


## Strengthening Students' Academic Writing Skills Through the Mendeley Reference Management Application

Ela Martisa<sup>1\*</sup>, Amiruddin Eso<sup>2</sup> , Nuzul Hijrah Safitri<sup>3</sup>, Nurjannah<sup>4</sup>, Aminah Maulida

Nugraha Silawati<sup>5</sup>, Abdul Latif<sup>6</sup>, Nurhalisa<sup>7</sup>   
<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</sup> Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

e-mail: [ela.martisa@uho.ac.id](mailto:ela.martisa@uho.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The ability to write scientific papers is an important competency for students; however, they often face challenges in properly managing citations and references. This situation results in poor quality of academic writing and an increased risk of plagiarism due to the continued use of manual reference management methods and limited utilization of technology. This community service activity is intended to enhance students' knowledge and skills in managing citations and references by strengthening their proficiency in using the Mendeley reference management application. The target participants are students of the English Literature Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University. The implementation methods included material presentation, application usage demonstrations, and hands-on practice guidance. The results of the activity showed an increase in students' understanding of citations and their ability to apply Mendeley in academic writing, with an average score increase from 54 on the pre-test to 88 on the post-test, thereby contributing to improved academic writing quality and the prevention of plagiarism.

### INTRODUCTION

The ability to write academic papers whether in the form of assignments given by course instructors or as a graduation requirement in a study program is an unavoidable necessity for students today. One essential aspect of academic writing is students' ability to cite others' opinions as a means of supporting the ideas being explained in the text (Misa & Lasi, 2022). The quality of academic writing is determined not only by the ability to present ideas but also by the accuracy of citations and the compilation of references (Rinanti et al., 2020). Therefore, students' understanding of the importance of citations and references is indispensable in academic activities.

The term "citation" refers to the act of quoting a work or a specific part of a work previously published by an author, writer, or editor in a clear and accountable manner (Zhang, 2013). A citation is a way for an author to inform readers that certain parts of their writing are sourced from another person's previously published work. This practice indicates the origin of the ideas, data, or quotations used in the article. Ethically, in scientific writing, any use of another party's ideas, findings, or writings must be accompanied by a citation of the source. Therefore, authors are required to include references as a form of acknowledgment of prior work while maintaining academic integrity in the article they compose (Aini et al., 2019).

However, in practice, many students still struggle to manage citations and references correctly (Zuriati et al., 2023). This situation results in low-quality academic work and an increased risk of plagiarism, particularly due to the continued reliance on manual reference management methods and the limited use of supporting technologies.

Advances in digital technology have actually introduced various reference management applications that can assist students in the academic writing process. There are many types of citation applications, each with its own advantages in helping authors organize references neatly and systematically. For example, EndNote, which is a commercial application widely used internationally. Additionally, there are applications like Zotero and Mendeley that can be obtained and used for free (Nurisani et al., 2019). Currently, the reference management tool most frequently used by students is the Mendeley application.

Mendeley is a reference management software that can be used to help authors manage and organize sources in the process of writing scientific papers. This application makes it easier for users to organize literature, save documents, and create citations and bibliographies more systematically. Furthermore, Mendeley is open-source and accessible at no cost, allowing users to download and use it for free. This software is also compatible with various platforms and operating systems, such as Microsoft Windows, macOS, and Linux, making it flexible for use by a wide range of users (Meria et al., 2022).

The use of reference management applications like Mendeley is considered essential in academic writing because it helps students manage their sources, create citations more systematically, and simplify the accurate compilation of reference lists. With organized reference management, the risk of citation errors can be minimized, thereby reducing the potential for plagiarism. Given that instances of plagiarism are still frequently found in students' academic writing, effective preventive measures are necessary. One approach that can be taken is to utilize Mendeley as a tool to ensure that the citation and source inclusion processes are carried out correctly and ethically (Cahnia et al., 2021). This application enables systematic, accurate, and integrated reference management with word processing software (Meria et al., 2022). However, students' limited knowledge and skills in using the application present a significant challenge. Therefore, training and guidance on using Mendeley are necessary to enhance students' understanding of proper citation practices, strengthen academic literacy, and prevent plagiarism in academic writing.

Within the context of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at Halu Oleo University, particularly in the English Literature Program, academic writing skills are a critical requirement as students are obligated to complete coursework, write scientific articles, and prepare their final theses. Courses focused on academic writing, such as Academic Writing, have been offered to students; however, limited class time and the density of the material have prevented the technical aspects of citation and reference management from being covered optimally. Consequently, inconsistencies between in-text citations and the bibliography are still found, along with a tendency to use conventional methods in writing references.

In addition to technical limitations, students also often face challenges in understanding the importance of consistency between in-text citations and the reference list. These inconsistencies not only lower the academic quality of a scholarly work but also have the potential to raise academic ethical issues, particularly unintentional plagiarism. In many cases, students are not yet fully aware that citation errors can have serious consequences for the credibility of the resulting scholarly work, both at the institutional and individual levels.

On the other hand, students are faced with the obligation to actively participate in the writing of scholarly works. This obligation is not limited to improving quality but also extends to the quantity of scholarly publications in line with institutional quality assurance and accreditation policies (Shoffah et al., 2021). As part of the academic community, students play a strategic role in supporting these achievements, particularly through the production of scholarly works that meet academic standards. Therefore, strengthening students' academic literacy especially in citation and reference management has become an urgent need that cannot be ignored. The use of reference management applications such as Mendeley is considered an appropriate method to address these challenges.

Several activities related to training in the application of Mendeley reference management have been widely conducted at various public and private universities (Hidayatullah et al., 2022; Puspita et al., 2021; Anwar, 2021; Niam, 2023). These activities generally focus on improving students' technical skills in managing citations and bibliographies as an effort to enhance the quality of scientific writing and prevent plagiarism. The results of these various outreach activities indicate that Mendeley training has a positive impact on students' understanding of citations and references, particularly for senior students preparing their final theses or scientific articles. Nevertheless, variations in participant characteristics, institutional contexts, and the mentoring approaches used in each outreach activity suggest that implementing similar activities remains relevant and should be tailored to the specific needs and conditions of each institution.

Referring to the discussion above, this activity aims not only to serve as a technical training session but also to raise students' awareness of the importance of scientific writing ethics and the use of digital technology in the academic world. Through an applied training and mentoring approach, students are expected to be able to integrate the use of Mendeley sustainably into the process of writing scientific papers. Thus, this activity is expected to have a long-term impact on improving students' academic quality as well as strengthening the scientific culture within the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at Halu Oleo University.

## **IMPLEMENTATION METHODS**

This community service activity was conducted through direct training and mentoring sessions for students in the English Literature Program at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University, who were enrolled in the Academic Writing course. The activity was attended by 102 students and held in the Faculty of Cultural Sciences auditorium. The implementation method was systematically designed through three main stages: the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation stage.

During the preparation stage, the outreach team identified participants' needs by analyzing the challenges students faced in managing citations and references. Next, the team developed training materials covering the basic concepts of citations, scientific writing ethics, as well as an introduction to and use of the Mendeley reference management application. Additionally, coordination was carried out with the program to determine the time and location of the activity and to prepare the necessary support facilities during the training.

The implementation phase was carried out through a training session consisting of several activities, namely a presentation on the importance of citations and references in scientific writing, a demonstration of the Mendeley application, and hands-on practice by participants. During the practice session, students were guided to install the Mendeley application, enter reference sources, cite sources within the text, and automatically generate a bibliography. This activity also included discussion and Q&A sessions to help students overcome challenges encountered during the practical process.

An evaluation phase was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the training. The evaluation was carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative evaluation involved administering pre-tests and post-tests to all participants, consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions related to citation concepts, academic ethics, and the use of the Mendeley application. The pre-test was administered before the training to assess students' initial level of understanding, while the post-test was administered after the training to measure improvements in understanding. Meanwhile, the qualitative evaluation was conducted through direct observation of students' ability to manage references and create citations using Mendeley during the practical sessions. The results of this evaluation were then used as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of the activity and as a basis for consideration in the development of future community service programs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This community service program was carried out with the participation of students from the English Literature Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University. The activity was

attended by more than 102 students currently enrolled in the Academic Writing course. The program ran smoothly and received positive feedback from participants, as evidenced by the students' enthusiasm during the material presentation, hands-on practice, and discussion and Q&A sessions.



**Figure 1.** Presentation of Material



**Figure 2.** Guidance on Using Mendeley

The results of the activity showed that prior to the training, most students did not have an adequate understanding of systematic citation and reference management. Students tended to still use manual methods for writing bibliographies and were not yet aware of the importance of consistency between in-text citations and references at the end of the paper. This situation has the potential to lower the quality of academic work and increase the risk of unintentional plagiarism. These findings align with the initial issues that formed the basis for conducting the community service activity.

After participating in the training and mentoring, there was an improvement in students' understanding of citation concepts and reference management. Students were able to recognize the functions and benefits of the Mendeley application, ranging from digital library management, integration with word processing software, to the automatic generation of bibliographies (Wijaya et al., 2022). During the practical sessions, students demonstrated their ability to enter reference sources, cite sources within the text, and generate a bibliography in accordance with scientific writing standards. This indicates that a training approach combined with direct mentoring is effective in enhancing students' technical skills.

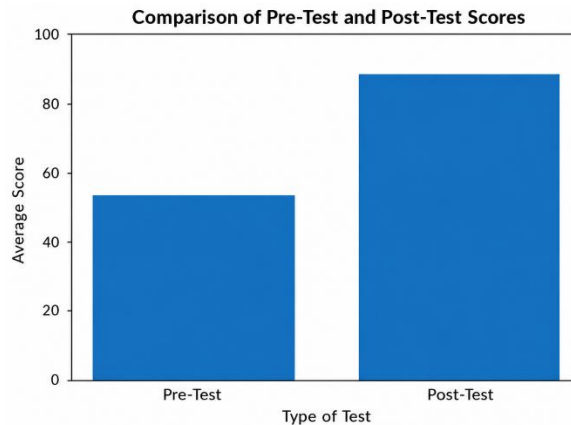
From a discussion perspective, the results of this activity indicate that the use of reference management applications such as Mendeley not only contributes to the improvement of technical skills but also to the development of students' awareness of scientific writing ethics (Safitri et al., 2025). With a better understanding of citations and references, students become more careful in citing sources and better understand the importance of respecting others' scholarly work. These findings reinforce the view that the use of digital technology in academic writing can serve as a preventive strategy against plagiarism in higher education settings (Amalina & Ardiansyah, 2025).

Additionally, this activity has a positive impact on the learning process within the program. Students who have participated in the training are expected to consistently apply the skills they have acquired in both course assignments and their final theses. Thus, this community service activity is not only a solution to short-term issues but also has the potential to make a long-term contribution to improving students' academic quality and the scholarly culture at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University. To clarify the improvement in students' understanding, the results of the pre-test and post-test evaluations are presented in Table 1 below.

Based on the evaluation results obtained through pre-tests and post-tests administered to 102 students, a significant improvement was observed across all measured indicators. The average pre-test score for students was 54, while the average post-test score increased to 88. This indicates an increase of 34 points following the training. The greatest improvement occurred in students' ability to manage references and generate automatic citations using Mendeley. These results demonstrate that the training and mentoring activities conducted were effective in enhancing students' understanding and skills in academic writing.

**Table 1. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results**

Indicator	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Improvement
Understanding of citation concepts	56	85	+29
Academic ethics & plagiarism	58	87	+29
Mendeley Knowledge	54	90	+36
Reference management	50	88	+38
Automatic citation	52	89	+37
<b>Average</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>+34</b>



**Figure 3. Comparison of Students' Average Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores**

Figure 3 shows a significant increase between students' pre-test and post-test scores after participating in the training. The average pre-test score of 54 increased to 88 on the post-test. This indicates that the training on using the Mendeley application was effective in improving students' understanding and skills in managing citations and references. This improvement indicates a statistically significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores.

In addition to quantitative improvements, this activity also had a practical impact on students' skills. Students who previously used manual methods for writing references are now able to utilize the Mendeley application to manage references systematically and automatically. This helps improve citation consistency and reduces the potential for plagiarism in academic writing. Thus, this activity not only enhances understanding but also brings about tangible changes in students' academic writing practices.

## CONCLUSION

This community service activity, which involved training and guidance on using the Mendeley reference management application, has had a positive impact on improving students' understanding and skills in managing citations and references for academic works. Before the activity was conducted, students tended to still use manual methods for writing references and did not fully understand the importance of citation consistency, which could potentially lower the quality of academic writing and increase the risk of plagiarism.

Through a training approach accompanied by hands-on guidance, students demonstrated improved ability in managing references, citing sources within the text, and systematically compiling bibliographies using Mendeley. This activity not only contributes to enhancing the quality of students' academic writing but also strengthens awareness of academic ethics and the utilization of digital technology in the learning process at the university.

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