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A Study on Awareness of Reference Management Software for Research Writing Activity Used by University Teachers

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Abstract

The study aimed at investigating the level of knowledge and awareness of reference management software among teaching faculties at the University of Zambia. With an increased emphasis on research and publications in higher education institutions, using these tools can significantly improve the efficiency and accuracy of the citation process. Despite the availability of these tools, the academic community at the University of Zambia has not fully embraced their use. The study aimed to understand why this may be the case and provide recommendations for increasing the adoption of these tools. Survey method was used. This is a research method in which a structured questionnaire is used to collect data from a sample of participants. In this case, the survey was emailed to teaching faculties at the University of Zambia, including lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and professors. Findings of the study showed that most faculty members don't use RMS despite awareness of its existence. Mendeley was the most used by the minority who indicated using RMS. Barriers as well as low usage of RMS revealed inadequate training. It was recommended that the library department conduct frequent trainings to provide the needed skills, knowledge and information to UNZA teachers in different faculties on the use of RMS. To better utilise the RMS, the training should go beyond referencing to using other advantaged features such flexible formatting, access to many file formats for export and import as well as sharing collections of references.

Keywords: *Bibliographic management software, Bibliographic database, Citation management, Reference management, Research reference tool*

1.0 Introduction

In reference lists, ranging from simple typographical errors to incorrect or missing information. These studies suggest that reference lists in published articles may not always be reliable, and researchers should exercise caution when using them as a source of information. It is also essential for authors, editors, and publishers to ensure the accuracy of reference lists to improve the credibility and integrity of academic research (Eichorn & Yankauer, 1987; McLellan et al., 1992; Siebers & Holt, 2000; Faunce & Soames Job, 2001; Gatten, 2010; Pavlovic et al., 2021; Lazonder & Janssen, 2022).

Loneragan defines Reference Management Software (RMS) as a tool that helps researchers organise and structure their sources in a digital format. This can include recording sources on a local computer or through a web-based interface. RMS allows researchers to efficiently organise their research and create accurate bibliographies and in-text citations. This can save time and effort and improve the accuracy and consistency of citations in academic research (Loneragan, 2017). Reference management software has become increasingly popular in recent years as more and more researchers and academics are turning to digital tools to help with their research and writing. Using RMS can streamline the research process, save time, and reduce citation errors.

Additionally, many RMS now have built-in collaboration features, which can be helpful for researchers working in teams, as well as integration with word processing software, which

makes it easy to insert citations and create bibliographies. RMS also facilitates compliance with the citation styles and formatting the journals or publishers require. These features make RMS an essential tool for researchers, academicians, librarians, and publishers who want to improve their work's efficiency, accuracy, and quality. There are many different reference management software options available to researchers, and each may have distinct features and capabilities. It is crucial to choose a solution that meets the specific needs of your research and adheres to the citation style and formatting requirements of the journal or publisher you plan to submit. Reference management software allows researchers to easily store, organise and manage the sources they use in their research, including books, journal articles, conference proceedings, newspapers, magazines, patents, audio recordings, videos, and more. This makes it easy to keep track of the sources used in a research project and to quickly and accurately create citations and bibliographies. Additionally, many reference management software has built-in citation styles for different journals, saving the researcher time and effort (Zhang, 2012; Basak, 2014).

Around thirty reference management tools are available worldwide. Each tool has unique features and capabilities, so it is vital to research and compare different options to find the one that best fits your needs (Awang Puteh et al., 2019). Many reference management tools now offer document management features in addition to citation management. These features can help researchers organise and keep track of the downloaded PDF articles and make it easier to access and share documents across multiple devices through cloud storage integration. Some reference management tools that offer these features include Mendeley, Zotero, and Papers. These tools can also allow for annotation and highlighting of PDFs and search across the documents library (Speare, 2018). Giving proper credit through citations is an essential aspect of academic research. Citations acknowledge the contributions of others and provide a way for readers to locate and verify the sources used in your research. This is especially important in scholarly writing, where new ideas are built upon the work of previous researchers. It is considered a professional and ethical responsibility to credit the original authors, and plagiarism is considered a severe offense in the academic and research community. It is also important to note that citations not only help to give credit to the primary authors but also it helps to trace the development of ideas and research in a field over time (Lanning, 2016).

Citation data providers offer citations that can be used to track down specific sources and prevent plagiarism. Examples of these providers include publisher websites, Google Scholar, SciFinder, SciVerse, Scopus, and Web of Science. These databases allow users to search for and access scholarly articles, papers, and other publications and provide information on properly citing the sources used in research (Awang Puteh et al., 2019; Martín-Martín et al., 2021). Researchers commonly use reference management software to capture, store, organise, and distribute references from a specialized database. This software typically supports different citation styles and can automatically generate references based on the requirements of the chosen citation style. This allows authors to easily create and format reference lists for their research papers, articles, and other publications. Some contemporary reference management software packages also offer functionality for integration with word processing software, making it even more convenient for authors to use and manage their references. (Setiani et al., 2021).

Numerous reference formats are available. Different disciplines, journals, and theses follow various formats. Some of the referencing formats are APA (American Psychological Association), Harvard, Chicago, IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), NLM (National Library of Medicine), MLA ((Modern Language Association), MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association, OSCOLA (Oxford Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities), Turabian, Vancouver, (Lampthey & Atta-Obeng, 2012; Alvi, 2016; Pandey

et al., 2020). Reference management software made the citation procedure considerably more manageable and user-friendly. In affluent nations, reference management software (RMS) usage has grown steadily over the past 30 years. This can be attributed to the growing emphasis on academic research and publishing, as well as the increasing availability and accessibility of RMS. However, in low-income nations, the usage of RMS is less well understood and used due to a lack of resources and access to technology. The reference section is integral to academic writing as it provides a clear and organized list of all the works cited in the text. It makes it easier for readers to access the sources used in an article and understand the context of the research (Martínez-López et al., 2019; Yanguí et al., 2020).

1.1 Need of the study

There are many open-source and proprietary reference management systems (RMS) in the current software market for managing research references. However, many researchers may be unaware of the many reference styles available and lack the skills to choose the appropriate software tool. This can lead to confusion and errors in the citation process, which can ultimately affect the quality of the research. Conducting a study to gauge researchers' knowledge level and use of open-source RMS for referencing is necessary to understand the field's current state and identify areas where more education and resources are needed. Such a study can help researchers better understand the different types of RMS available and make informed decisions about which tools to use. Additionally, it can provide valuable insights into using open-source software in the research process and help improve the quality of research through better referencing.

The study's research objectives are:

1. To determine the proportion of faculties that use reference management software (RMS).
2. To identify which specific RMS is used by faculties and their purpose.
3. To identify the barriers to using RMS and why some faculties choose not to use it.

By achieving these objectives, the study can provide valuable insights into the current state of RMS usage among faculties and help to understand the factors that influence the adoption of RMS. This information can improve the quality of research by better educating researchers about the benefits of RMS and addressing any barriers preventing their use. Additionally, the study can help identify the most popular RMS and their most common use cases among faculties which can be helpful for developers, educators, and researchers.

2.0 Literature Review

Charles Terbill condensed the three possible explanations given by experts. The reader is intended to be persuaded in the first step and informed in the second. The final step is to compliment or criticise the cited authors. These are responsibility, searchability, and accountability, in both. He confirms in his article's conclusion that the purpose of a citation is to allow others to locate the material referenced by the authors (Terbill, 1990).

The use of Reference Management Software (RMS) in citation and referencing is not a new phenomenon. Studies have shown that RMS have been used since 1980 by researchers and were based on d/base II/III Database Management System (Bertrand & Bander, 1980). However, with the increase in the number of researchers and scholars, the RMS have advanced and being utilized by different Institutions of Higher learning Worldwide. The differences lying in terminology and technology used to store and retrieve as compared to today. The RMS have helped many scholars and researchers in managing large sets of

references to produce citations that are consistent hence many studies have been conducted in this area.

Francese (2013) conducted a study focusing on the usage of Reference Management Softwares (RMS) in academic environment at Tallinn University. Results showed that RMS suffers a low spread among scholars even though there is an awareness of its existence. The study suggested that libraries should provide more information and create stronger support to widen RMS usage. The low usage despite awareness may be necessitated by how sophisticated the RMS has become due to technological advancement beyond the basic use for producing references. Other factor that may lead to the above results is non exposure to different types of RMS available. Amrutha, Kumah & Kabir (2018) noted this when they found that most researchers used Mendeley free desktop edition despite having many RMS online.

Similarly, a study by Sarrafzadeh and Hazeri (2014) aimed at investigated the use and knowledge of Reference Management tools among library and information science faculty at Iran University found that majority participants used Endnote Reference Management app as it was common. Further, the findings revealed that half of the participants indicated awareness of and use of Reference Management tools as well as the need for RMS preparations.

Accordingly, a study was conducted by Pathak & Johnson (2018) on use and awareness of Reference Management Softwares among community college students in New York City. 124 participants were recruited and the results indicated a low awareness and use of RMS among community college students regardless of their level of education, ethnicity and other general information. Low awareness and usage is directly linked to two factors. The first maybe associated to less information provision about the available RMS by librarians within the community college. The second factor focus on the need to train the user by academic librarians so that these softwares can be better utilized.

On the other hand, the availability and user-friendly of RMS also affect their utilization. A study by Madhusudan (2016) with students at Delhi University under the library and information science department revealed that the majority utilized an online citation method called Simple Bib, despite not undergoing any formal training in generating online citations. These findings show that despite the need to deal with large sets of references among many scholars and researchers, user-friendly RMS tools are preferred.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 The survey questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the study had four areas of content. The first area covered consent and demographic information, educational background, and publishing experience. The second area of the questionnaire covered Reference Management Software (RMS) awareness and usage. This section aimed to gather information about the participants' familiarity with RMS, their current usage of RMS, and their reasons for using or not using RMS. The third area of the questionnaire covered RMS using issues and challenges. This section aimed to identify any problems or challenges that participants may have encountered while using RMS, such as difficulty in understanding the software and difficulty integrating the software with word processors. Overall, the questionnaire was designed to comprehensively understand the participant's knowledge and experience with RMS, including their awareness, usage, issues, and challenges.

3.2 Statistical analysis

Google Spreadsheets were used for data analysis in the study. This is a standard method to organize, store and analyze data; it's also widely used and accessible, which makes it easy to share and collaborate with other researchers. This study found simple percentages and frequencies for the data analysis. These are standard statistical measures used in descriptive statistics, which are used to summarise and describe the characteristics of a dataset.

4.0 Findings

Table 1. Gender-wise distribution

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	44	62
Female	27	38

table 1 shows the number of respondents and their percentages. It shows that there were 44 male respondents (62%) and 27 female respondents (38%). It is clear that most of the respondents are male, and the least are females.

Table 2. Do you have scientific experience?

Scientific experience	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	69	97.2
No	2	2.8

Information presented in Table 2 about research experience. The majority of the respondents, 97.2%, have scientific experience, while only 2.8% do not have any scientific experience.

Table 3. Are you aware of RMS?

Aware of RMS	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	40	56.3
No	31	43.7

The data in table 3 shows that most respondents (56.3%) are aware of RMS, while the remaining (43.7%) are not.

Table 4. Do you use reference management software (RMS) for your citation needs?

Reference management software (RMS) used for your citation needs	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	28	39.4
No	43	60.6

Table 4 indicates that a smaller proportion of the respondents (39.4%) use RMS for their citation needs, while the majority (60.6%) do not.

Table 5. If yes, Which of the following reference management software do you use? Select all that apply.

Name of the RMS do you use	Respondents	Percentage
RefWorks	1	1.4

Paperpile	2	2.8
Wizfolio	0	0
Citavi	0	0
Docear	0	0
EndNote	3	4.2
BibTex	1	1.4
Zotero	9	12.7
Mendeley	16	22.5
I did not use	43	60.6

Table 5 shows that out of the 28 respondents who use reference management software, the most popular options are Mendeley (22.5%), followed by Zotero (12.7%), and EndNote (4.2%). Other options, such as RefWorks, Paperpile, Wizfolio, Citavi, and Docear, have shallow usage among the respondents. 43 of the respondents (60.6%) do not use any reference management software.

Table 6. How long have you been utilising RMS tools?

Utilising RMS tools	Respondents	Percentage
I do not use them	45	63.4
Less than one year	4	5.6
From one to two years	3	4.2
From two to five years	5	7
Since more than five years	14	19.7

Table 6 shows that out of 71 respondents, 45 (63.4%) do not use RMS tools, 4 (5.6%) have been using them for less than one year, 3 (4.2%) have been using them for one to two years, 5 (7%) have been using them for two to five years, and 14 (19.7%) have been using them for more than five years.

Table 7. Frequency of usage RMS

Usage of RMS	Respondents	Percentage
Never	43	60.6
Rarely	4	5.6
Sometimes	4	5.6
Often	9	12.7
Very often	11	15.5

Table 7 shows that out of 71 respondents, 43 (60.6%) never use RMS, 4 (5.6%) use it rarely, 4 (5.6%) use it sometimes, 9 (12.7%) use it often, and 11 (15.5%) use it very often.

Table 8. Which features are most important in the reference management software you use and like? Select all that apply

Most favourite RMS feature you like it	Respondents	Percentage
Adding references to my research articles	25	35.2
Annotating and highlighting uploaded documents	4	5.6
Arranging and storing references	14	19.7
Auto-generate citations and bibliographies/ reference lists	4	5.6
Automatically generating a reference entry from an uploaded PDF	6	8.5
Create bibliographies instantly	21	29.6
File attaching and previsualization capabilities	3	4.2
Flexible formattings	16	22.5
Access to many file formats for export and import	10	14.1
Import citations from bibliographic databases and websites	12	16.9
Insert in-text citations into a document	23	32.4
Networking with other researchers	6	8.5
Plugin for Microsoft Word or other word processors to format citations and bibliographies while writing	8	11.3
Share collections of references with others	10	14.1
Store references in a searchable database	6	8.5
Storing and managing research data	20	28.1
Sync your references across multiple devices	14	19.7

According to the data in table 8, the most essential features in the reference management software used by the respondents are Adding references to research articles (35.2%), Create bibliographies instantly (29.6%), Insert in-text citations into a document (32.4%), Storing and managing research data (28.1%), Flexible formatting (22.5%), Access to many file formats for export and import (14.1%), Import citations from bibliographic databases and websites (16.9%), Arranging and storing references (19.7%), Syncing references across multiple devices (19.7%). Other features such as Annotating and highlighting uploaded documents, Auto-generate citations and bibliographies/ reference lists, Automatically generating a reference entry from an uploaded PDF, File attaching and previsualization capabilities, Networking with other researchers, Plugin for Microsoft Word or other word processors to format citations and bibliographies while writing, Share collections of references with others, and Storing references in a searchable database have a lower usage among the respondents.

Table 9. Where can you get assistance with citation-related problems if you need to utilize reference management software (RMS)? Select all that apply.

Where can you get assistance with citation-related problems if you need to utilize RMS?	Respondents	Percentage
I seek assistance from my coworkers	12	16.9

I adhere to a guidebook on citation style	4	5.6
I use an online site	12	16.9
I do not seek help	34	47.9
I use google scholar for citation	29	40.8

table 9 shows that when respondents need assistance with citation-related problems when using RMS, the most common sources of help are using Google Scholar for citation (40.8%), not seeking help (47.9%), seeking assistance from coworkers (16.9%), using an online site (16.9%), and adhering to a guidebook on citation style (5.6%).

Table 10. Difficulties using RMS and reason for not using RMS (Select all that apply)

Difficulties using RMS	Respondents	Percentage
Difficult to install and add plugins	33	46.5
I am aware of them, yet I am comfortable with my way.	14	19.7
I am familiar with RMS; however, I would have preferred to take training before using	41	57.7
I like to do Manually	18	25.3
Insufficient training by OSS's	29	40.8
Lack of technical support	6	8.5
I record it on a working file	2	2.8
Normally, I record it on paper.	3	4.2
Normally, I record it on separate word files	11	15.5
Inadequate training	39	54.9
A lack of understanding of citation styles	8	11.3
Software is overly complicated.	2	2.8
I did not face any difficulties	6	8.5

According to the data in table 10, the most common difficulties using RMS and reasons for not using RMS among respondents are: I am familiar with RMS. However, I would have preferred to take training before using (57.7%), Insufficient training by OSS (40.8%), Inadequate training (54.9%), and Difficult in installing and adding plugins (46.5%); I am aware of them, yet I am comfortable with my way (19.7%), I like to do Manually (25.3), Lack of technical support (8.5), A lack of understanding of citation styles (11.3), Software is overly complicated (2.8%), I did not face any difficulties (8.5), I record it on a working file (2.8%), Normally, I record it on paper (4.2%), and Normally, I record it on separate word files (15.5%).

Table 11. Desired library support regarding RMS

Expected support from the library	Respondents	Percentage
In-person workshops	39	54.9

Web-based training/tutorials	19	26.7
Individual consultations	15	21.1
Walk-up assistance	8	11.3
E-mail assistance	14	19.7
Online chat assistance	43	60.6
Not applicable	4	5.6

The table 11 shows that respondents desire various forms of library support for RMS, with the most popular being in-person workshops (54.9%), online chat assistance (60.6%), and web-based training/tutorials (26.7%). Other forms of support, such as individual consultations (21.1%), walk-up assistance (11.3%), e-mail assistance (19.7%), and not applicable (5.6%), are also desired by a smaller percentage of respondents. Most respondents prefer in-person workshops and online chat assistance as their primary source of support.

5.0 Discussion

From the results analyzed, it is clear that most participants (56.3%) were aware of the existence of RMS. Despite the awareness, the Majority (63.4%) did not use any RMS for referencing or citations. The low usage may be attributed to little or no information provided on how these available RMS aid participants in their scholarly writing. This is evidenced by the findings showing that participants desired in-person workshops (54.9%) and online chat assistance (60.6%) from the library support regarding RMS usage. This finding also shows that despite the awareness, many participants still preferred manual preparation of the references, as evidenced by their willingness to be assisted in learning and also the indication of the majority (97.2%) having scientific experience but not using RMS. Furthermore, the results revealed that among those who indicated using RMS, the majority (22.5%) had knowledge of how to use Mendeley. The findings have also shown that the most used feature is *'adding references to research articles'*, which recorded 35.2%. This may imply that the features of Mendeley are user friendly to some participants than other RMS available, as noted even from other previous studies (Amrutha, Kumah & Kabir, 2018; Nitsos, Malliari & Chamourodi, 2022) conducted in different institutions. In addition, the everyday use of Mendeley may be necessitated by the fact that it is free-source software that may be used by individual participants without the need for a site licence.

Barriers identified by the participants on using RMS were *'not being trained before using it'*, which was recorded at 57.7%, and *'inadequate training'*, which was recorded at 54.9%. These findings may be influenced by the non-availability of information provision to interested users (i.e., mostly provided during training) and the sophistication of some RMS features. A similar study by Speare (2018) on graduate student use and non-use of references and pdf management software found that participants had difficulties when organizing pdf documents and references as well as challenges when changing the style format; it is clear from both studies that most if not all participants had never attended any RMS related training.

6.0 Conclusion

The study aimed at investigating the level of knowledge and awareness of reference management software among teaching faculties at the University of Zambia. From the study,

results have shown that despite most participants being aware of the existence of RMS, there is low usage. The low usage has been necessitated by lack of training. The RMS most used is Mendeley by some participants as it is found to be user friendly when adding references to research work. Other barriers found are that there is no much information available to the users by the library department on the features of RMS. Finally, this article proposes that the library department conduct frequent trainings to provide the needed skills, knowledge and information to UNZA teachers in different faculties on the use of RMS. To better utilise the RMS, the training should go beyond referencing to using other advantaged features such flexible formatting, access to many file formats for export and import as well as sharing collections of references.

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