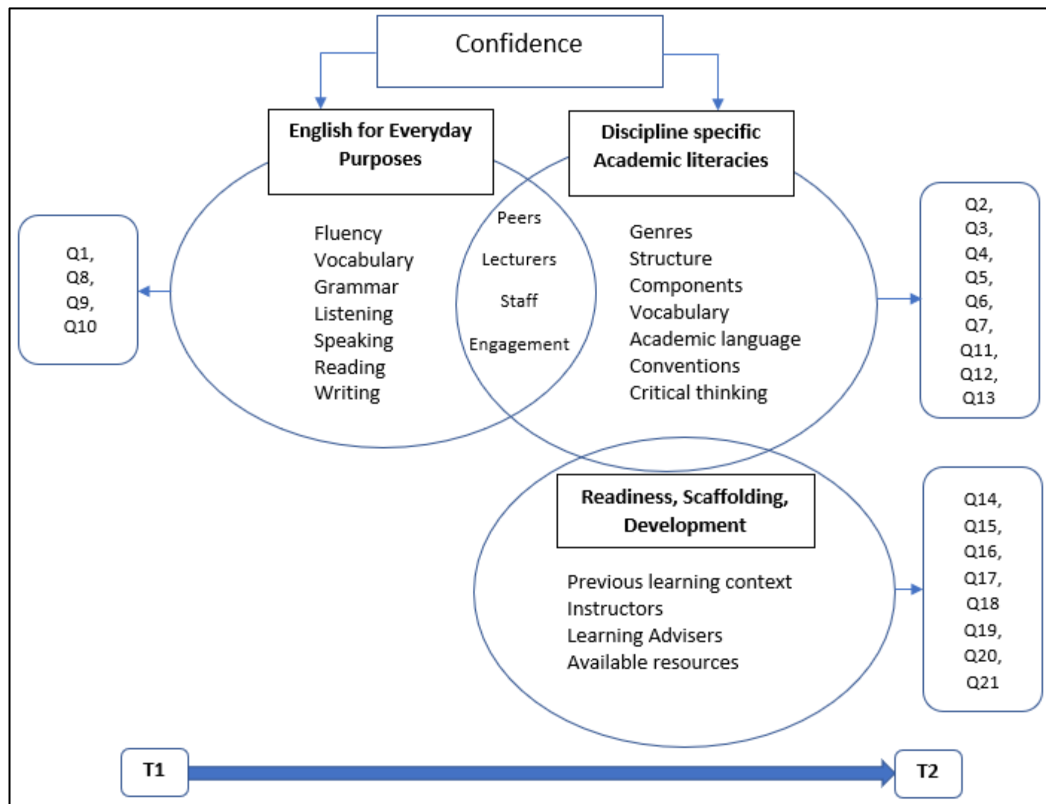

Figure 3: Conceptual framework for the study

Quantitative data was gathered using an online survey to investigate students' knowledge and confidence levels relating to academic literacies. The survey comprised 21 questions (see Appendix) exploring themes from the conceptual framework. It was also important to identify whether lecturers played a role in the development of their students' academic literacies and therefore questions were included to investigate this. The themes and related questions explored in the survey were:

1. Genre knowledge (4 items: Q2 – Q5)
2. Academic/discipline vocabulary (2 items: Q6 – Q7)
3. Difference between English for everyday purposes and discipline specific academic literacies (4 items: Q1, Q8 – Q10)
4. Academic conventions (1 item: Q11)
5. Critical thinking (2 items: Q12 – Q13)
6. How students develop their academic discourse (8 items: Q14 – Q21).

For each item, students responded on a five-point Likert-style scale: Strongly agree; Agree; Not sure; Disagree; and Strongly disagree. Additionally, respondents were asked to provide biographical information to construct a population profile.

Ethics approval for the study stipulated anonymity for students and voluntary participation, making it impossible to match survey responses, limiting the opportunity to see changes in response from the same students. Therefore, the researchers administered one survey shortly after students commenced their studies, and another after two semesters of instruction. The second survey included two additional questions asking students if their confidence with attempting different types of assignment had changed, and to gauge their confidence level relative to when they commenced their studies. This allowed the researchers to address whether students' confidence changes after two semesters without tracking individual students.

The qualitative phase of the study was undertaken through semi-structured interviews, to complement the data obtained from the survey. This permitted in-depth exploration of the themes under investigation. A semi-structured approach was chosen to give students ample opportunity to express themselves and to address themes that had not been incorporated into the survey.

Research context

A core course was selected in the Bachelor of Teaching program with the Program Director and Course Coordinator's permission. An email invitation to participate was sent to 580 students enrolled in the course. The email included details about the investigation, ethics approval, and a consent form. Invitations were sent twice, with the two timeframes referred to as T1 and T2. The T1 invitation was sent in April 2016, four weeks after students had commenced in their study program, to provide students the opportunity to settle into their studies. The T2 invitation was sent in October of the same year, after two semesters of instruction. A link to the survey which was created on *Survey Monkey* was provided in the email.

Data collection methods and analysis

Data was collected to address the research questions as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Mapping of data collection to research questions

	Research questions	Method	T1	T2
RQ 1	How confident at employing academic literacies when they begin their studies?	Survey (closed qs)	✓	
		Interview	✓	
RQ 2	How do confidence levels change after experiencing two semesters instruction?	Survey (closed qs)		✓
		Open-ended qs		✓
RQ 3	How do confidence levels vary among commencing students of different cohorts?	Survey (closed qs)	✓	
		Open-ended qs	✓	

The researchers did not use the mandatory response option of the tool, to ensure maximum participation and responses. At T1, 120 and at T2 54 students completed the survey, representing 21% and 9% of the cohort respectively. The administration of the T2 survey may have resulted in the lower response rates, as students were busy completing their assignments and may have lacked the motivation to participate.

Students who completed the survey were invited to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-to-one with 35 students. Interviews were only conducted alongside the T1 survey as there were not enough volunteers at T2. Despite this, the interviews yielded valuable data to answer research question 1. Participants were asked a total of nine questions (see Appendix) related to the key concepts already identified in the survey but also allowed for students to identify additional themes that related to their confidence when commencing their studies. Interviews typically lasted between 30 – 45 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were read for familiarity, responses for questions compiled, emerging themes identified, similar answers categorised, and the various categories were compared, labelled, and contrasted (Ornek, 2008).

Population profile

Table 3: Population profile of students

Demographic	Response	Percentage		Count	
		T1	T2	T1 (n=84)	T2 (n=43)
Mode of study	Internal	70.2%	62.8%	59	27
	External	14.3%	20.9%	12	9
	Mixed	15.5%	16.3%	13	7
Residency	Australian	96.4%	95.3%	81	41
	International	3.6%	4.7%	3	2
Language background	English	89.3%	88.4%	75	38
	Non-English	10.7%	11.6%	9	5
Previous study location (a)	Australian high school	77.4%	67.4%	65	29
	Overseas high school	3.6%	4.7%	3	2
	TAFE	31%	37.2%	26	16
	SAIBT (b)	2.4%	0%	2	0
	CELUSA (c)	2.4%	2.3%	2	1
Study gap	0 – 6 months	51.2%	7%	43	3
	6 – 12 months	11.9%	30.2%	10	13
	1 – 2 years	11.9%	11.6%	10	5
	3 – 5 years	10.7%	18.6%	9	8
	5 years +	14.3%	32.6%	12	14

a: Some students selected multiple previous study locations
b: SAIBT – South Australian Institute of Business and Technology
c: CELUSA – Centre for English Language in the University of South Australia

Respondents were questioned about their year level, study mode, campus, residency, first language, previous study, and duration since their last period of study. At T1 only 84 of 120 respondents answered these profile questions, while at T2, 43 of the 54 respondents completed this section. The population profile (Table 3) highlights the diversity of students enrolled, allowing for the exploration of differences in confidence levels among groups of students (research question 3). Students commencing their studies outside the university in some capacity (fully external or mixed delivery) accounted for approximately one third of all students across the two surveys. Students from English as an additional

language background account for just over 10% of respondents, with smaller numbers of international students included in the cohort. Over 35% of students came to the university through routes other than 'traditional' high school entry, and almost half have taken a gap in their studies.

Results

Confidence employing academic literacies among commencing students

1. Genre knowledge

Fifty-four percent of participants indicated they knew how to structure assignments, with a slightly higher proportion (61%) understanding what their assignments required (Figure 4). This leaves significant numbers of students uncertain or lacking in knowledge about how to approach their assessments, which were explored in further detail with responses about specific assignment types.

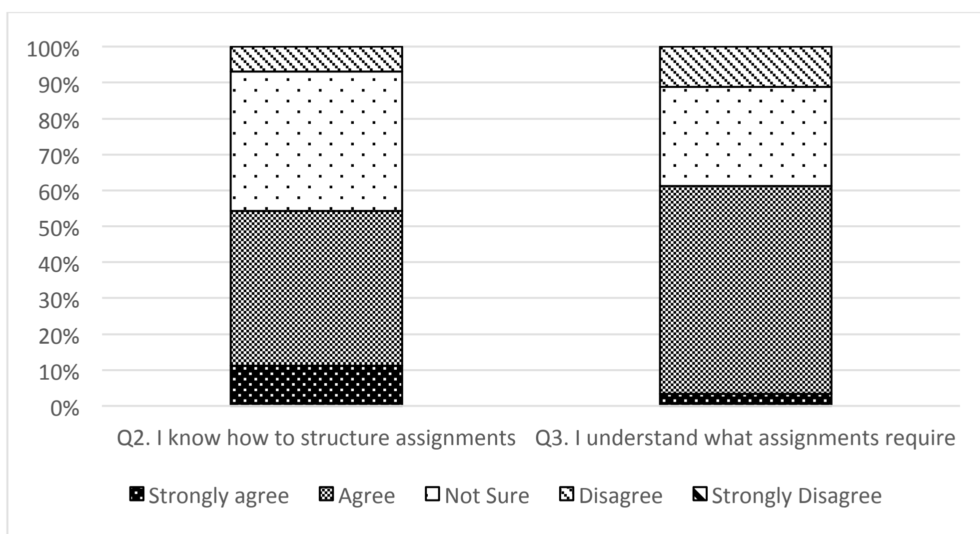

Figure 4: Respondents' knowledge of assignments for my course

Participants indicated that they felt most knowledgeable about essays, followed closely by oral presentations, with few students indicating that they lacked knowledge of these assignment types (Figure 5). Case studies were rated the lowest in terms of knowledge, with article reviews and critical reflections also showing almost 20% of students expressing lack of knowledge.

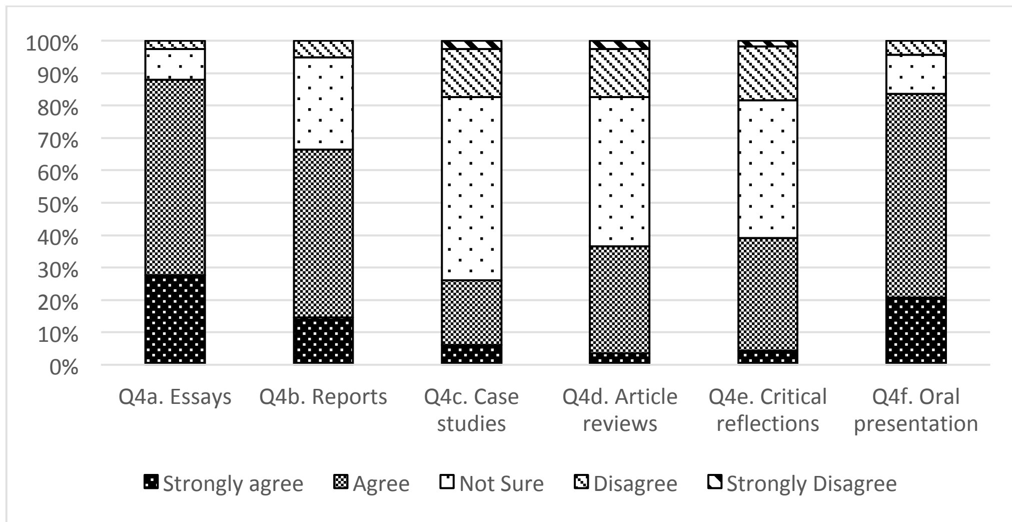

Figure 5: Respondents' knowledge of assignment types
("I know the different components to be included in the following:")

Student responses regarding confidence followed a similar pattern (Figure 6) to the previous question, but with a higher proportion of students disagreeing that they were confident with completing each of the different assignment types.

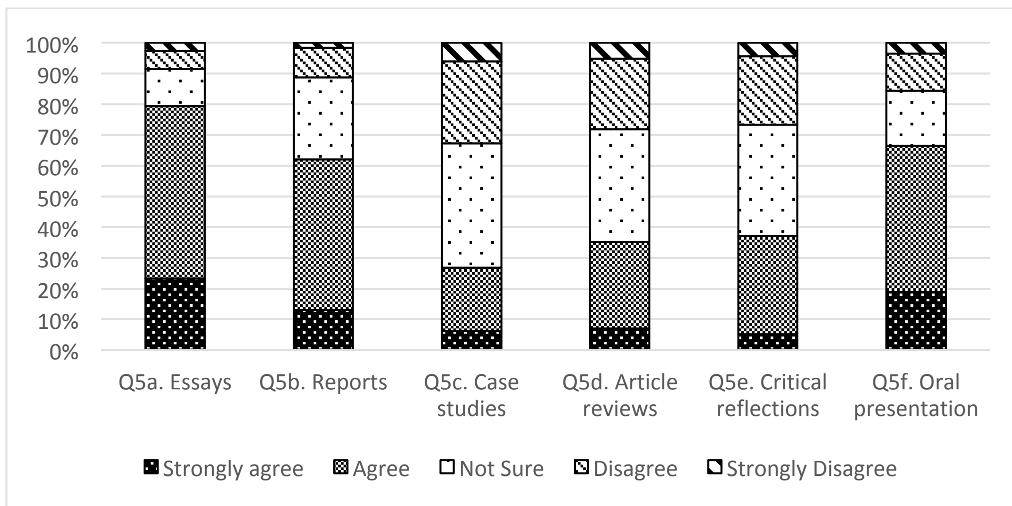

Figure 6: Respondents' confidence with assignment types
("I feel confident about completing the following:")

2. Academic/discipline vocabulary

Discipline specific vocabulary proved to be challenging, both in terms of knowledge and confidence, with over one third of students expressing uncertainty in using correct vocabulary (Figure 7).

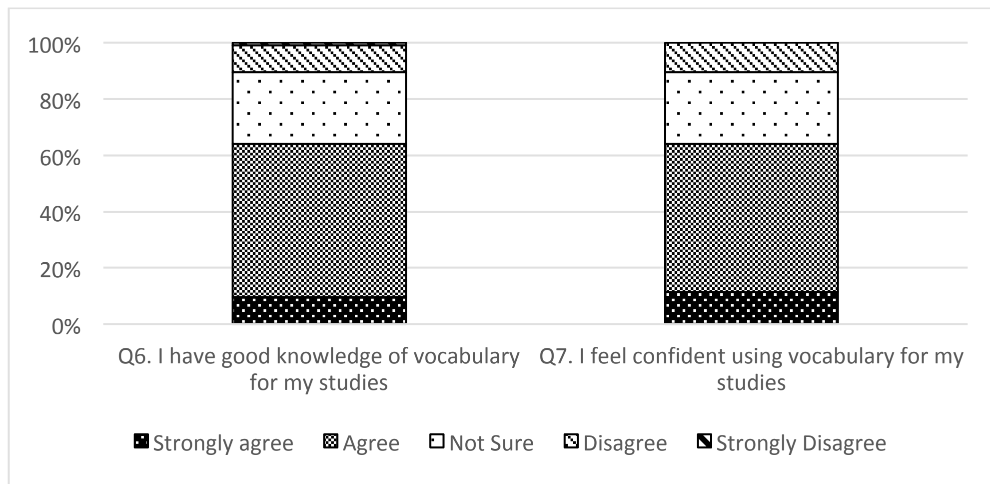

Figure 7: Respondents' command of discipline vocabulary specific to my area of study

3. Difference between English for everyday purposes and discipline specific academic literacies

Respondents showed a high level of agreement (90%+) with the first three statements relating to knowing the difference between everyday language and academic language (and the need to use the latter), while *confidence* in using academic language was noticeably lower, with less than 70% agreeing with the statement (Figure 8).

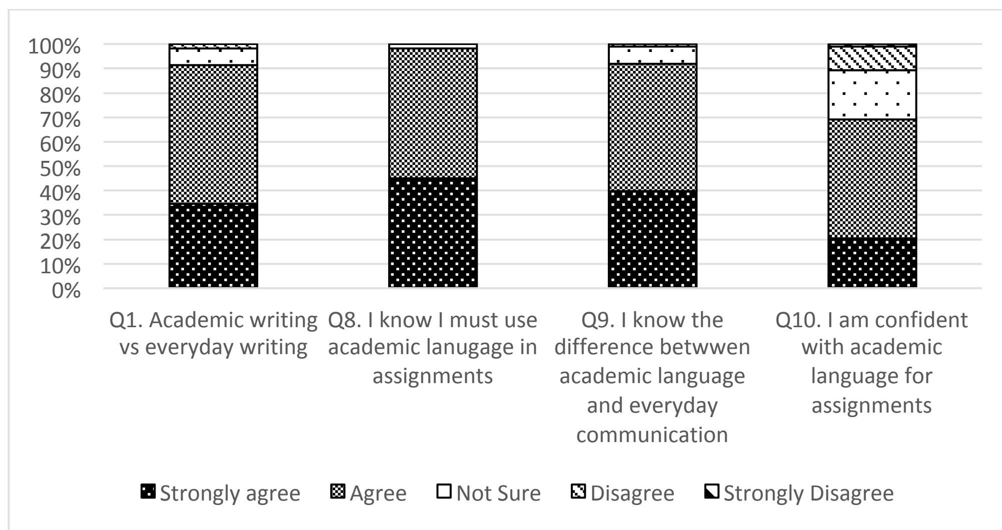

Figure 8: Respondents' ability to differentiate everyday English and disciplinary language

4. Academic conventions

Students showed different levels of knowledge relating to academic conventions, with contractions being a source of uncertainty for 61% of students (Figure 9). Command of abbreviations was stronger, with 61% of students agreeing that they knew the rules.

Punctuation and referencing were rated more strongly by participants, although 7% expressed some difficulties with referencing.

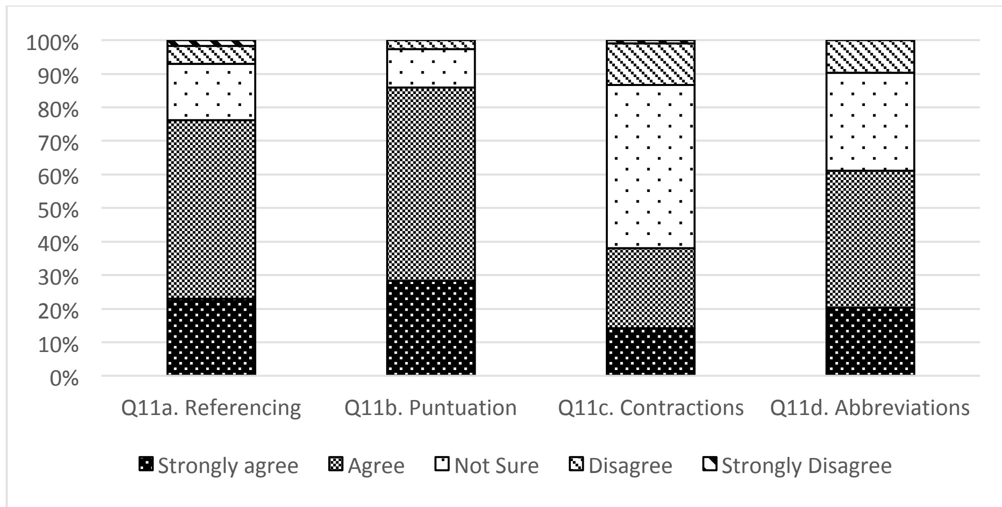

Figure 9: Respondents' command of academic conventions
("I know the rules relating to conventions on:")

5. Critical thinking

These skills were relatively weak, with 56% of respondents agreeing they knew what critical thinking is, and only 41% agreeing they knew how to use critical writing in assignments (Figure 10). This complements responses to the questions on genre knowledge, indicating that students struggle with critical reflection assignments due to lack of experience.

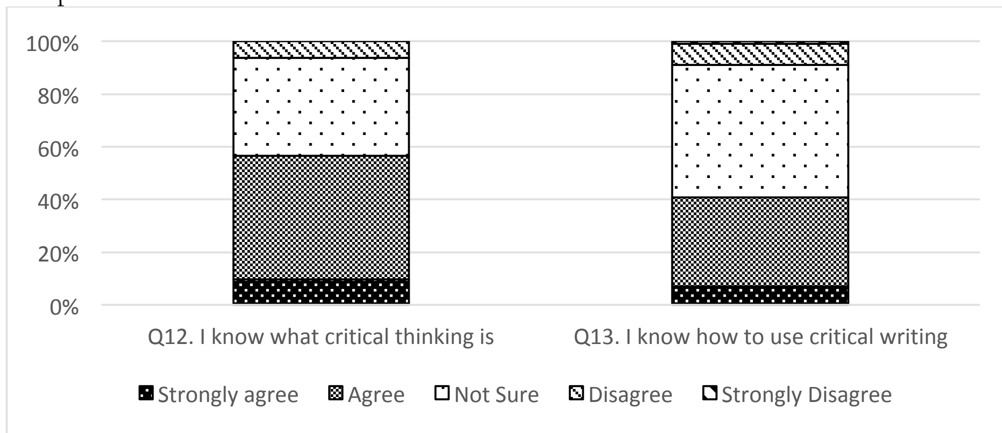

Figure 10: Respondents' command of critical thinking

Interview data also revealed students found it difficult to articulate what they understood by the term 'critical thinking' and this in turn created challenges in helping them develop their critical writing skills.

> That (critical thinking) is a new term that I have heard recently… I guess I'm learning a bit. (Participant 4)
> I don't know if I'm doing it correctly. I don't know where to start. (Participant 6)

6. How students develop their academic discourse

For the first four items, students appear to have learned slightly more about academic communication from their previous study (with over 20% indicating 'Strongly agree'). There were similar levels of agreement to having learned skills by imitation of text, learning directly from instructors, and through models and examples provided (Figure 11).

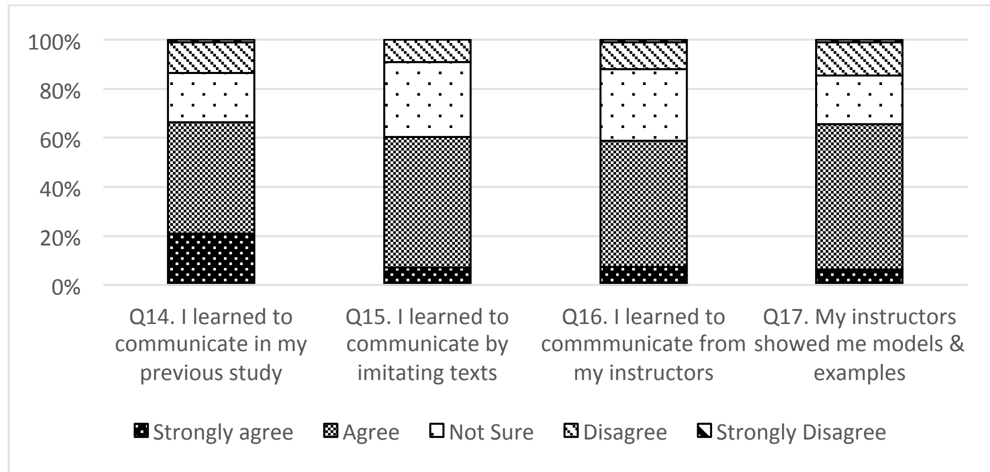

Figure 11: Respondents' development of academic discourse (part 1 of 2)

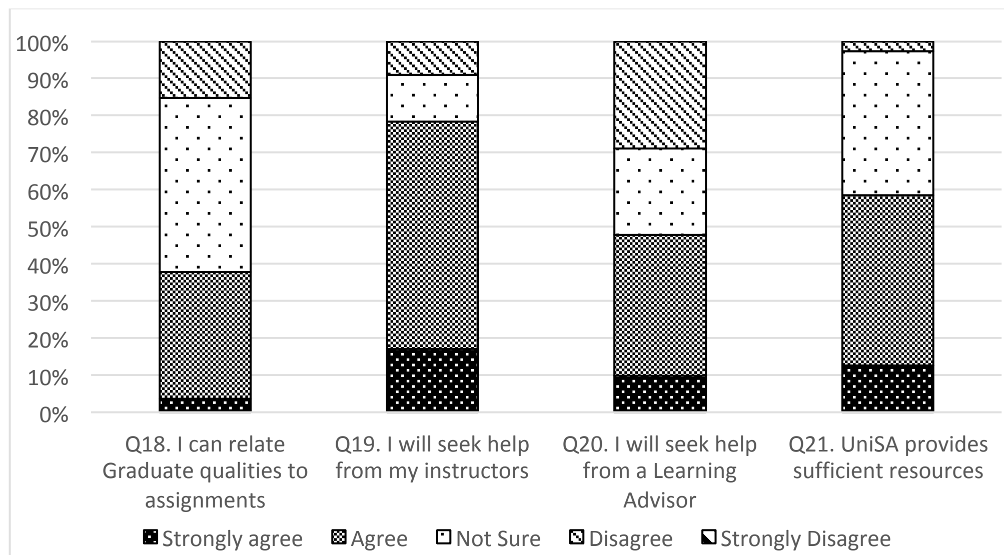

Figure 12: Respondents' development of academic discourse (2 of 2)

Just under 40% of students indicated that they were confident in relating graduate qualities to assignments (Figure 12); this is perhaps unsurprising since commencing students are unlikely to be familiar with this type of behavioural framework. Students expressed a higher likelihood (almost 80% Agree) to seek help from instructors, compared to less than 50% who would seek help from a Learning Advisor (a specialist support role at the University).

Confidence levels after two semesters of instruction

Knowledge of assignment types changed substantially, with over 55% of students indicating that their understanding had changed, although 24% indicated their understanding had not changed; a similar proportion of students reported increased confidence levels. Article reviews and case studies (Q4 and Q5) remained problematic for many students. Students' understanding of academic vocabulary changed the most out of the five items, according to their survey responses (Figure 13), with 44% of students reporting increased confidence. This was reflected by an increased level of agreement with the corresponding survey questions (Q6 and Q7).

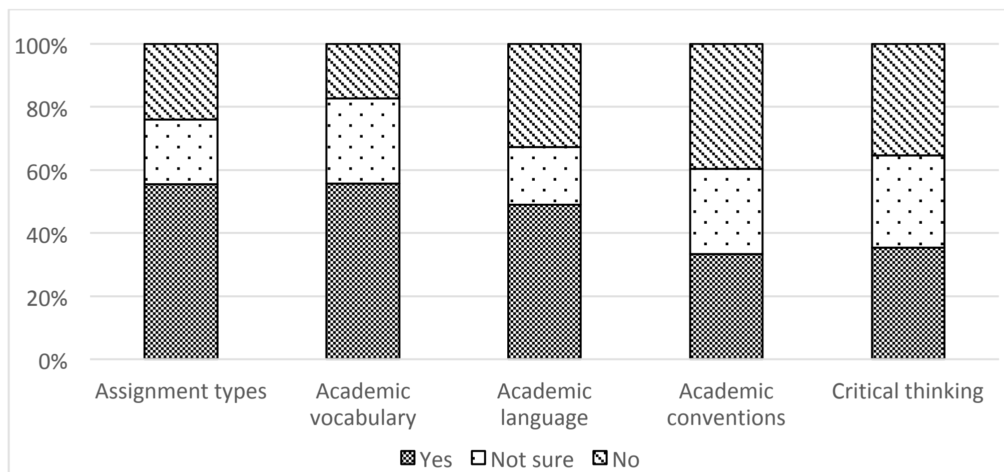

Figure 13: Respondents' change in understanding since the start of the year ("Has your understanding changed since the start of the year?")

Critical thinking and writing skills remained challenging for students, with over one third of respondents indicating that their knowledge of critical thinking had not improved, and 8% of students reporting that their confidence with writing critically had *decreased* since starting their course (Figure 14). Responses to the main survey questions (Q12 and Q13) showed that although overall knowledge and confidence had improved, a significant number of students indicated negative opinions.

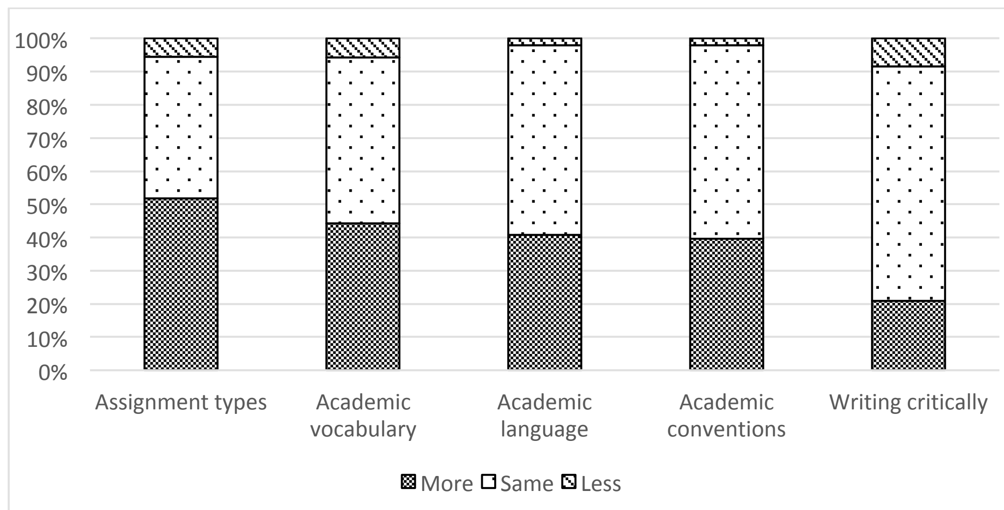

Figure 14: Respondents' change in confidence since the start of the year ("Do you feel more or less confident since the start of the year?")

Confidence levels among different cohorts

Table 4: Difference in confidence levels between demographics

	Area	T1	T2
1.	Genre knowledge	*Confidence with assignment types* • External students (lower) • EAL students (lower) • TAFE students (lower)	*Knowledge of assignment types* • External students (lower) • Study gap 6-12 months (lower)
2.	Academic/ discipline vocabulary	• Mixed delivery (higher) • EAL students (lower) • Study gap 3-5 years (lower)	• EAL students (lower) • International students (lower)
3.	Everyday vs academic English	*Use in assignments and confidence* • EAL students (lower)	*Use in assignments and confidence* • EAL students (lower)
4.	Academic conventions	• External students (lower)	• External students (lower) • Study gap 0-6 months (lower)
5.	Critical thinking	• EAL students (lower)	• EAL students (lower)
6.	Development of discourse	*Resources* • EAL students (lower)	*Resources* • EAL students (lower)

Confidence levels among different demographic groups were investigated by separating survey responses and looking for consistent trends among cohorts (summarised in Table 4 below). EAL students were the most disadvantaged across the themes investigated, with confidence levels below average for both T1 and T2 surveys—particularly for vocabulary; using academic language in assignments; critical thinking skills; and resources. External students exhibited lower confidence with respect to knowledge of and confidence with assignment types, as well as academic conventions.

Discussion

1. Confidence in employing academic literacies among commencing students

Investigating students' confidence of using academic literacies at commencement was useful for identifying the scaffolding and instruction that is necessary in first year undergraduate studies. The findings revealed students had some experience with specific text types but their knowledge and use of academic discourse, vocabulary and conventions needed further developing.

Genre knowledge
Interview responses revealed some students commenced with an expectation to be assigned essays—a structure they felt comfortable and familiar with. Students felt challenged by unfamiliar assessments such as academic blogs, posters, role plays, etc., and needed guidance. While respondents felt comfortable with the research process, they were unsure how to begin writing due to inexperience with the text type and structure. This confusion seems to be amplified by conflicting information provided by instructors and course materials. Some respondents mentioned instructors have high expectations around students' ability to develop concepts and analyse theories independently. As seen in the quotes below, the tasks students were asked to engage with were different to their expectations. The pressure of developing these capacities within their first-year left students wondering if they were doing it correctly.

> [I] came in thinking everything will be essays, but there are different types. (Participant 4)
> We did academic blog, poster, essay, activity play… they are all different. Some I knew, some are really new for me. I attended a workshop to help me know them. (Participant 5)

Among the genres investigated at T1, 79% of survey respondents indicated they were most confident writing essays (Figures 4 – 6), indicating previous experience with this text type at school. Following essays, 62.5% of respondents identified they were confident writing reports. While many respondents (83.3%) identified that they knew the structure and components expected of oral presentations, this was not reflected in their confidence to undertake them (65.6%). Students indicated the least confidence with case studies (26.6% confidence), article reviews (35.6%) and critical reflections (38.3%), suggesting uncertainty of completing assignments of this nature. This lack of capacity to think and write critically was also reflected in the interview responses with some students doubting they could accurately describe what critical thinking is:

> I'm not sure if my definition of what it (critical writing) is even correct. (Participant 4)

A range of support and resources which facilitated understanding and knowledge of their genre were identified. Instructor assistance and being shown sufficient examples through scaffolding was commonly identified as a driving force in developing understanding of assessment types. Orientation programs and study assistance workshops provided by the University's library or central teaching and learning unit were also highly regarded. These responses affirm Vygotsky's (1978) theories on social learning that scaffolding received via

social interaction can contribute to students' development of academic language and literacies (Wilson & Devereux 2014). Undertaking preparatory studies via the University's enabling pathway program was also identified as useful. Students who completed such programs tend to complete their studies with high grade point averages, heightened sense of self-efficacy and a greater sense of belonging to the academic community (Syme et al., 2021). These aspects show that students entering from pathway programs may have a greater sense of confidence regarding their knowledge and use of academic discourse.

Difference between English for everyday purposes and discipline specific, academic vocabulary/ literacies

At T1 most of the survey respondents (91.7%) indicated they knew the difference between academic writing and writing for everyday purposes, but their confidence in using academic writing was lower. The interview participants' responses provided further insight into how they differentiate between academic and everyday writing. Several participants identified formality, type of language used, and the inclusion of referencing and research to be distinctive features of academic writing.

> Academic writing uses a lot of technical language, lot bigger words, lots of in-text referencing; everyday writing there is no in-text referencing and depending on who you are writing for, it's lots more casual as well. (Participant 3)
> Academic writing is a lot more formal, you don't use first person as much, a lot more referencing, lots more factual… you need proven evidence. (Participant 7)

Furthermore only 63.5% of respondents (T1) indicated having a comprehensive knowledge of their discipline's academic vocabulary and confidence in using this vocabulary in assignments. This was also reported in some of the interview responses regarding challenges in developing academic language.

> [T]here's some technical terms and it's just knowing, understanding those terms, when to apply them and how to apply them. (Participant 3)

Such responses suggest commencing students are developing an inventory of academic lexical items and learning to employ them within the discourse of their discipline. Word knowledge is a highly regarded component for effective academic writing and studies have explored the lexical decisions made by second language learners in their writing (Brun-Mercer & Zimmerman, 2015; Coxhead, 2012). Yet simply 'knowing' words is not enough; having productive knowledge of how vocabulary is appropriately used in terms of grammatical function, frequency and register gives depth and richness to academic writing (Nation, 2013).

While paraphrasing was only mentioned a few times in the interview responses, some students reported their lack of confidence with academic vocabulary and language impacted their ability to summarise and paraphrase effectively. A minority of students mentioned they developed their vocabulary through academic reading but were expected to work through the set readings independently. Bharuthram and Clarence (2015) reported that while it is widely acknowledged that academic reading and writing go hand in hand, the emphasis in higher education tends to be on teaching and developing writing. This could be viewed as a backwards approach. If instructors assist students with their

comprehension and analysis of reading texts, students can practise and develop summarising, paraphrasing and synthesis in their writing outputs. Subsequently, this can help students build rhetoric and argument in their academic writing practice.

Academic conventions

With academic writing conventions, many respondents indicated knowing how to reference (76.9%) and using appropriate punctuation (86.4%) at the T1 stage (Figure 9). Interestingly, this finding was inconsistent with the interview responses, with many participants indicating they found learning of referencing challenging. These students conveyed dissatisfaction with the guidance provided to learn and apply the institutional and disciplinary conventions. While this study did not investigate understandings of academic integrity, students' concern with their learning and application of referencing may indicate their commitment to uphold ethical academic practice. Furthermore, students may recognise a stronger command of academic conventions could prevent them from inadvertent breaches of plagiarism. While the survey respondents were generally confident about the rules for referencing and punctuation, they were less so regarding the rules for using contractions and abbreviations.

Critical thinking

At T1, it was found (see Figure 10) that only half of the respondents knew what critical thinking was (58.1%) and felt able to demonstrate critical writing in their assignments (41.8%). This finding supports previous responses regarding the students' inexperience with genres such as critical reflection. The findings revealed that students found it difficult to articulate what they understood by the terms critical thinking, which created challenges in helping them develop their critical writing skills. However, conjecture exists amongst the academic community regarding what critical thinking is and how it should be taught and embedded within curriculum and assessment design (Johnson & Hamby, 2015; Larsson, 2017). We acknowledge the concept of critical thinking is complex and nuanced according to various disciplines. Therefore, responses indicating a lack of confidence in critical thinking should not be considered exclusively as a deficiency in student knowledge.

Development of academic discourse

Students felt their previous educational experiences had contributed to the development of academic discourse and understandings of communication and writing styles within their discipline (Figure 11). At T1, nearly two thirds of participants (64.9%) indicated they had learned academic communication in their previous study context. Approximately two-thirds of responses indicated this learning was influenced by imitation of texts and/or the models and examples provided by their instructors, suggesting that genre-based pedagogies can help learners develop discourse competency (Rosado, Aparici & Perera, 2014). Other research has focused on the benefits genre-based pedagogies have in making connections between language, structure, and content of different text types (Hyland, 2007; Fenwick & Herrington, 2020).

The findings suggested links between academic conventions and the development of academic discourse. Approximately 42% (T1) of respondents were not sure or did not agree that their instructors taught them academic conventions in their current study

program. This finding was consistent with the interview responses indicating students felt it was up to them to figure it out for themselves.

> [T]hey mention the Harvard referencing guide, direct you to the URL… they sort of left it to student to work it out. (Participant 2)
> In my first two assignments it (academic conventions) wasn't really discussed. (Participant 4)
> They don't talk about referencing much. It's up to you to figure out. (Participant 7)

There was a variety of responses regarding students' support seeking behaviours to further develop their understanding of academic discourse (Figure 12). Approximately 80% of students indicated they were more likely to ask for help from their instructors than seek support from a University Learning Advisor (less than 50%). This suggests students feel more comfortable approaching teaching staff who they have established rapport with, and/or feel more assured their instructors will provide explicit guidance given they are also marking the students' work and are more familiar with the assessment criteria. Just under 40% of students indicated they were confident in relating graduate qualities to their assignments; this suggests that instructors may need to provide detailed explanation regarding how assessment criteria align with the graduate qualities. This could help students identify how the development of academic discourse will benefit them later in their professional careers.

2. Confidence levels after two semesters of instruction

At T2, around half of the survey responses indicated understanding of different assignment types, academic vocabulary and language had broadened and approximately a third of respondents admitted to a change in their understanding of academic conventions and critical thinking. Although over 50% of students felt more confident engaging with different assignment types, uncertainty remained with assessments such as case studies and article reviews. These assignments tend to be more prevalent in 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate curriculum, emphasising the need for instructors to provide support when introducing assessment tasks. Beaumont, Moscrop and Canning (2016) suggested that adopting a 'dialogic feedback cycle' model to scaffolding leads to 'significant improvements… in students' perceptions of their understanding of assessment tasks and criteria' (p. 331). If instructors diverge from conventional teaching approaches and experiment with multiple pedagogical styles, it could influence the development of student writing.

Case studies, critical reviews and reflections require application of critical thinking and analysis which may explain why 41.7% of respondents still felt unsure of how to write critically and 8% of students indicating they felt less confident with critical writing in the T2 stage of the study. Responses indicated students grapple with their understanding of applied criticality and question whether they are 'doing it right'. Demonstrating capacity for critical reflection and analysis is a commonly assessed criterion, yet it appears students are not receiving enough guidance and modelling to critically engage with their texts. This finding is synonymous with other studies (Arum & Roska, 2011; Flores et al., 2012) which

have reported employer dissatisfaction with university graduates who are ill-equipped with critical thinking—a skill highly valued and sought after in the workplace. As mentioned previously, how critical thinking and reflection is embedded within pedagogy and curriculum remains a point of conjecture amongst academics, yet it appears teaching staff expect students to autonomously develop critical reflection in their academic writing.

While approximately 40% of responses indicated improved confidence in academic vocabulary, language and conventions, generally students felt the same as they did in the T1 stage. Development of academic literacies is a lifelong endeavour which can require years of scholarly experience. Teaching staff may have unrealistically high expectations of first-year students' capacities in disciplinary academic literacies. Scaffolding and modelling needs to be embedded in the pedagogy and curriculum of first year undergraduate studies to help students acquire the language and discourse of their discipline (Maldoni, 2018).

3. Confidence levels among different cohorts

EAL and external students had the lowest confidence levels across the themes examined. EAL students reported lower confidence using academic language and vocabulary, critical thinking skills and understanding resources. This is not surprising given numerous studies have documented the challenges linguistically diverse students face with language acquisition for academic purposes (Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012; Maldoni & Lear, 2016). Bretag (2007) maintained EAL students need to quickly progress from basic interpersonal communication skills to cognitive academic linguistic proficiency (CALP) to succeed. Cummins (1984) maintained that it can take at least 5 years for international students to reach CALP in their second language. The pressure for EAL students to demonstrate CALP from the start of their program may account for why this cohort can be implicated in cases of academic misconduct (Curtis et al., 2021).

The 15% of students who were studying mixed mode reported higher confidence levels in their discipline specific academic vocabulary, whereas students who had taken a break of 3 – 5 years from study felt less confident. However, external students reported lower confidence with academic conventions. This suggests that undertaking mixed-mode studies can provide students with the right balance between receiving scaffolding and modelling on campus and reinforcing that learning through online resources. Consequently, students commencing higher education after a considerable break from study will feel less familiar with the academic literacy practices associated with their discipline and may require intensive scaffolding and interaction with teaching staff and peers to develop confidence in their knowledge and use of academic vocabulary.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have reiterated the common challenges associated with the acquisition of academic literacies among commencing students. Although universities around the world invest in mechanisms to support the development of academic literacies, the current study has identified that some students are still challenged by this. This study has affirmed that not all students who commence in higher education have the same levels

of confidence to engage in their discipline specific academic literacies and this sometimes does not improve, even after students experience two semesters of instruction. Academic literacies development and scaffolding is pertinent and should be rigorously carried out in the first year of study. Ideally, this should unfold in the study program and be undertaken by experts teaching in the discipline. Teachers should ensure that new assignment types are introduced alongside models and examples, with consistent and clear instructions. Development of critical thinking and writing are academic literacies that teachers should spend time fostering as students are expected to demonstrate these at university and in the workplace once they graduate.

This study also highlighted that more support for developing academic literacies is required for EAL students, those who are studying externally, and students who have returned to university after taking a break. Despite an abundance of research about support mechanisms such as central learning and teaching units to help students, this study showed that more could be done to increase at least some students' ability to confidently employ academic literacies in their study program. This research identifies the gaps associated with the development of commencing students' academic literacies and advocates for its conscious development throughout students' journey in their study program. The development of academic literacies is not the sole responsibility of staff located in the central learning and teaching units but an initiative that should be undertaken by everyone.

Limitations and future research

Due to the requirements of voluntary and anonymous participation, and limits on student availability, the authors were not able to undertake a full longitudinal study that could report on the progress and experiences of individual students. However, we were able to satisfactorily address our research questions and draw valid conclusions about the challenges that students face with regards to academic literacies, particularly the need to provide extended support for EAL students.

Since this study took place, UniSA has undertaken research to inform further support for the learning needs of students, particularly from overseas and EAL backgrounds (Nallaya & Hobson, 2021). Students who spoke English as a second language, especially international students, experienced similar issues with academic literacies to those identified by interview participants in this study and required additional support that was best realised when embedded in the academic discourse of their discipline. The project informed the development of an *English Language and Intercultural Learning and Teaching* (ELILT) framework, which recognises the centrality of language in academic achievement, and has been adopted across a Division to provide systematic support for students.

Further research could be conducted to assess the impacts realised through the changes of practice that were recommended in the ELILT framework, for students in the division. Emphasis could be placed on analysing items relating to the use of academic language, as well as the responses from EAL and international students, to determine if confidence

levels among commencing students are higher than in previous years, and how they rate the support given by their tutors and the university. Evidence of success against these areas could then inform the provision of similar support mechanisms across the university. Areas that were not addressed by the ELILT framework could be examined separately to identify if there has been any change in students' confidence and identify what factors have contributed to the changes—or lack thereof.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr Benjamin Kooyman from the Australian National University for his initial work on the earlier versions of this manuscript. His contribution significantly shaped the results section of the paper.

References

Arkoudis, S., Baik, C. & Richardson, S. (2012). *English language standards in higher education: From entry to exit*. ACER Press: Camberwell, Victoria. https://shop.acer.org/english-language-standards-in-higher-education.html

Arum, R. & Roksa, J. (2011). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/A/bo10327226.html

Australian Government, Department of Education and Training (2017). *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education: Higher Education standards panel discussion paper, June 2017*. https://apo.org.au/node/94326

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: towards a unifying theory of behavioural change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Beaumont, C., Moscrop, C. & Canning, S. (2016). Easing the transition from school to HE: Scaffolding the development of self-regulated learning through a dialogic approach to feedback. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(3), 331-350. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2014.953460

Bharuthram, S. & Clarence, S. (2015). Teaching academic reading as a disciplinary knowledge practice in higher education: Articles. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(2), 42-55. https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC176179

Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: Final report.* Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. https://apo.org.au/node/15776

Bretag, T. (2007). The emperor's new clothes: Yes, there is a link between English language competence and academic standards, *People and Place*, 15(1), 13-21. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A163051303/AONE

Brun-Mercer, N. & Zimmerman, C. B. (2015). Fostering academic vocabulary use in writing. *The CATESOL Journal*, 27(1), 131-148. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1111751

Calvo, S., Celini, L., Morales, A., Martínez, J. M. G. & Utrilla, P. N. (2019). Academic literacy and student diversity: Evaluating a curriculum-integrated inclusive practice intervention in the United Kingdom. *Sustainability*, 12(3), article 1155. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12031155

Chesser-Smyth, P. A. & Long, T. (2013). Understanding the influences on self-confidence among first-year undergraduate nursing students in Ireland. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 69(1), 145-157. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.06001.x

Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11(1), 25-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320500074915

Commonwealth of Australia (2000). *Employer satisfaction with graduate skills: Research report.* Canberra, ACT: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Retrieved Mar. 12, 2021, from http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A13863

Coxhead, A. (2012). Academic vocabulary, writing and English for academic purposes: Perspectives from second language learners. *RELC Journal*, 43(1), 137-145. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212439323

Cummins, J. (1999). Alternative paradigms in bilingual education research: Does theory have a place? *Educational Researcher*, 28(7), 26-32+41. https://doi.org/10.2307/1176138

Cummins, J. (1984). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework*. California State Department of Education, Sacramento, USA. pp. 3-49. https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1334.9449

Curtis, G. J., McNeill, M., Slade, C., Tremayne, K., Harper, R., Rundle, K. & Greenaway, R. (2021). Moving beyond self-reports to estimate the prevalence of commercial contract cheating: An Australian study. *Studies in Higher Education*, online first. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1972093

Dooey, P. M. & Grellier, J. (2020). Developing academic literacies: A faculty approach to teaching first-year students. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 14(2), 106-119. https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/download/631/435435479

Duff, P. A. (2010). Language socialization into academic discourse communities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 169-192. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190510000048

Dunham, N. (2012). A date with academic literacies: Using brief conversation to facilitate student engagement with academic literacies. *US-China Education Review, B7*, 682-688. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535493.pdf

Farrand, P., McMullan, M., Jowett, R. & Humphreys, A. (2006). Implementing competency recommendations into pre-registration nursing curricula: effects upon levels of confidence in clinical skills. *Nurse Education Today*, 26(2), 97-103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2005.06.002

Fenwick, L. & Herrington, M. (2022). Teacher use of genre pedagogy: Engaging students in dialogue about content area language during text deconstruction. *Language and Education*, 36(1), 43-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2021.1912082

Flores, K. L., Matkin, G. S., Burbach, M. E., Quinn, C. E. & Harding, H. (2012), Deficient critical thinking skills among college graduates: Implications for leadership. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(2), 212-230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00672.x

Groves, O. & O'Shea, S. (2019). Learning to 'be' a university student: First in family students negotiating membership of the university community. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 98, 48-54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.08.014

Hale, A. (2020). *Not* scraping the bottom of the barrel: Disadvantage, diversity and deficit as rich points. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 19(3), 244-262. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022219832453

Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(3), 148-164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.005

Johnson, R. H. & Hamby, B. (2015). A meta-level approach to the problem of defining 'critical thinking'. *Argumentation*, 29(4), 417-430. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-015-9356-4

Larsson, K. (2017). Understanding and teaching critical thinking —A new approach. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 84, 32-42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.05.004

Lea, M. R. (2017). Academic literacies in theory and practice. In B. Street & S. May (Eds.), *Literacies and language education*, 147-158. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02252-9_19

Maldoni, A. M. (2018). "Degrees of deception" to degrees of proficiency: Embedding academic literacies into the disciplines. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 12(2), A-102-A-129. https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/download/408/435435441

Maldoni, A. M. & Lear, E. L. (2016). A decade of embedding: Where are we now? *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 13(3), 5-25. https://doi.org/10.53761/1.13.3.2

McPeck, J. E. (1981). *Critical thinking and education*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Critical-Thinking-and-Education/McPeck/p/book/9781138206892

Murray, N. & Hicks, M. (2014). An institutional approach to English language proficiency. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(2), 170-187. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2014.938261

Nallaya, S. & Hobson, J. E. (2021). A division-wide framework to scaffold the development of English language and intercultural learning. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 15(1), 162-186. https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/767

Nation, I. S. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom. [2nd ed.] https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139858656

Ornek, F. (2008). An overview of a theoretical framework of phenomenography in qualitative education research: An example from physics education research. *Asia-Pacific Forum on Science Learning and Teaching*, 9(2), article 11. http://www.ied.edu.hk/apfslt/download/v9_issue2_files/ornek.pdf

Porter, J., Morphet, J., Missen, K. & Raymond, A. (2013). Preparation for high-acuity clinical placement: confidence levels of final-year nursing students. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, 4, 83–89. https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S42157

Putwain, D. W. & Sander, P. (2016). Does the confidence of first-year undergraduate students change over time according to achievement goal profile? *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(2), 381-398. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.934803

Redmond, P., Abawi, L.-A., Brown, A., Henderson, R. & Heffernan, A. (2018). An online engagement framework for higher education. *Online Learning*, 22(1), 183-204. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1175

Rosado, E., Aparici, M. & Perera, J. (2014). Adapting to the circumstances: On discourse competence in L2 Spanish [De la competencia discursiva en español L2 o de cómo adaptarse a las circunstancias]. *Culture and Education [Cultura y Educacion]*, 26(1), 71-102. https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2014.908671

Schunk, D. H. & Pajares, F. (2009). Self-efficacy theory. In K. R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds), *Handbook of motivation at school*, pp. 35-53. New York: Routledge. [2nd ed.] https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773384

Sosu, E. M. & Pheunpha, P. (2019). Trajectory of university dropout: Investigating the cumulative effect of academic vulnerability and proximity to family support. *Frontiers in Education*, 4, article 6. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00006

Street, B. (1996). Academic literacies. In D. Baker, J. Clay & C. Fox (Eds.), *Challenging ways of knowing: In English, mathematics and science* (pp.101-134). New York: Routledge.

Syme, S., Roche, T., Goode, E. & Crandon, E. (2021). Transforming lives: The power of an Australian enabling education, *Higher Education Research & Development*, online first. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1990222

Taylor, J., Irvine F., Bradbury-Jones, C. & McKenna, H. (2010). On the precipice of great things: The current state of UK nurse education. *Nurse Education Today*, 30(3), 239-244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.10.013

The Productivity Commission (2019). The demand driven university system: A mixed report card. Australian Government. https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/university-report-card/university-report-card.pdf

The University of Edinburgh (2016). *Widening participation*. [1 Dec 2020 version] https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation

Wilson, K. & Devereux, L. (2014). Scaffolding theory: High challenge, high support in academic language and learning (ALL) contexts. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 8(3), A91-A100. https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/353

Wingate, U. (2015). *Academic literacy and student diversity: The case for inclusive practice*. Multilingual Matters, Bristol. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783093496

Wingate, U. & Tribble, C. (2012). The best of both worlds? Towards an English for academic purposes/academic literacies writing pedagogy. *Studies in higher education*, 37(4), 481-495. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.525630

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE Publishing. https://au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/case-study-research-and-applications/book250150

Appendix

Table A1: Questions asked in the online survey

Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly agree; Agree; Not sure; Disagree; and Strongly disagree.

Q1	I know the difference between academic writing and writing for everyday purposes.
Q2	I know how to structure my writing for different assignments in my courses.

Q3	I understand what most of my assignment tasks require.
Q4	I know the different components to be included in the following assignment types: • essays • reports • case studies • article reviews • critical reflections • oral presentations
Q5	I feel confident about completing the following assignment types: • essays • reports • case studies • article reviews • critical reflections • oral presentations
Q6	I have a comprehensive knowledge of vocabulary associated with my area of study.
Q7	I feel confident using vocabulary associated with my area of study in my assignments.
Q8	I know I must use academic language in my assignments.
Q9	I know the difference between academic language and language for everyday communication.
Q10	I feel confident using academic language in my assignments.
Q11	I know the rules related to these conventions when writing my assignments: • referencing • punctuation • contractions • abbreviations
Q12	I know what 'critical thinking' is.
Q13	I know how to write critically in my assignments.
Q14	I was taught academic communication (verbal and written) in my previous study context (e.g. high school, TAFE, etc.)
Q15	I learn how to communicate in my current study program by imitating the texts I read.
Q16	My instructors teach me how academic communication (verbal and written) is undertaken in my current study program.
Q17	My instructors show me models and examples of writing in my current study program.
Q18	I know how to relate the graduate qualities to my assignments.
Q19	If I don't know how to produce a particular assignment, I seek help from my instructor.
Q20	If I have problems with my assignment, I seek help from a Learning Adviser.
Q21	There are enough resources in UniSA to help me develop communicative competence (verbal and written) in my study program.

Student responses to Q12 and Q13, combined with the interview responses, indicate that critical thinking and writing cause particular difficulties for first year students and could benefit from some additional introduction to students in invitation emails and/or text provided with the survey, as well as a specific question in the interviews, allowing for more detail on where confusion arises and how teaching could change to scaffold these activities.

Table A2: Questions asked in semi-structured interviews

I1	What do you see as the differences between academic writing and writing for everyday purposes?
I2	What do you see as the major differences in writing different assignments for your courses?
I3	How was knowledge for different assignment types developed?
I4	Do your instructors show you models and examples to help with assignments?
I5	Are models and examples important for you as a first-year student?
I6	Do your instructors generally scaffold learning?
I7	What are the major challenges in developing your knowledge of different assignment types?
I8	What aspects of writing different assignments are you not sure of?
I9	Are there enough resources to help you with your tasks?

Experiences with the interviews suggest that questions I4 and I5 could be amended to encourage students to give more extended answers, as several interviewees gave closed responses to these questions.

Dr Shashi Nallaya has been extensively involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of English language and teacher training programs at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. As an Academic Developer at UniSA she is responsible for facilitating the implementation of innovative curriculum through mentoring, staff development sessions and resources.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3098-8112
Email: shashi.nallaya@unisa.edu.au

Dr James Hobson is an Online Educational Designer at the Teaching Innovation Unit and develops online courses for UniSA Online. Previously, he worked in one of the exam boards in the UK where he got involved with online learning and supporting the adoption of digital assessment technologies.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1230-6053
Email: james.hobson@unisa.edu.au

Ms Tamra Ulpen has extensive experience in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and has worked in English language schools in Japan and in Australia. She plays an integral role at UniSA College in supporting students acquire academic literacy for university study and teaching the values of academic integrity.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9671-0554
Email: tamra.ulpen@unisa.edu.au

Please cite as: Nallaya, S., Hobson, J. E. & Ulpen, T. (2022). An investigation of first year university students' confidence in using academic literacies. *Issues in Educational Research*, 32(1), 264-291. http://www.iier.org.au/iier32/nallaya.pdf