

Use of Reference Management Software by Graduate Students: A Case Study at Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia



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Abstract

Problem Statement: Large-scale analysis at Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Indonesia, to assess students' awareness and usage of Reference Management Software (RMS) in academic writing tools has been limited. **Purpose:** This study aimed to examine the extent to which postgraduate students at UGM are familiar with and use RMS in analysis and academic writing. **Method:** A descriptive survey method was applied using an online questionnaire distributed to postgraduate students at Faculty of Geography, UGM. Furthermore, a total of 52 valid responses were collected and analyzed. **Results:** The results showed that 94.2% (49) of students were aware of RMS, such as Mendeley, Zotero, and EndNote. The remaining 5.8% (3) were not aware of the existence of RMS. Mendeley was the most widely used, and out of the 49 students who were aware of the existence of RMS, only 2% or 1, did not adopt the application in scientific writing. The knowledge of the software was obtained from librarians or libraries in 44% of cases. **Conclusion:** Librarians play an important role in enhancing students' ability to use RMS effectively. This study recommends that libraries continue to offer structured and periodic training programs to strengthen students' productivity and digital literacy. The results contribute new insights into RMS adoption in Indonesian higher education and report the evolving role of librarians in supporting activities.

Keywords: Academic library; Faculty of Geography; Mendeley; Reference Management Software

Abstrak

Permasalahan: Meskipun penggunaan *Reference Management Software* (RMS) semakin penting dalam penulisan akademik, hingga kini belum ada penelitian berskala besar di Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Indonesia, yang menilai tingkat pengetahuan dan penggunaan RMS oleh mahasiswa. Perangkat lunak manajemen referensi merupakan aplikasi yang membantu dalam kegiatan penulisan karya ilmiah bagi para peneliti, dosen, dan mahasiswa. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sejauh mana mahasiswa pascasarjana di UGM memahami dan menggunakan RMS dalam kegiatan penelitian dan penulisan karya ilmiah. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan metode survei deskriptif. Kuesioner daring diedarkan di antara mahasiswa pascasarjana di Fakultas Geografi, Universitas Gadjah Mada, dan hasil dari 52 tanggapan dikumpulkan dan dianalisis. **Hasil:** Ditemukan bahwa 94,2% (49 students) mahasiswa mengetahui Perangkat Lunak Manajemen Referensi seperti Mendeley, Zotero, EndNote, dan sebagainya. Sisanya 5,8% (3 students) tidak mengetahui keberadaan Perangkat Lunak Manajemen Referensi. Mendeley adalah Perangkat Lunak Manajemen Referensi yang paling banyak digunakan. Dari 49 mahasiswa yang mengetahui keberadaan Aplikasi Manajemen Referensi, hanya 2% atau 1 mahasiswa yang tidak menggunakan aplikasi Manajemen Referensi dalam penulisan ilmiah. Pengetahuan mahasiswa terhadap Aplikasi Manajemen Referensi 44% diperoleh dari pustakawan atau Perpustakaan. **Kesimpulan:** Pustakawan memberikan kontribusi terbesar dalam memberikan informasi dan pelatihan pada mahasiswa terkait penggunaan RMS. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi baru terhadap pemahaman adopsi RMS di pendidikan tinggi Indonesia serta menyoroti peran pustakawan yang terus berkembang dalam mendukung kegiatan riset.

Kata kunci: Perpustakaan Akademik; Fakultas Geografi; Mendeley; Perangkat Lunak Manajemen Referensi

I. INTRODUCTION

Background. Writing scientific papers in universities requires the accurate and ethical use of reference sources, which form the foundation of scholarly communication and research integrity (Sarrafzadeh & Hazeri, 2014). University libraries play a central role in facilitating this process by providing access to diverse reference resources and by supporting students in managing those resources effectively (Ribeiro et al., 2020). However, as the volume of scholarly information continues to grow, manually organizing citations and bibliographies has become increasingly time-consuming and error-prone (Cuschieri et al., 2019).

Reference Management Software (RMS) is an important digital tool used to streamline citation and bibliography management, ensuring accuracy and efficiency in academic writing (Singh & Mahawar, 2021; Kalisdha, 2023). Applications such as Mendeley, Zotero, RefWorks, and EndNote enable experts and students to store, organize, and cite references seamlessly within manuscripts (Marshall, 2020). Recognizing these benefits, many academic institutions worldwide have integrated RMS training into information literacy programs, with libraries taking a proactive role in providing guidance and technical support (Lonergan, 2017; Sarrafzadeh & Khaleghi, 2017).

Previous research consistently emphasized the positive impact of RMS adoption on productivity and writing quality, as well as the essential contribution of institutional libraries in promoting digital literacy among students and faculty (Lonergan, 2017; Sarrafzadeh & Khaleghi, 2017; NitCastillo, R. et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence from developing contexts, particularly Indonesia, remains limited. There is little understanding of how postgraduate students engage with RMS tools, the extent of awareness and usage, and librarians support within Indonesian universities.

Addressing this gap, the present research investigates the awareness, usage patterns, and perceived benefits of RMS among postgraduate students at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Indonesia. The result explores the role of librarians in promoting and facilitating RMS adoption as part of the university's broader effort to enhance research quality and digital scholarship. Based on the description, this research contributes to the literature on digital tools for academic writing and shows the evolving role of librarians in supporting digital transformation in higher education.

Problems. There are no current results published on the use of RMS by graduate students at Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Indonesia. Therefore, an investigation is needed regarding the familiarity and proficiency of students with RMS. This study is useful for libraries to determine the extent of knowledge and use of RMS by graduate students. The results are used to develop training programs in the future. For other libraries, this study provides an overview of students' skill needs to support writing and publication.

Previous Literature Review. Singh & Mahawar (2021) at the Department of Library and Information Science of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Mahatma Gandhi Central University stated that 97% of experts were familiar with citation management applications. Zotero is the most widely used software. A survey of different groups of reference management software users at the University of Huddersfield, England, showed that postgraduates had higher rates of RMS use than undergraduates. Meanwhile, EndNote was the most widely used software (Williams & Woods, 2024).

The results of the study at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, were different. The use of RMS by graduate students showed that two-thirds of the population did not use the application, while only one-third predominantly adopted Mendeley (Nitsos et al., 2022). A study of experts at 13 institutes of CSIR, Ghana, showed that 33.6% did not use RMS even though 80% were aware of the application (Bugyei et al., 2019). RMS tends to be underused in low-income countries. A study conducted in Tunisia to determine trends in the use of RMS by experts and doctoral students showed that out of

121 respondents, only 26.5% used the application. Similar to the results in Ghana and Greece, Mendeley was the dominant RMS used (Yangui et al., 2020).

State of the Art. Different studies have been conducted related to awareness of RMS and the use in various institutions/countries. This study fills the gap in the knowledge of the existence and use of RMS in Indonesia. New insights are added into the existence and use of the software by graduate students at UGM, Indonesia.

Purpose. This study aims to identify the use of RMS by postgraduate students at Faculty of Geography, UGM, Indonesia, in writing scientific papers. The research questions include the following.

1. How do students know about the existence of RMS?
2. How are students using RMS?

II. METHOD

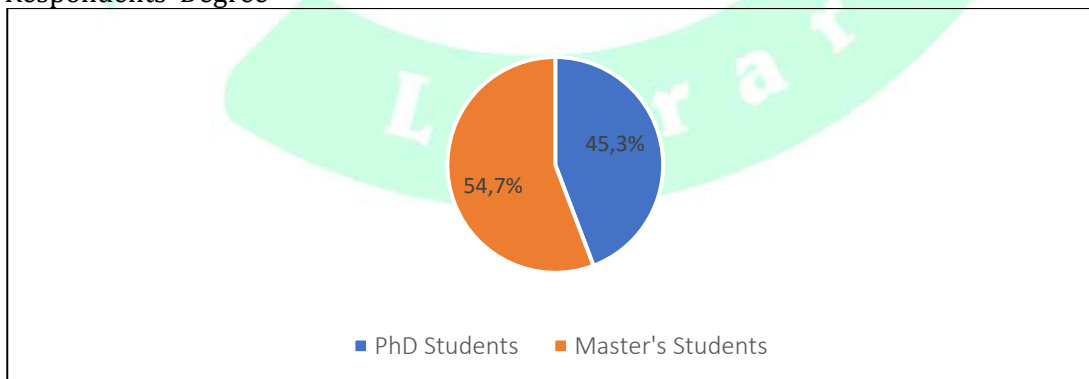
A survey was conducted in January 2024 among all the postgraduate students to achieve the objective. The survey was conducted throughout January 2024. The questionnaire, distributed online through Google Forms, received 53 responses, with one incomplete response and excluded from analysis. Therefore, 52 questionnaires were analyzed using a simple calculation method. The surveying instrument was divided in 3 main categories. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions on biographic characteristics such as name, email, gender, education level, course of study, and student number. The second part contains questions of knowledge about the existence of RMS. Section 3 contains questions about the use of RMS. In this research, all respondents were aware that the survey results would be published and the answers would be kept confidential.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 52 responses were analyzed based on a survey shared with graduate students. This was slightly different from previous studies, including undergraduate students, lecturers, and experts (Bugyei et al., 2019; Lonergan, 2017; Madhusudhan, 2016; Yangui et al., 2020). A study with respondents of S2 and S3 students has been conducted by Osmani at the Research University of Malaysia (Osmani et al., 2016). Approximately 45.3% (24), 54.7% (28), 49%, and 51% of the 52 respondents were doctoral, master's degree, female, and male students, respectively.

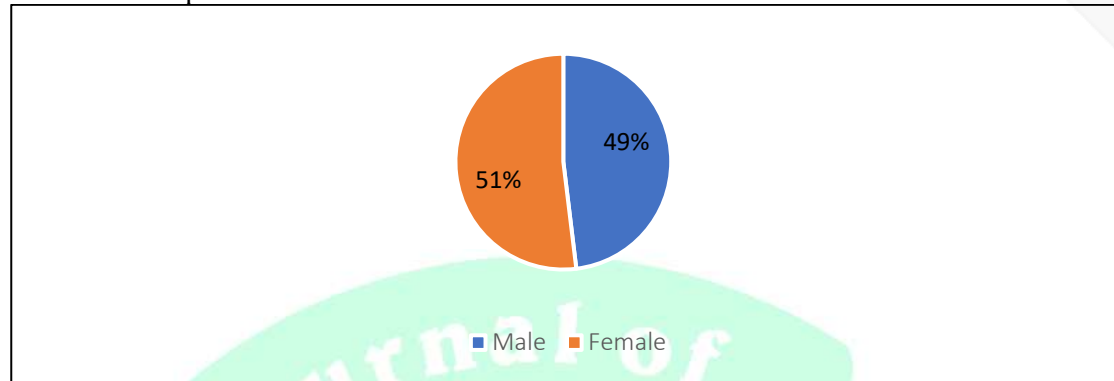
Figure 1.

Respondents' Degree



Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

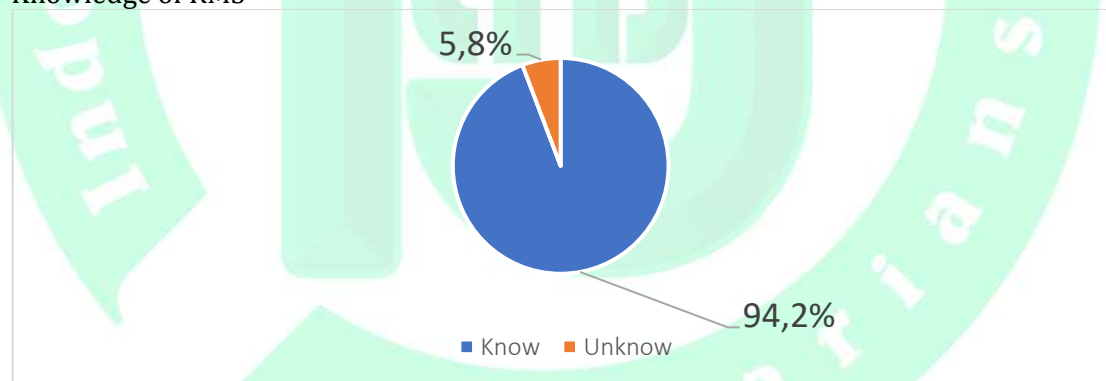
Figure 2.
Gender of Respondents



Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

Knowledge of the Existence of Reference Management Software. The results showed that 94.2% (49) of students were aware of RMS such as Mendeley, Zotero, and EndNote, while the remaining 5.8% (3) were unaware of the existence (Figure 3). The percentage of awareness was lower than the results of previous studies (Osmani et al., 2016; Rakshatha & D.Pai, 2019; Sarrafzadeh & Hazeri, 2014; Yangui et al., 2020). Approximately 97% of scholars from the Department of Library and Information Science of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU) and Mahatma Gandhi Central University (MGCU) were aware of RMS. The results obtained at Delhi University showed that 100% of students were aware of the software.

Figure 3.
Knowledge of RMS

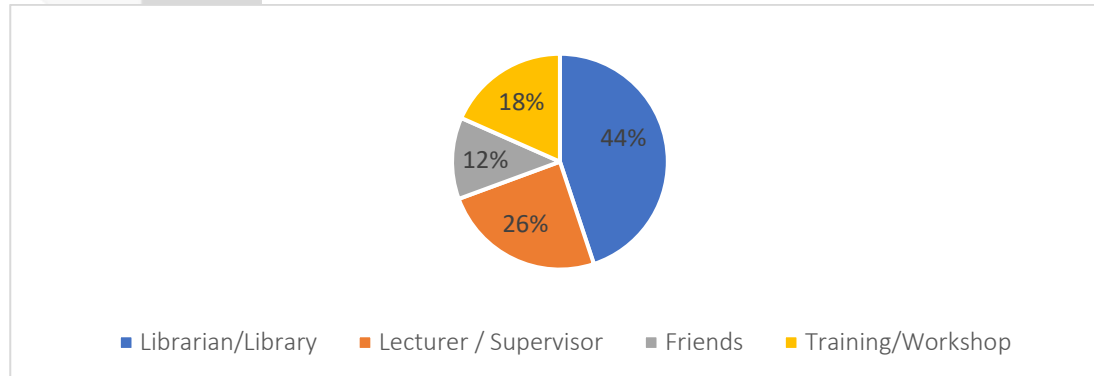


Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

Among the 44% of students who reported being motivated to acquire knowledge of RMS as a tool in writing and publication activities from librarians/libraries, 26%, 18%, and 12% obtained the information from lecturers or supervisors, training or workshops, and friends, respectively (Figure 4). This shows that librarians are the main source of transmitting knowledge about RMS among students and scholars. The result is in line with Madhusudhan, who examined the use of the application at the University of Delhi (Madhusudhan, 2016).

Figure 4.

Sources of Information About RMS

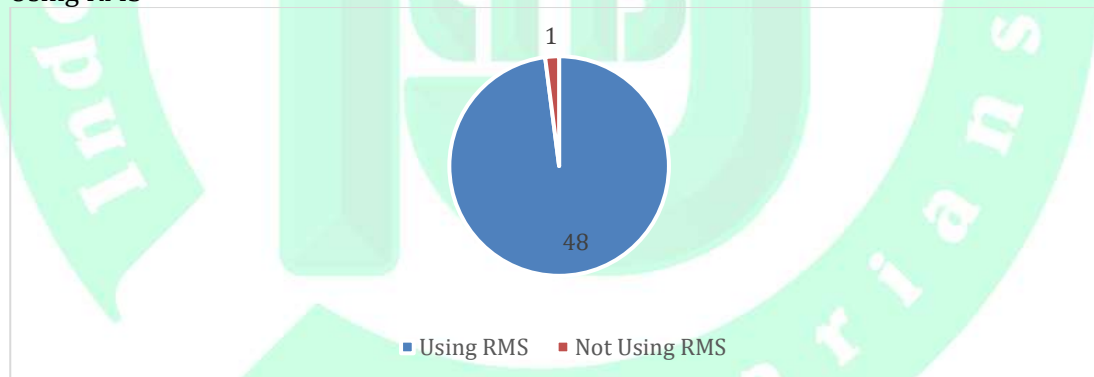


Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

Use of RMS by Students. Approximately 48 of the 49 respondents aware of RMS actively used the application in research writing. Meanwhile, 2% students were found not making use of RMS in the writing. This is in contrast to the results obtained on graduate students of the University of Manitoba. The results showed that 42 (30,43%) students out of 138 did not use RMS (Speare, 2018). A study on teaching staff reported that 40% did not use the software (Lonergan, 2017; Nitsos et al., 2022; Yangui et al., 2020). The low-level use of the application was also found in the results of Bugyei's study (Bugyei et al., 2019). At Delhi University, 100% students and other experts made use of RMS (Madhusudhan, 2016).

Figure 5.

Using RMS

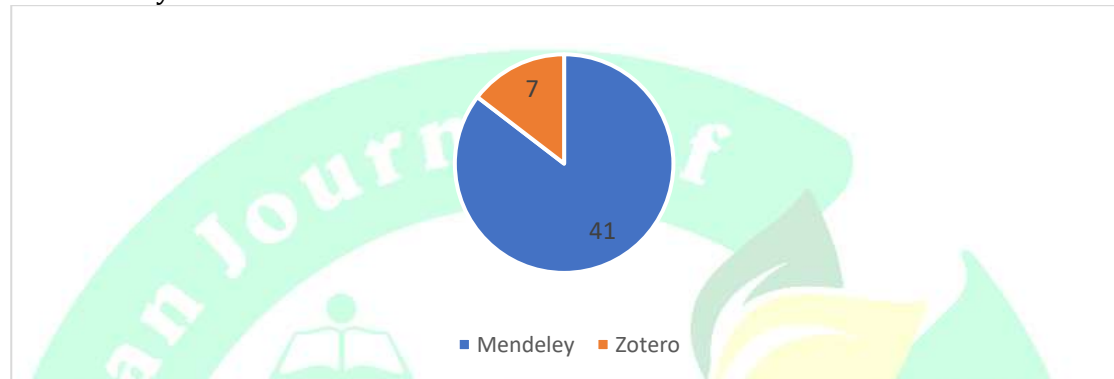


Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

There are N-number of proprietary and open source RMS available in the market, namely EndNote, RefWorks, EndNote Web, Zotero, Papers, Mendeley, WizFolio, Docear, Qiqqa, ReadCube, colwiz, Paperpile, and F1000Workspace (Speare, 2018). A total of 85,7% and 14,3% users adopt Mendeley and Zotero, respectively. The results of this study only reported two applications used by students, namely Mendeley and Zotero. Faculty of Geography Library has also provided training support for the use of Mendeley. The results are in line with the study conducted in India (Rangaswamy & Rajendra, 2021). This is in contrast to previous studies on the use of applications other than Mendeley and Zotero (Nitsos et al., 2022; Speare, 2018; Yangui et al., 2020). In a study conducted at the University of Manitoba, 10 different variants of RMS were used (Yangui et al., 2020).

There are contradictions about the popularly used software since some individuals rate Mendeley as the most popular (Jegan & Balasubramanian, 2022; Nitsos et al., 2022; Speare, 2018; Yangui et al., 2020). Meanwhile, others rate EndNote as the most popular and widely used RMS (Berry et al., 2020). The universities in Iran support the use of EndNote citation management software (Sarrafzadeh & Khaleghi, 2017).

Figure 6.
RMS used by the Student

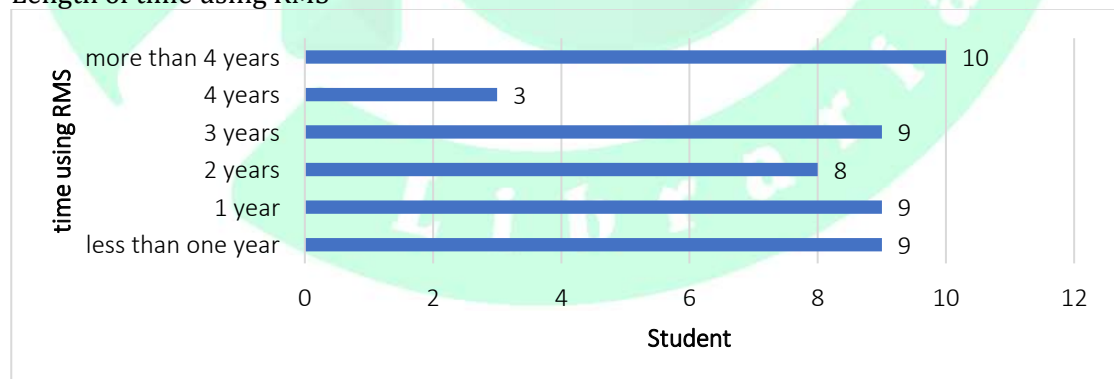


Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

The use of RMS at Delhi University is dominated by EasyBib, but the software is unknown in Indonesia. The results from the Department of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University Library and Information (BBAU) and Mahatma Gandhi Central University (MGCU) found the use of Zotero to be dominant (Singh & Mahawar, 2021).

Zotero is selected over other RMS in research, writing, and publication because the application is free. The application is also recommended by libraries since librarians are often proficient in specific programs. Therefore, a librarian typically recommends the most familiar application when providing training to others. The length of use of RMS by graduate students varies depending on the years of usage (Figure 7).

Figure 7.
Length of time using RMS

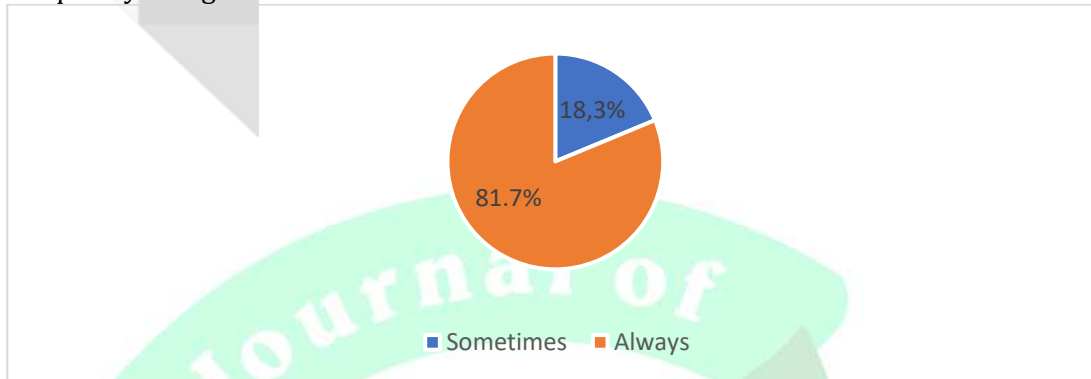


Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

Figure 8 shows that 18.3% and 81.7% of respondents use RMS occasionally and consistently during research activities, academic writing, publication processes, and collaborative projects, respectively. This is good from the academic and research perspective since students use RMS in writing, publications, and collaborations. In Madhusudhan's study, 60% of respondents reported using online citation tools

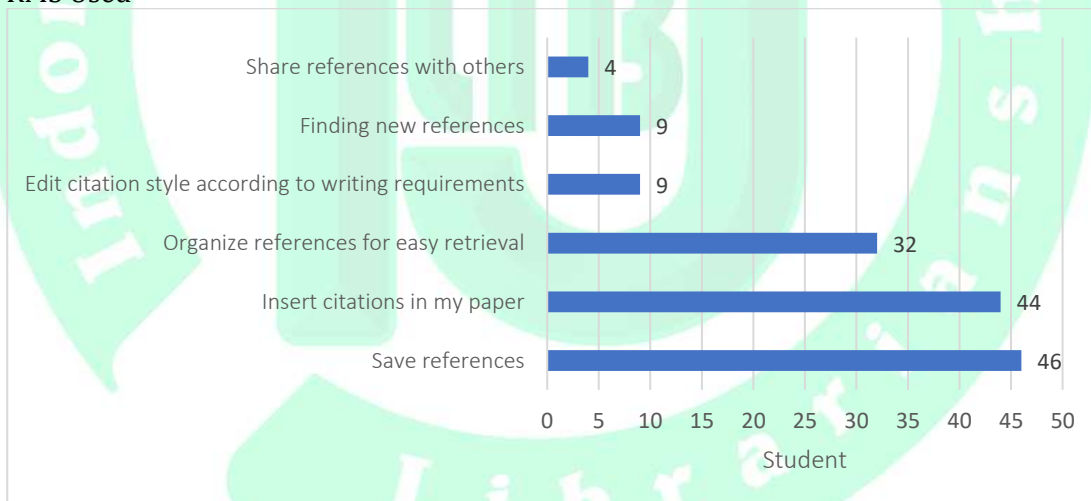
occasionally (Madhusudhan, 2016).

Figure 8.
Frequency Using RMS



Saving references is the feature most frequently used by students, followed by inserting citations in articles, organizing references for easy retrieval, editing citations, and locating references. In contrast, sharing references is the least used feature among students (Figure 9). The top three features used were the same as study conducted by Speare on graduate students at the University of Manitoba (Speare, 2018).

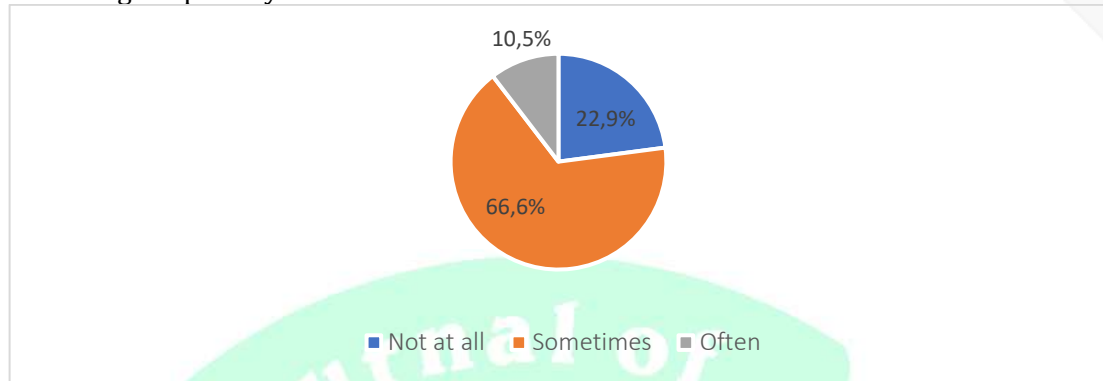
Figure 9.
RMS Used



Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

In this study, 10.5% graduate students encounter difficulties in using RMS. A total of 66.6% of respondents reported occasionally encountering difficulties, while 22.9% experienced no challenges. This suggests that only 22.9% of students possess sufficient proficiency in using RMS. In Madhusudhan's study, 75% of respondents were found to be well-acquainted with the applications (Madhusudhan, 2016).

Figure 10.
RMS Usage Capability



Source: Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, 2024

Discussion of Research Findings.

The results of this study show that 94.2% of students are aware of the existence of Reference Management Software as an application that helps in managing references and writing citations. Their source of knowledge about the existence of RMS applications is from librarians/libraries. This indicates that libraries play a crucial role in equipping students with knowledge about applications that are useful in writing their scientific papers. Although this figure is lower than several previous studies (Osmani et al., 2016; Rakshatha & D.Pai, 2019; Sarrafzadeh & Hazeri, 2014; Yangui et al., 2020), this percentage is higher than the research conducted by Madhuri & Harilakshmi (2021) on 545 library science researchers in India and also the research by Bugyei et al. (2019). The high level of awareness among graduate students in the Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, regarding the Management Reference Software application is closely tied to the Library's active role in introducing this application to students.

Awareness of the existence of the RMS application among graduate students at the Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University, followed by its usage rate in scientific writing. The results of this study show that only 2% of students did not use the RMS application when writing scientific papers. Of course, this is an encouraging result for the Library and also the academic world in the Faculty of Geography. This will support the improvement of scientific writing quality, particularly in areas such as citation and bibliography creation. This contrasts with the results of a survey conducted on graduate students at the University of Manitoba, which found that 30% did not use the RMS application (Speare, 2018). Meanwhile, research by Osmani et al. (2016) found that only 10.2% of graduate students (master's & doctorate) at universities in Malaysia did not use RMS.

In terms of the selection of applications used, Mendeley was the preferred application in several student, lecturer, or researcher studies (Bugyei et al., 2019; Jegan & Balasubramanian, 2022; Nitsos et al., 2022; Speare, 2018). The reasons for choosing Mendeley are that it is free, easy to use (Speare, 2018), and recommended by the university. The high usage rate of 85.7% among students demonstrates a shared commitment to effective research practices, supported by the Library's training efforts, fostering a sense of community among users.

Saving references is the feature most frequently used by students, followed by inserting citations into articles. The results of this study align with the research findings (Speare, 2018). This feature is often employed in practice to aid in the writing process of scientific papers, and its benefits are widely recognized. This study also found that only 22.9% of students have sufficient skills in using RMS. In Madhusudhan's study, 75% of respondents

reported familiarity with the application (Madhusudhan, 2016). These findings certainly provide input for the Library to improve students' skills in using the RMS application.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the level of RMS awareness (94.2%) remains lower than the results reported in countries such as India, reaching 97%. Most knowledge about the application is obtained from librarians and lecturers. From 50 students who are aware of the existence of RMS, only 2% or 1 person does not actively use the application for scientific writing. There are two RMS applications used by students, namely Mendeley and Zotero. Approximately 98% of graduate students actively use the applications in scientific writing. This study has limitations since the context is only concerned with graduate students. Therefore, future investigations should include undergraduate students as respondents.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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