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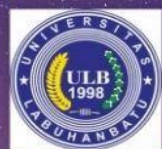
Students' Perception of Zotero Utilization in Reference Setting in the Academic Text Writing Process in Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the utilization of Zotero in academic writing. It examines the background factors contributing to the adoption of Zotero as a reference management tool and its impact on students' academic writing processes.

Methodology – The research employs a qualitative design with data collected from twelve undergraduate students at Tanjungpura University during the 2023-2024 academic year. Participants were selected based on their confirmed experience using Zotero for academic writing. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and themes in the responses.

Findings – The study reveals that students perceive Zotero positively due to its ease of access, intuitive operation, and seamless integration with writing applications like MS Word. Zotero improves time efficiency, enhances writing quality, and boosts academic literacy by automating citation processes and facilitating access to reputable scholarly articles. Additionally, the influence of academic institutions, peers, and lecturers significantly contributes to its widespread adoption. These findings underscore Zotero's effectiveness in supporting students' academic writing needs.

Significance – This research is beneficial for educators, students, and academic institutions seeking to incorporate effective reference management tools into academic writing practices. It highlights Zotero's potential to streamline the writing process and improve academic outcomes, offering valuable insights for integrating technology into higher education curricula.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to manage references is one of the skills that must be possessed by a researcher (Basak, 2014; Kurniati et al., 2022). This is in order to produce quality work (Putra et al., 2023) and to avoid acts of plagiarism (Nursidika et al., 2021; Wibowo, 2012) which can occur due to a lack of expertise in citing the

references used (Izzah & Lubis, 2021; Ngibad, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to use technology that can help the writing process (Aidid et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2022).

The technology that can be used to organize references is with the help of Reference Management Software (RMS) (Parabhoi et al., 2017). RMS is one example of the many tools developed to support writing tasks such as organizing and locating various types of digital references (Ray & Ramesh, 2017). Some popularly used RMS are Mendeley, EndNote, RefWork, and Zotero (Parabhoi et al., 2017) as focused on in this research.

Zotero is an RMS developed in 2008 by several librarians at George Mason University's Center for History and New Media (Parabhoi, 2017). When compared to other RMS, Zotero is one of the most popular, freely available programs, designed to search, collect, cite, and distribute articles or research findings that have been conducted online (Alshammari et al., 2023; Bonanni, 2022; D'Angelo et al., 2016; Haliq et al., 2021; Puckett, 2010; ud et al., 2023).

Some previous studies have revealed that the advantage of using Zotero is that it can read the source files of websites, PDFs, etc. (Alshammari et al., 2023), or read input via ISBN ID, DOI, or PubMed (Vaidhyanathan et al., 2012). RMS Zotero has the advantage over other RMS that it can track the search for research references that have been saved without requiring an internet connection and can save files into articles making it easier to cite according to the references used (Hanum et al., 2021; Maleha & Pramita, 2023). With several other features, users can create, sort, and filter collections and sub-collections based on desired criteria (Asy'ari et al., 2023; Frantz et al., 2015). Some researchers have even mentioned that Zotero is very helpful for streamlining the process of maintaining a reference library (Courraud, 2014; Kurniati et al., 2022).

When first installed, Zotero automatically integrates with Microsoft Word (Haliq et al., 2021; Wicaksono & Nurpratama, 2017). Users can also integrate Google Docs accounts and popular web like Chrome, Firefox allowing users to quickly capture and save references while browsing the web (Ahmed & ..., 2011; Asy'ari et al., 2023). It doesn't stop there, users can synchronize their accounts with other RMS such as Mendeley (Chawla & Gupta, 2017), and facilitate co-authoring projects (Bonanni, 2022).

Some previous researchers revealed the reasons for choosing to use Zotero because of its ease of use, it is available for free, easy to download and install, saves researchers time and is easy to customize the citation style that researchers need (Rangaswamy & Babu, 2021). It is also known that Zotero is able to reduce plagiarism (Izzah & Lubis, 2021; Ngibad, 2020), simpler, and consistent in citations and bibliography (Hermawati et al., 2023; Widianti et al., 2021) with the most popularly used citation styles such as APA, Harvard, and MLA (Chawla & Gupta, 2017). In several trainings held in Indonesia, it was revealed that Zotero is easier and more effective in creating citations and bibliographies and improves students' ability to easily manage references, have a digital library, and efficiently write academic texts (Aziz et al., 2022; Haliq et al., 2021; Kurniati et al., 2022; Nursidika et al., 2021).

Some previous studies such as those conducted by Rangaswamy & Babu, (2021) utilized quantitative research to compare student perceptions of the Zotero and Mendeley applications. Other research such as that conducted by Basri & Patak (2015), Fauziah & Yuliana (2023), Zahro & Nugraha (2021) only focuses on Mendeley RMS. Research on student perceptions that specifically discuss Zotero with qualitative research has never been done so this research must be done to see student perceptions of Zotero from a qualitative research perspective.

This research is expected to be a reference for universities in developing writing, especially in writing better scientific papers and avoiding plagiarism. The results of this study contain an explanation that can explain directly how students use the Zotero application in writing scientific papers. The novelty of this research is to look deeper into the use of the Zotero application using a qualitative approach with the focus of fourth semester students. The purpose of this study is to understand more deeply how students perceive Zotero, one of the academic supporters to avoid students avoiding plagiarism. Thus, this research is not only for application development, but also for universities in supporting the use of applications, to improve education and learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design to understand students' perceptions of using Zotero in the college lecture process, especially in writing academic texts. The choice of the method is based on the flexibility and support of the method in exploring more deeply the attitudes, experiences, and intentions of

informants (Berg & Lune, 2017; Kitzinger, 1995). In addition, qualitative methods can be used in producing varied ideas and opinions on an issue, and can reveal dissimilarities in perceptions between groups (Berg & Lune, 2017). By utilizing qualitative research, researchers can discover areas that have not been exposed by quantitative research (Dolan Mullen & Reynolds, 1978; Hashmi et al., 2017). Therefore, a semi-structured form of research is the best option.

This research was conducted at Tanjungpura University Pontianak, West Kalimantan, which has the third lowest literacy rate after West Papua and Papua (Lukman et al., 2019), with the second highest level of digital literacy after Yogjakarta (Rizki et al., 2022). Therefore, this study seeks to measure the level of technology acceptance, namely RMS Zotero, with the condition that students are low in literacy but high in digital literacy.

The data in this study are responses regarding the Zotero application as a tool that helps in writing academic texts. The source of data in this study are students of Indonesian Language Education FKIP Tanjungpura University who take Scientific Writing Skills lectures in the third semester of 2023-2024.

Table 1 Demographics of Research Respondents

Code	Age	Gender)	Frequency of Use (weekly)
R1	19	Female	15
R2	20	Female	4
R3	20	Female	5
R4	20	Male	2
R5	19	Female	5
R6	20	Female	3
R7	21	Female	3
R8	20	Female	8
R9	20	Female	8
R10	19	Female	2
R11	20	Female	2
R12	20	Female	5

A semi-structured interview technique was used as a data collection technique in this study. Interviews with respondents were conducted after an appointment was made. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian because it is the language of instruction in education in Indonesia. Each interview lasted for 20 to 25 minutes. Questions were asked and respondents were given the freedom to express additional views and opinions. The tools used in collecting research data were a recording device/handphone, pen, and notebook to facilitate research into themes that emerged during the interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and small notes were taken to avoid errors in data collection. After the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were verified for accuracy and consistency by listening to the recordings.

After listening to the recording, the researcher transcribed the data from voice to text, followed by the activity of analyzing the transcript line by line. The researcher read repeatedly and analyzed the data thematically using thematic data analysis techniques. Thematic analysis is a method used to determine, investigate, organize, describe, and report themes found in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Muzammil et al., 2023). The stages of thematic data analysis in this research refer to the views of Nowell et al., (2017) namely: 1) understanding the research data comprehensively, 2) generating initial codes, 3) uncovering themes, 4) double-checking, 5) providing definitions of general dema and minor themes, 6) making reports.

FINDINGS

Based on thematic data analysis, there are six themes, each of which has subthemes. The first theme is the perception of convenience with subthemes of ease of download, easy to install and use, and easy to understand and learn. The second theme is the perception of usefulness with the subthemes of speeding up the writing process, better grades, improving the quality of writing, facilitating citations and bibliography, and making it easier to translate. The third theme, the influence of use with the subthemes of the influence of academics, the influence of friends, and the influence of lecturers.
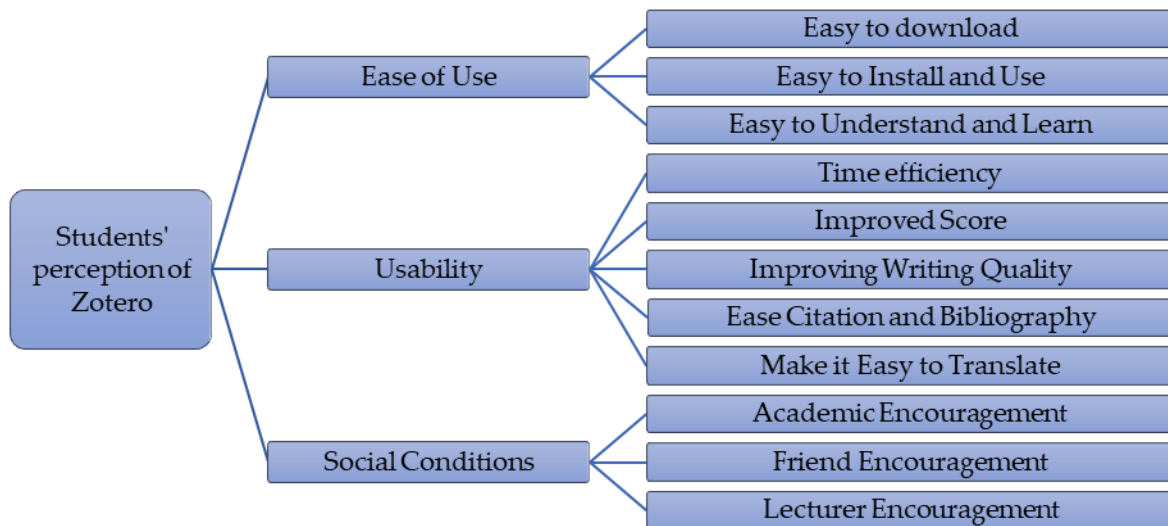
Figure 1: Diagram of Perception of Zotero

Ease of Use

Based on the results of the interviews, some respondents expressed perceptions regarding ease of use such as ease of downloading, ease of installing and using, and ease of understanding and learning. The discussion of these themes and the results of the corroborating interviews are presented in full as follows.

Easy to Donwload

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that Zotero was easy to use because it was easy to download. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

... the Zotero application is easy to download, and also Zotero does not occur errors when used (R3).
...The Zotero application is easy to download via google web so that it makes it easier to do lecture assignments (assignments in using RMS) (R12).

The interview results above show that Zotero is considered easy to obtain because it is easy to download. Users, in this case students, feel helped by the Zotero application which is available for free. Users, namely R3 and R12, simply go to the official Zotero website and download it with a few clicks.

Easy to Install and Use

Apart from being easy to download, the findings also revealed that the Zotero app was easier to install as shown below.

...Zotero is quite easy to access because the features it provides are appropriate for its use. In addition, the size of the Zotero application is also not too large, so it does not hamper the speed of the laptop when accessing it (R7).
....The laptop I use is very compatible with Zotero because after downloading the Zotero application, its integration feature with Microsoft Word is already useful (R10).
...The devices I use, especially laptops, are very compatible with Zotero, because after I download the Zotero application, it is automatically listed in the word application which will be very useful when I will cite an article I made (R11).

The interview results above show that Zotero is seen as an easy application to install and use as stated by R7, R10, and R11. This is because the application does not require a lot of memory so it does not take a long time to install and does not error when used. After installing, Zotero will automatically connect with Ms.Word so that it does not make it difficult for students when installing.

Easy to Understand and Learn

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that Zotero was easy to use because the application was easy to understand and learn how to use. Interviews and discussions regarding this are

shown below.

>...*The Zotero application is easy to understand with clear features that make it easy to use (R12).*
>...*The features contained in Zotero are easy to learn, making it easier to do assignments in lectures (R9).*

The interview results above show that Zotero is considered easy to understand and learn. With its easy to understand and learn nature, users, in this case students, feel helped as expressed by R12 and R9. In the interviews conducted with R12 and R9, they admitted that the interest in Zotero was because it was easy to understand and learn so that it was very helpful for more utilization of the application.

Usability

Based on the data analysis, there is a theme regarding the usefulness of the Zotero application. The theme is further divided into several subthemes, such as time efficiency in writing, better grades, improving the quality of writing, facilitating citations and bibliography, and making it easier to translate foreign languages. The discussion of these themes and the corroborating interview results are presented in full as follows.

Time Efficiency

The research findings show that some respondents recognized that Zotero speeds up the process of writing academic texts. The interviews and discussion on this matter are presented below.

>...*The use of Zotero can help me speed up the research process because Zotero can store various quality research articles from other researchers (R5).*
>...*In my personal experience, I found the Zotero application useful in my learning during lectures (academic text writing assignments) (R6).*

The results of the interviews above show that Zotero accelerates students' work in writing and especially in working on lecture assignments related to research article writing projects as expressed by R5 and R6. With Zotero, students can more easily manage quality references.

Improve Score

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that by using Zotero they were able to get better grades. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

>...*Using Zotero increases my chances of getting better grades because my lecturer requires using Zotero instead of other applications (R5).*
>...*I feel that using Zotero can increase my chances of getting better grades in that field (R6).*

The interview results above show that by using Zotero students can get better grades as expressed by R5 and R6. Respondents recognized that with Zotero, citations and bibliographies are well connected and the sources used are reliable so that they can improve lecture grades.

Improving Writing Quality

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that using Zotero could improve the quality of their writing. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

>...*Using Zotero can improve my literacy of articles, especially high quality articles (R5)*
>...*The use of Zotero must require serious accuracy, so this can make me become literate often to retrieve accurate references (R6).*

22

The interview results above show that by using Zotero, students can improve the quality of their writing as expressed by R5 and R6. With Zotero, students are more motivated to use quality and accurate articles because of several features in it such as the translator feature and the automatic article document search feature, making it easier for students to reach articles from the metadata collected by article collection tools such as Publish or Perish.

Ease Citation and Bibliography

The research findings show that some respondents acknowledged that Zotero was easy to use for the reason that the application was easy when doing citations and bibliographies. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

... Zotero is very easy to use especially when we want to make citations in scientific papers, compared to the Mandeley application, the Zotero application is easy to use for beginners who are just entering the world of writing scientific papers because they can directly cite (R1).

... The use of Zotero for the lecture process is very easy, especially citing citations in other people's articles that we want to quote. Zotero also makes it easy to create a bibliography manually to avoid plagiarism (R2).

The interview results above show that Zotero is seen as easy to use in doing citations as expressed by R1 and R2. Zotero is seen as an easier tool to use when doing citations than similar applications. With the ease of citation, students in this case are helped in avoiding plagiarism.

Make it Easy to Translate

The research findings show that some respondents acknowledged that Zotero was easy to use for the reason that the application was easy when translating articles in foreign languages. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

...There is no need to use Google Translate to translate foreign language articles, because using Zotero can directly translate foreign language articles is a plus point of using Zotero (R9).

...It can make it easier to translate foreign-language articles into Indonesian. If we use Zotero, we don't need to translate word by word from foreign language to Google Translate (R10).

The interview results above show that Zotero is considered easy to translate foreign language articles as revealed by R9 and R10. Features in the Zotero application can be added according to the availability of plugins such as translation features, making it easier for first semester students to understand foreign language articles including English. With this feature, students no longer need to use other translator applications. They just need to shade the part they want to translate and Zotero will automatically translate while connected to the internet.

Social Conditions

Based on the analysis of the research data, a theme was found regarding the perception of social conditions as an influence on the use of the Zotero application in the university environment. The theme is further divided into several subthemes, namely academic encouragement, friend encouragement, and lecturer encouragement. The discussion of these themes along with the results of the corroborating interviews are presented in full as follows.

Academic Encouragement

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that the use of Zotero was also suggested by the academic side, especially the study program. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

...The use of Zotero, especially in the study program, suggests using the application, because it makes it easier for students to write scientific articles, very helpful for completing assignments given by lecturers (R4).

...The academic department advises students to use this Zotero application because it can help facilitate students in doing assignments and finding quality articles (R7).

The interview results above show that Zotero is recommended for use in academia as expressed by R4 and R7 who were advised by their academic administrators to use Zotero. With the encouragement from academics, the utilization of RMS, one of which is Zotero, is becoming more massive by students, especially when writing academic texts.

Friend Encouragement

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that the use of Zotero was also suggested by friends. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

...I was influenced by friends who had already used the Zotero application, so that I could use Zotero well because the environment also used Zotero a lot. (R4)
...My friends helped me use Zotero. If I don't understand, my lecturer or friends will help me so that I can use Zotero. (R8)

The interview results above show that the use of Zotero is influenced by the environment around students such as their peers. With friends who have used it first, students find it easier to ask questions and model the use of the RMS as a tool to help write academic texts.

Lecturer Encouragement

The research findings show that some respondents admitted that the use of Zotero was also influenced by the lecturers teaching the courses, especially courses related to academic text writing. Interviews and discussions regarding this are shown below.

...There are some lecturers who require the use of the Zotero application because the lecturer's course is related to writing scientific papers, the lecturer requires the use of Zotero because it facilitates assignments, especially for writing scientific articles (R4).
...My lecturer recommends using the Zotero application because there are so many functions that we can utilize by using Zotero. In addition to being able to use it to cross-reference the articles we make, it can also help us translate articles that use foreign languages. (R8)

The interview above shows that lecturers greatly influence students' intention to use RMS, in this case Zotero as expressed by R4 and R8. Some respondents even admitted that they are required to use Zotero because of the many conveniences that can be received by students.

DISCUSSION

This study successfully revealed that students have a positive tendency towards the use of the Zotero application which can be seen from the themes that emerged from the results of the research data analysis. In general, students perceive that Zotero is an application that is easy to access, download, install, and is very relevant to the applications used by students in writing academic texts such as MS Word so that it affects their comfort in using the application when writing academic texts in college. The findings are in line with previous research (Rangaswamy & Babu, 2021; Vijai et al., 2019) which reveals that the ease of downloading makes students choose the application in doing citations and writing bibliographies. That way, students can easily download and use the Zotero application to support learning activities in college. This convenience influences students in choosing other RMS which are seen as having some difficulties when registering or creating an account, for example in the Mendeley RMS (Muzammil et al., 2024) which revealed that some students had difficulty in connecting Mendeley with Ms Word.

In addition to being easy to access, download, install, and relevant to writing applications, research respondents also revealed that the first time they used Zotero, they could easily understand and learn how to operate the application in the context of assisting the citation and bibliography writing process. With that, students were more encouraged to use Zotero in the future. This is in line with other research (Muzammil et al., 2023) which reveals that the main reason for choosing an application to help the learning process is due to the ease of understanding and learning how it works. In addition, some other researchers (Muzammil et al., 2024) also revealed that the reason for RMS utilisation was its usefulness in the citation process and the appearance of the bibliography.

The next finding is about the usefulness of the Zotero application which greatly facilitates students in the lecture process. RMS Zotero in this case is able to make the writing process faster than using manual methods in citing and bringing up the bibliography. This automation makes writing time more efficient and students can focus on improving the quality of writing. This is in accordance with previous research (Muzammil et al., 2024) which revealed that the use of RMS can help writing tasks to be completed faster.

Students in this study considered that Zotero is an application that can help them improve the assessment of their scientific work. This is because Zotero makes citation easier and makes it easier to create a bibliography (Aziz et al., 2022; Haliq et al., 2021; Kurniati et al., 2022; Nursidika et al., 2021). With that, plagiarism will be easier to avoid so that lecturers no longer have difficulty checking the results of student writing (Nursidika et al., 2021; Wibowo, 2012). Previous research related to Zotero utilization analysis has also revealed similar things (Baso et al., 2023; Haliq et al., 2021) namely the reason for helping to create a bibliography automatically. Previous research related to Mendeley has also revealed similar things (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2019;Iskandar & Patak, 2019;Patak & Tahir, 2019;Patak et al., 2016) namely the reason for choosing Mendeley as a reference managerial tool is because of the ease of citation.

Another interesting finding was the effect of Zotero on the quality of students' writing, which would improve their grades in the scientific writing course. The research findings reveal that with Zotero, students are facilitated in accessing scientific publications and are more motivated to use reputable scientific articles. This is due to features such as the automatic pdf search feature with an unlimited number so that students have more choices in utilising articles in their literature review process, especially relevant and quality articles. With this feature, of course, students' scientific reading is increasing. This is in accordance with the statement of previous research (Kaur, 2017) which reveals that the use of RMS can improve the quality of student writing in the future.

his research also reveals the theme of the influence of the use of Zotero by students, namely the influence of academic parties, the influence of friends, and the influence of lecturers who suggest the use of the application. With this encouragement, students massively use RMS including the use of Zotero. Previous research related to Mendeley Reference Manager has also revealed similar things (Arifiyana & Prasetyawan, 2023), namely the reasons for using Mendeley because it is required by academics, suggested by friends. In addition, several other studies have also revealed that the big reason for using RMS is the encouragement of lecturers (Muzammil et al., 2024). The findings of this study have important implications in higher education, especially regarding the use of technology to support students' academic processes. With the ease of access, download, installation, and relevance of Zotero with writing applications such as MS Word, this application is proven to be able to improve the efficiency and quality of students' academic writing process. This suggests that educational institutions need to be more active in promoting the use of Zotero as part of students' digital literacy development. In addition, the ease of operation of Zotero is one of the main reasons students prefer this application over other RMS, so integrating training in the use of Zotero in the lecture curriculum can be a strategic step to improve student competence in reference management.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully revealed that students have a positive tendency towards the utilisation of Zotero application in writing academic texts. The main findings show that Zotero is considered easy to access, download, install, and relevant to writing applications such as MS Word, thus providing convenience in its use. Students also rated Zotero as easy to learn and has features that support time efficiency in the citation process and automatic creation of bibliographies. This makes it easier for students to produce quality scientific work, prevent plagiarism, and improve their academic grades.

In addition, Zotero's features, such as automatic search of PDF files, motivate students to utilise reputable scientific articles, which has an impact on improving the quality of their writing. Influences from academics, friends, and lecturers also contributed significantly in encouraging the massive use of Zotero among students. Thus, the Zotero app has proven to be effective in supporting students' academic needs and improving the quality of their learning in higher education.

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