

Student evaluation of academic literacy workshops and individual consultations: A study in an Australian university

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Academic language and learning (ALL) support aims to provide additional learning assistance to students for them to acquire various academic skills to meet the requirements of their study. It is worth investigating whether language support services provided by ALL advisers are useful and relevant to students' learning needs. This paper reports on a study which aims to evaluate two types of language support services, namely academic skills workshops and individual consultations, provided by an Academic Skills Unit located at an Australian university. Quantitative data were collected from an online survey completed by 129 university students who accessed the services of the Unit. Participants were asked to evaluate workshop learning materials, workshop administration, and facilitators' teaching as well as the quality of individual consultation services. Descriptive statistical data analysis was performed and results show that various types of student groups accessed the services, and the reasons for using the services tended to be of a practical nature including understanding university expectations, knowing assignment requirements, and obtaining better grades. Most participants showed satisfaction with these two types of services. This study also examined the perceived impacts of services on preparedness for study, learning outcomes, and student retention through the survey, and the results indicated that workshops had a greater perceived impact on student retention than that of individual consultations. This study provides evidence-based research that can inform the practice of ALL professionals and has important implications for strategic academic literacy support for university students. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Key Words: academic language and learning, academic literacy, workshop evaluation, student feedback, individual consultations

1. Introduction

Academic language and learning (ALL) support aims to provide additional literacy support to equip university students with various academic skills required for their study. This type of support may take different forms including academic literacy workshops, individual or one-on-one consultations, computer-based online learning resources, and embedded faculty-based programs within the curriculum. It is crucial for universities to evaluate ALL support services for a number of reasons. First, on an operational level, evaluation results provide evidence-based findings to inform practice and to improve the quality of program design and delivery so as to cater to students' learning needs. One of the aims of ALL professionals is to provide the best possible support

to promote student learning and to enhance their learning experiences (Butler, 2013). Second, on a strategic level, it provides important data to inform university senior management on institutional language support policies and funding allocation. This study aims to evaluate academic literacy practices through collecting student feedback on academic literacy workshops and individual consultations, as well as their perceived impacts of these services provided by an Academic Skills Unit situated in an Australian university. The survey used in this study can serve as an example for ALL practitioners who are in search for a research instrument to evaluate workshops and individual consultations to obtain evidence-based findings for service improvement. This paper sets out to discuss the importance of academic literacy support and identifies issues regarding the evaluation of ALL practice, for example, the infrequent publication of workshop evaluation results and the difficulties in evaluating individual consultation systematically. This paper presents the findings of this study and discusses the results in light of the relevant literature. Finally, it concludes with suggestions for future research.

1.1. Importance of academic literacy support

While academic skills support can benefit university students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, it is especially essential to first year students, who are new to university studies, and for an increasingly diverse student body with students speaking English as an additional language (EAL), as in the case of Australia. Butler (2013) suggests that academic support is an integral part of higher education as more underprepared students are admitted to tertiary education in the South African higher education sector. Similarly, in the UK, Sloan and Porter (2009) found that 93% of their university student survey respondents considered academic literacy program an important part of their degree program. The importance of academic literacy support to promote student learning and retention is well-documented in the literature. Academic literacy support has been shown to be directly related to academic achievement (Butler, 2013; Holder, Jones, Robinson, & Krass, 1999; Ooms, Fergy, Marks-Maran, Burke, & Sheehy, 2013; Preece & Godfrey, 2004; Yeld, 2003) and is a means to improve student retention (Durkin & Main, 2002; Ooms et al., 2013; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). In the UK, Lotkowski, Robbins and Noeth (2004) reported that students who were not provided with academic and social support were at risk of dropping out. Ooms et al. (2013) also reported that academic skills sessions, together with other types of support such as the support from librarians and numeracy specialists, have led to the improvement of retention among first year students. In the US, a lack of study skills such as the ability to structure different academic genres and writing critically can lead to high dropout rates (Durkin & Main, 2002). While the factors for dropping out are complex, it is worth investigating the relationships between academic support and attrition rates. Attrition rate refers to the proportion of students who commence a bachelor course but neither complete nor return in the coming year. In Australia, the attrition rate for all commencing bachelor students at public universities was quite high at 18.91 % in 2014 (15.52% for domestic students and 10.07% for international students) (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

Despite the importance of academic literacy support, the problem of persistent failure to adequately support students for academic literacy development exists, especially at the initial stages of their study (Wingate, 2015). Wingate (2015) examined the preparedness of first year Applied Linguistic students in a UK university ($N = 101$) and found that 83% of the respondents were “somewhat” prepared rather than “well” prepared for writing at university. A majority of these respondents were uncertain about academic writing style and displayed feelings of inadequacy in their current writing. This highlights the importance of providing students with literacy knowledge and appropriate support. However, whether academic support is able to meet students’ learning needs or to what extent students are aware of support services is questionable (Fenton-Smith & Michael, 2013).

While various academic literacy support services are available at many universities, empirical studies that evaluate the effectiveness and impacts are limited. In the United Kingdom, Ooms et

al. (2013) evaluated various support services through administering a questionnaire with 812 nursing students enrolled in two universities and found that over half of the participants did not use any literacy support services at all. Of those who used the services, 90% of them found the services helpful for developing study skills, reducing anxiety, and building confidence. Academic literacy support was particularly valued by EAL students. In Australia, student evaluations have been a standard element of ALL practices used as part of curriculum development and justifications for services. Although there are discussions of evaluation processes and issues, evaluations are not often used in a research context and published. This may be attributable to the fact that many academic literacy advisers are general/professional staff and they are not expected to undertake research. Despite this, evaluation of ALL practices such as embedded literacy programs, web-based learning support, and collaboration between ALL professionals and academic staff were reported, for example, the publication of *Academic Skills Advising: Evaluation for Program Improvement and Accountability* edited by Webb and McLean in 2002.

1.2. Evaluation of academic literacy workshops and individual consultations

Academic literacy workshops and individual consultations are two prevalent and important services provided by ALL professionals and yet studies that evaluate these services are limited. The evaluation of many small-scale workshops is either not done or completed superficially (Bamberger, Rugh, Church, & Fort, 2004; D'Eon, Sadownik, Harrison, & Nation, 2008; Stone et al., 2003), or results are for some reasons unpublished. Durkin and Main (2002) examined the effectiveness of discipline-based mentoring approach and generic study skills workshops and found that mentoring was in greater demand than workshops. However, it was not possible to compare the two approaches because no students attended the workshops, and therefore how students evaluated these workshops is unknown. Green and Agosti (2011) evaluated the usefulness of 16 postgraduate workshop materials for a one-week intensive non-compulsory academic literacy program through a questionnaire ($N = 8$). Overall, the participants found most materials "very useful". Based on the findings, the syllabus of another 12-week extension program was designed, and its relevancy and effectiveness was evaluated through a second questionnaire. The participants found the course content highly relevant to their needs but suggested additional topics such as nominalisation, punctuation, and reading efficiently. Learning how to deconstruct assignment questions was considered the most important activity in the program. While this study yields useful results, the limitation lies in its small sample size. As studies that evaluated the relevancy and perceived impacts of generic academic workshops are limited, there is an urgent need for conducting and publishing more empirical studies.

Individual consultations can benefit students by paying attention to their individual needs and providing personalised attention (Best & Neil, 1996; Garner, 1996; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015) as well as creating a non-threatening environment for them to ask questions (Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015; Brunken, 1996). Individual support is regarded as being especially important for students at their initial stages of university study (Wingate, 2015) and it benefits not only students but also learning advisers by helping them to identify student needs through assessing student problems (Wong-Toi, 1996) and to become more familiar with particular disciplinary discourses that are new to them (Devlin, 1996). Individual consultations can be used as input into the curriculum development of other modes of ALL teaching such as "generic" and curriculum-embedded classes (Huijser, Kimmins, & Galligan, 2008; Berry et al., 2012; Chanock, 2007). Best and Neil (1996) and Garner (1996) discussed in detail other benefits of consultations. Despite being beneficial, the provision of individual consultations is under threat in the context of reduced funding in higher education (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009) because of its expensive operational cost. In the early years of ALL provision in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, individual consultations were evaluated mainly for the justification of their practice, aligning evaluation to the number of students attending rather than conducting evaluation in its own right (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009).

Recent literature has called for more evaluation of individual consultations and yet many problems exist (Chanock, 2002). It is difficult to evaluate individual consultations systematically (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009) because they are used differently in various academic literacy contexts in terms of duration, student access (self-select or referral or both), nomenclature (appointment, drop-in) and location (library, within a Faculty or an ALL unit). Early studies were mainly based on learning advisers' self-reflections (e.g., Boddington, 1996; Wong-Toi, 1996) and Chanock (2007) called for ALL advisers to develop appropriate questionnaires to evaluate individual consultations. Stevenson and Kokkinn (2009) proposed a framework which evaluates individual consultations from four perspectives: a) purpose of evaluation, b) specific focus of evaluation, c) participants of evaluation, and d) methods of evaluation. Berry et al. (2012) adopted this framework and evaluated individual consultations offered by an ALL centre at a university in Australia, using peer-observation, self-reflection and student questionnaire. It was found that peer observation was successful in building knowledge of practice but was rather time consuming. While some staff considered the overlap between peer observation and self-reflection unhelpfully replicated evaluation criteria, others found that peer observation prompted different types of reflection. The questionnaire data show that students mainly expected to have assistance on checking draft assignments, quality of writing, and grammar, and on unpacking assignment questions.

To apply Stevenson and Kokkinn's (2009) framework in the present study, the *purpose* of evaluation is to make continual improvement of services and to share evaluation experiences with other ALL practitioners. The *focus* of evaluation is on student satisfaction, personal qualities of "service provider", and perceived impacts. This is different from some previous studies in which the focus was on the interaction between advisers and students (e.g., Wilson, Li, Collin, & Couchman, 2011; Chanock & Vardi, 2005; Woodward-Kron, 2007). The present study recruited students as *participants* because one of the gaps in researching individual consultations lies in the student perspectives (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009). Collecting student feedback is particularly important because students are service users who are directly involved in academic literacy support programs (Chanock, 2007). At an institutional level, student feedback provides internal information to guide improvement (Kember, Leung, & Kwan 2002; Spooren, Mortelmans, & Denekens, 2007) and to allocate financial resources allocation (Richardson, 2005). It also provides external information for quality assurance (Leckey & Neill, 2010; Rowley, 2003) and benchmarking institutions (Watson, 2003). At an individual level, it provides students opportunities to express their views and satisfaction levels of learning experiences, enhancing their reflection on learning. In the present study, a questionnaire was used as the *method* of evaluation and it can serve as a sample to be adapted and replicated by ALL practitioners in other institutions. The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of student groups use the Academic Skills Unit's services and resources?
2. How do students rate academic skills workshops and individual consultations provided by the Academic Skills Unit?
3. How do students perceive the impacts of academic skills workshops and individual consultations on their study?

2. The study

2.1. Research context

The present study was conducted at an Australian university where an Academic Skills Unit, consisting of a small team of 5 (full-time equivalent) Academic Skills Advisers, was situated. Advisers were responsible for designing and delivering academic literacy workshops, providing individual consultations at the Enquiry Counter located in the library, developing online independent learning resources on academic skills and academic integrity, and embedded faculty-based projects in collaboration with discipline academics. A summary of academic language support is presented in Table 1.

Individual consultations offered at the library enquiry counter replaced one-hour booked consultations that were the consultation format offered previously because not all students kept the appointment and it was considered a waste of human resources. In addition, the same group of students tended to book numerous consultations repeatedly, and therefore the service could not benefit as many students as expected. Consequently, quick individual consultations had been introduced one year before this study was conducted as a triage to access long individual consultation sessions. It is therefore essential to evaluate the effectiveness of this new initiative.

Table 1. Summary of academic literacy support.

Services	Service description	Availability
Academic literacy workshops	Offered in Weeks 1-3, mid-semester break, and Week 9.	98 undergraduate and post-graduate workshops on 30 academic literacy topics per semester. Non-compulsory and non-credit awarding.
Enquiry counter	Individual consultations at the library enquiry.	12-2pm each week day during teaching weeks. No booking is required.
Online resources	Two modules for self-learning on: i) academic literacy skills such as referencing, critical reading, academic writing; and ii) academic integrity	Resources available online through Moodle.
Email enquiry	Students send enquiries via email.	Academic Skills Advisers take turns to answer enquiries daily.
Embedded academic literacy projects	Collaboration with discipline academics to develop and teach resources.	Selected groups of students during or outside class time.

2.2. Instrument

An invitation of research participation was sent out to 695 students by email, including 541 distinct workshop attendees and 154 distinct individual consultation service users. Participants completed the online questionnaire via Qualtrics ($N = 129$) with a response rate of 18.5%. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, designed by the researcher, who was also an academic skills adviser in the Academic Skills Unit in collaboration with two other advisers. Part 1 collected student demographic information such as level of study, faculty affiliation, and types of student groups. Parts 2 and 3 contained questions that evaluated the quality and perceived impacts of workshops and individual consultations. An open-ended question for general comments was placed at the end of Parts 2 and 3 respectively for participants to provide opinions on areas that they felt strongly about or items that were not included in the questionnaire.

2.3. Participants

The respondents ($N = 129$) were mainly undergraduates (70%), with some postgraduate coursework students (19%) and research students (5%). They were from four faculties at the university, namely Human Sciences (33%), Arts (33%), Business and Economics (18%), and Science (12%).

2.4. Procedures

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the researchers' institution. Potential participants were identified from the records of attendance kept in the Unit. The questionnaire was sent out in the last week of the semester, which was considered an appropriate time because seeking feedback sometime after rather than immediately following services allows students to have time to appreciate the benefits or impacts that may not have otherwise been recognised. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey and lucky draw prizes were offered as an incentive for participation. Richardson (2005) suggests the importance of increasing student motivation in survey completion to achieve a high response rate.

2.5. Data analysis

Quantitative research approach was adopted and descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the data. Additional qualitative comments in the open responses were analysed through a thematic analysis (Holliday, 2015). Common themes were identified, from which the coding frames were determined. Data were independently coded by the researcher and a research assistant to ensure coding consistency and reliability, with the inter-coder agreement reaching 88%, which is considered to be high (Artstein & Poesio, 2008).

3. Results

3.1. Types of service users

Participants were asked to identify themselves with one or more student groups provided in order to investigate the representation of student groups. Table 2 shows the percentages of participants by student groups.

Table 2. Participants by student groups ($N = 124^*$).

Student groups	Percentage
First year students	64
Mature students (older than 21 years old)	49
English is not my first language	35
International students	21
Long time since last study	16
External students	5
Regional/remote students	6
Pathways students	5
Students with disability	3
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders	0
Refugees	0

*Five respondents did not answer this question.

Table 2 shows that most participants were first year students (64%). As 70% of the respondents were undergraduates and 64% were first year students, it means that about 6% of the respondents used the services beyond the first year of undergraduate study. About one-third of the respondents did not use English as their first language (35%). No respondents were refugees or Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders.

3.2. Generic academic literacy workshops

3.2.1. Reasons for attending workshops

Of the 129 respondents, about 80% attended workshops ($N = 103$). About a quarter of these workshop attendees (26%) attended one workshop and nearly half (43%) attended two or three workshops. The rest (31%) attended 4-7 workshops.

The reasons for attending workshops are presented in Table 3, with the main reasons being understanding university expectations (70%), improving grades (57%), and achieving outstanding results (51%). Only 6% of the respondents attended workshops because of a failing grade. Very few respondents got a referral from teaching staff (12%) and only 9% heard about workshops from student mentors, senior student group leaders who assisted new students with their transition to university. The reasons for such few referrals are worth investigation. If teaching staff and student mentors are not aware of the services provided, there is an urgent need for more ALL service promotion among teaching staff and mentors. If they are not aware of the benefits of the services, it is necessary to make clear to them how services might be beneficial or to invite academic staff to review the services.

Table 3. Reasons for attending workshops ($N = 103$).

Reasons	% *
To better understand university expectations	70
To improve my grades	57
To achieve outstanding results in my course	51
It has been a while since I last studied and I wanted to refresh my knowledge.	33
To improve my English	30
I had an upcoming assignment that I needed help with.	24
My tutor/lecturer referred me.	12
My mentor told me about the workshops.	9
I was at risk of failing a unit.	6
Other	2

*Participants could select multiple options and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%.

3.2.2. Student feedback on workshop delivery

Respondents who attended workshops were asked to evaluate workshop materials, facilitators' teaching and workshop administration. Ratings are on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) and the results are presented in Table 4.

Overall, respondents were very positive about workshop delivery. Most found the workshop materials useful (81%), appropriate to their level, and relevant to their study (79%). Statement 3 was phrased negatively to avoid the Halo Effect (Thorndike, 1920). About 85% of the respondents found that the presenters provided clear explanations, had professional knowledge, and demonstrated helpful and approachable personality. However, only 56% considered the workshop times convenient. The overall satisfaction level was 82%, showing that respondents were highly satisfied with the quality of workshops. Twenty respondents provided additional comments in the open-ended questions, including both positive comments such as "I am very grateful you offer them!!!" and some negative comments on the inflexibility of workshop times operating between 10am-4pm. Two respondents thought that the level was too basic.

Table 4. Student feedback on workshop delivery ($N = 103$).

Statements	Strongly agree & Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree & Disagree	Mean score
1. The workshop(s) were relevant to my study.	79	19	3	4.13
2. The PowerPoint slides were useful.	81	16	4	4.11
3. The workshop materials were too difficult / hard to follow.	10	16	74	2.19
4. The presenter(s) explained the content clearly.	85	13	3	4.13
5. The presenter(s) had a good knowledge of the topic.	86	11	3	4.19
6. The presenter(s) were helpful and approachable.	85	12	3	4.17
7. The workshop times were convenient.	56	32	12	3.66
8. The workshop venue was easily accessible with adequate facilities.	80	18	3	4.10
9. Overall, I was satisfied with the workshop(s).	82	14	5	4.06

3.3. Individual consultation services

3.3.1. Reasons for using individual consultations

Of the 129 respondents, 55 reported that they used individual consultation services. About half of the service users (44%) accessed individual consultation service only once and about one-third (35%) of them reported that they used the service two or three times. Others (22%) visited more than four times. The reasons provided for seeking advice at the Enquiry Counter are presented in Table 5. Most respondents asked questions about their assignments (80%), either because they needed clarification about assignment requirements (65%) or they did not do well in a previous assignment (15%). About one-fifth of the respondents reported the need for assistance with improving English language skills.

Table 5. Reasons for using individual consultations ($N = 55$).

Reasons	%*
1. I wanted clarification about assignment expectations.	65
2. I was feeling overwhelmed with my study and wanted to talk to someone about this.	36
3. I needed help to improve my English.	20
4. I received a low grade in an assignment and wanted to know how I could improve.	15
5. I was referred to the Enquiry Counter by my teacher.	11
6. Other	13

*Participants could select multiple options and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%.

3.3.1. Student feedback on individual consultations.

Five-point Likert scale items were used to evaluate the quality of service (see Table 6), with the key results being as follows. A majority of respondents showed agreement with Statements 1–3, indicating positive views on the skills and expertise of Academic Skills Advisers in solving their problems in general. About half of them (52%) thought that the advice helped them obtain better results in assignments. The overall satisfaction level was 74%, which is 8% lower than that of workshop delivery, but it is still quite high. Most of the mean scores of the statements were below 4.0 and they were lower than those of the workshops, showing that workshops received a higher satisfaction rate than individual consultations. Only 9 respondents provided additional comments including comments on advisers' personality such as "open", "kind" and "passionate about what they do". Having more flexible times for consultation periods was recommended.

Table 6. Student feedback on individual consultations ($N = 55$).

Statements	Strongly agree & Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree & Disagree	Mean
1. The Academic Skills Adviser provided a clear explanation.	76	22	2	4.02
2. The Academic Skills Adviser had the expertise in analysing my learning needs.	72	24	4	3.89
3. The Academic Skills Advisers helped me to solve my problem(s).	69	28	4	3.87
4. The advice that I got from the Academic Skills Adviser helped me to get higher grades in assignments.	52	45	4	3.63
5. Overall, I was satisfied with the services of Academic Skills Advisers at the Enquiry Counter.	74	22	4	3.96

3.4. Perceived impacts of workshops and individual consultations

Participants were asked to evaluate the impacts of workshop attendance and advice received from advisers on their preparedness for study, assignment results and decisions to discontinue study. Table 7 compares the results of perceived impacts of these two services. Note that most participants felt more prepared for their studies after using these two services (76%–79%). In addition, these services appear to be very important for some students because about one-third of them reported that the services helped with retention rate and failing rate. For this group of students, individual consultations were slightly more effective in preventing failing than workshops. Only very few participants (11%–13%) reported that using the services did not have any impact on their studies. Workshops attendance had a higher perceived impact on student retention (24%) than that of individual consultation (15%).

Table 7. Comparison of perceived impacts of workshops and consultations.

Perceived impacts	Workshops %* (N = 103)	Individual consultations %* (N = 55)
Made me decide to keep studying instead of dropping out.	24	15
I might have failed.	8	11
My marks have improved.	26	26
I feel more prepared for my studies.	76	79
Made NO difference to my studies.	13	11

*Participants could select multiple options and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%.

4. Discussion

The first research question of this study aims to identify the types of student groups who used the support services offered by the Academic Skills Unit. It is not surprising that most respondents were first year students because they were the main target group of the Unit. However, some students continued to use the services beyond their first year and this supports Wingate's (2015) suggestion that undergraduate students need more than one term to understand and acquire academic literacy. This study shows that some students need more than one year. About 21% of the respondents were international students, who were an important target group of the Unit. To examine if this group of students was under represented, it is important to compare this figure with the total percentage of international students at the university of the study. According to the figure provided by Australian Education Network (2016), 26% of students enrolled at this particular university were international students. This indicates that the Unit needs to continue to promote its services to these students, reaching out to them through different channels, and to investigate other possible reasons for non-attendance. The results enable the Unit to target its marketing strategies at underrepresented groups such as refugees and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. It is surprising that about half of the respondents were mature students and it is worth investigating whether they have special learning needs.

The second research question investigates students' rating of workshop delivery and individual consultations. Overall, respondents were satisfied with both services, with workshops having a higher satisfaction level. Similarly, Oom et al. (2013) found that about 90% of service users thought that the support services were helpful or somewhat helpful. With this evidence of user satisfaction in this study, the Academic Skills Unit was more confident that the resources invested in these services were well- allocated and these evidence-based findings should be relevant for the university senior management with respect to resource allocation to these services.

This study reveals that the main reasons for students to attend workshops were to understand university expectations and to obtain better results. It is clear that many respondents did not attend for remedial purposes, unlike what was reported by the National Audit Office (2007) that some students regarded academic support as a "deficit" in their ability, which is a perception that may lead to difficulties in attracting students to use academic support services. This implies that academic skills advisers should adopt the role of providing initiation rather than remediation in their profession. The fact that many respondents hoped to obtain better results means that the tone of workshop delivery could be pitched at high achievers. This study also shows that the level of workshop material was appropriate and therefore should be maintained. It is worth investigating whether workshop attendance can lead to improved performance. However, some respondents were dissatisfied with the workshop times, and therefore more flexible options such as evening workshops and online workshops should be offered.

The main purpose for students to use individual consultation service was to clarify assignment expectations. This implies that institutional requirements and expectations are not always clear to students. It could be a lack of transparency at the teacher's end or there may be some other reasons. What factors hinder students' understanding of expectations and how to make expectations clear and explicit to students are worthy of future investigations. The findings in the present study support Berry et al.'s (2012) study in which students hoped to understand assignment questions through individual consultations. Likewise in Oom et al.'s (2013) study, over 87% of service users thought that language support sessions were helpful for assignment completion. It is worth mentioning that about half of the respondents in the present study reported that the assistance provided by Academic Skills Advisers helped them improve their marks, making a difference to their study. However, it is worth exploring why other students did not share the same view through other research methods such as individual interviews.

Many respondents used individual consultation services only once and it is unclear why they did not return for more services. It could be that they did not have any more questions or were too busy with university study. Using focus group interviews in future research can explore issues in greater depth and may obtain some useful insights into service improvement. Only 10% of the respondents who attended workshops and individual consultations were referred by teaching staff and it points to the need for investigating the reasons for non-referrals. Possible reasons could be that staff do not perceive the benefits of services, or they do not see the need to build academic skills development into their teaching, or they simply are not aware of the availability of services. Ooms et al. (2013) also suggest the need for better marketing and advertising of support services.

The last research question explores the perceived impacts of workshops and individual consultations. Both services have shown some impact on retention rate, with workshops having a greater impact than individual consultations. In this study, about 23 participants reported that workshop attendance had positively influenced their decision to persist in their study. If we project this number to the total number of distinct workshop attendees (N=541) in that particular semester, it is possible that 124 students were retained. It represents a significant amount of institutional revenue, not to mention the positive impacts on these students' prospects. To sum up, this study provides some evidence to show the importance of student support as a means of improving retention and empowering students to succeed at university (Ooms et al., 2013). Therefore, the impacts of academic skills support go beyond the learning of study skills and academic language development (Fenton-Smith & Michael, 2013).

5. Conclusion

This study evaluated two important types of ALL support for students, namely workshops and individual consultations. It found that respondents were generally satisfied with both services and reported significant perceived impacts on their study preparedness and learning outcomes. A limitation of the study is that the findings were based on self-report data and perceived impacts were reported rather than actual effects on students' grades, which are in fact problematic to measure because of other possible variables affecting learning outcomes such as self-management, learning motivation, and understanding of subject matter (Drew, 2001; Chanock, 2002). Another limitation is the time gap between service use and questionnaire completion. While this gap allows students to reflect on the impacts on their study, the data were based on memory and may not be accurate.

ALL services vary between universities, dictating that evaluation approaches should be tailored to each ALL centre (Berry et al., 2012). Although the results are unique to the present research context and may not be readily generalisable to other institutions, the survey used in this study can serve as an example research tool for ALL practitioners to evaluate services with a view to collect data on how students perceive the impacts on their studies although actual impacts are difficult to measure. This is a great challenge for evaluating ALL services. As Ooms et al. (2013)

reported that over half of their participants did not use any literacy support services, it is important to understand the reasons for student non-engagement. For future research, surveying non-service users may yield important results that could lead to service improvement as they may have very different opinions from service users. Using other research methods such as focus group interviews allows further probing and may yield rich data. It is also recommended that regular surveys be conducted over several semesters to check the consistency of results and trends.

Students' views should be collected for the purpose of translating them into actions as Harvey (2003, p. 19) suggests that "there is more to student feedback than collecting data". Based on the findings of this study, the Academic Skills Unit did take actions and offered additional evening workshops in the following semester. More similar evaluations of ALL services in different universities and publications of results will contribute to a more informed national discussion of the quality and impacts of services.

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Appendix A. Evaluation questionnaire

Part 1. Demographic information

Q1. In which level of study are you enrolled?

- Undergraduate (including bachelors, honours, certificate, diploma or non-award)
- Postgraduate Coursework (including Masters, PG Certificate, PG Diploma)
- Higher Degree Research

Q2. In which faculty do you study most of your units?

- Arts and Humanities
- Science
- Human Sciences
- Business and Economics

Q3. Please indicate if you identify with any of the following. Select all the statements that apply to you. I am ...

- a first year student.
- a mature age student (aged 21 years or older).
- English is not my first language.
- an international student.
- an external student.
- a pathway student.
- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- a refugee.
- I have a disability.
- It has been a long time (more than 10 years) since I did any formal study.
- I come from a regional or remote part of Australia.

Q4. Which of the following services provided by the Academic Skills Unit have you used? (More than one option can be ticked.)

- I attended workshops.
- I sought advice from an Academic Skills Adviser at the Enquiry Counter.
- I have not used any of the services mentioned above.

Part 2. Workshops

Q1. Why did you attend Academic Skills workshops? (Select all the statements that apply to you.)

- To improve my English.
- To better understand university expectations.
- To improve my grades.
- To achieve outstanding results in my course.
- I was at risk of failing a unit.
- I had an upcoming assignment that I needed help with.
- It has been a while since I last studied and I wanted to refresh my knowledge.
- My mentor told me about the workshops.
- My tutor/lecturer referred me.
- Other

Q2. How many workshops did you attend?

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-6
- 7 or more

Q3. Tick all statements below that you feel are true. (More than one option can be ticked.)

- Attending the Academic Skills workshops made me decide to keep studying instead of dropping out.
- I might have failed if I had not attended the workshops.
- My marks have improved because I attended the workshops.
- I felt more prepared for my studies after attending the workshops.
- Attending workshops made **NO** difference to my studies.

Q4. How much do you agree with the following statements? (5-point Likert Scale 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

1. The workshop(s) were relevant to my study.
2. The PowerPoint slides were useful.
3. The workshop material was too difficult / hard to follow.
4. The presenter explained the content clearly.
5. The presenter had a good knowledge of the topic.
6. The presenter was helpful and approachable.
7. The workshop times were convenient.
8. The workshop venue was easily accessible with adequate facilities.
9. Overall, I was satisfied with the workshop.

Q5. Do you have any other comments about the Academic Skills workshops (Optional)

Part 3. Individual Consultations

Q1. In this semester, I have talked to an Academic Skills Adviser at the Enquiry Counter located in the library ...

- 1 time
- 2-3 times
- 4-6 times
- 7 or more times

Q2. Why did you talk to an Academic Skills Adviser?

- I wanted clarification about assignment expectations.
- I was referred to the Enquiry Counter by my teacher.
- I received a low grade in an assignment and wanted to know how I could improve.
- I needed help to improve my English.
- I was feeling overwhelmed with my study and wanted to talk to someone about this.
- Other

Q3. Tick all statements below that you feel are true. (More than one option can be ticked.)

- Getting advice from an Academic Skills Adviser made me decide to keep studying instead of dropping out.
- I might have failed if I had not gotten advice from an Academic Skills Adviser.
- My marks have improved because I got advice from an Academic Skills Adviser.
- I felt more prepared for my studies after getting advice from an Academic Skills Adviser.
- Getting advice from an Academic Skills Adviser made **NO** difference to my studies.

Q4. How much do you agree with the following statements? (5-point Likert Scale 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

1. The Academic Skills Adviser had the expertise in analysing my learning needs.
2. The Academic Skills Adviser provided a clear explanation.
3. The Academic Skills Adviser helped me to solve my problem(s).
4. The advice that I got from the Academic Skills Adviser helped me to get higher grades in assignments.
5. Overall, I was satisfied with the services of Academic Skills Advisers at the Enquiry Counter.

Q5. Do you have any other comments about the Academic Skills services at the Enquiry Counter? (Optional)

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