

## Mendeley-Based Training to Improve Reference Management and Citation Formatting in Sociology Students

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### ABSTRACT

*This program was conducted at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Halu Oleo University, to address challenges in scientific writing, particularly in reference management, academic ethics, and citation formatting. Students often struggled with these issues, hindering their ability to write quality academic papers. The program aimed to equip students with skills to organize references, compile bibliographies, and apply citation formats using Mendeley. The program's success was reflected in a 40% improvement in reference management skills, a 45% increase in Mendeley usage, and a 35% improvement in understanding academic ethics. Additionally, students' ability to correctly format citations and compile bibliographies improved by 45%. Final-year students showed substantial progress, enhancing their academic writing capabilities. These results highlight the importance of integrating Mendeley training into the curriculum, and it is recommended that such training be regularly incorporated into research methodology courses to foster long-term academic success.*

**Keywords:** Academic Ethics; Bibliographies; Citation Formatting; Mendeley; Reference Management.

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### 1. Introduction

Scientific writing is a vital skill for university students, as it reflects their critical and analytical thinking and their ability to contribute to the advancement of knowledge (Gallagher, 2023; Amna, 2022). It allows students to formulate arguments, synthesize information, and communicate effectively within the academic community (Widyastuti, 2018). Moreover, scientific writing requires adherence to academic integrity, especially in properly citing sources and managing references.

However, students face several challenges in scientific writing, particularly in reference management, citation practices, and avoiding plagiarism (Maryatun, 2020, Nur Intan Ode & Suherman, 2022). The complexity of citation rules and the need to acknowledge previous research demand a strong understanding of ethical principles in academic writing (Marsh & Campion, 2018). These ethical principles involve the responsibility to properly credit the work of other researchers, which is achieved through correct reference management and following citation formats like APA, MLA, or Chicago Style (Subagiyo & Budiman, 2024).

Despite the availability of various tools, improper referencing and plagiarism remain widespread. A study by Rahman and Jumino (2019) found that 65% of university students made citation errors or failed to include references correctly, which violates academic ethical

norms. These issues are often due to inadequate training, limited access to reference management tools, and a lack of awareness regarding plagiarism (Khairani & Zainarti, 2025).

In addition to these challenges, scientific writing also requires linguistic and structural competence (Crossley, 2020). Many students struggle with organizing their arguments logically and presenting their ideas clearly (Zwiers & Crawford, 2023). Crafting a coherent flow of ideas is essential to communicate research findings effectively (Marzuki et al., 2023), and using proper academic language, including formal tone and discipline-specific terminology, is necessary to meet scholarly standards (Saudah et al., 2023).

To overcome these barriers, universities need to provide structured writing programs that address both technical and ethical aspects of scientific writing. Workshops, mentoring, and the integration of writing courses into the curriculum can significantly improve students' writing skills (Kleinbort et al., 2020). The use of plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin or Grammarly can also encourage students to self-check their work for originality and proper citation (Yusuf & Rahayu, 2024).

In the Department of Sociology at Halu Oleo University, students encounter specific challenges related to reference management. Many students still manage their bibliographies manually, leading to citation errors and inconsistent formatting (Beatty & Cochran, 2020). A lack of familiarity with digital tools like Mendeley, coupled with limited training, further exacerbates these issues (Iksan et al., 2022). Moreover, students often fail to understand the importance of academic ethics, with plagiarism remaining a common problem (Pun, 2021).

Furthermore, students struggle with technical issues related to citation formats, such as APA, MLA, and Chicago styles. These formats often confuse students, especially when different academic assignments or journals require different styles (Mardin et al., 2020). Additionally, many students perceive reference management as time-consuming, which leads them to neglect this critical task (Sujarwati et al., 2021). This neglect results in subpar bibliographies and citations, which lowers the quality of their academic work.

To address these issues, Mendeley offers an efficient solution. Mendeley is a reference management tool that helps students organize references, compile bibliographies, and apply citation formats automatically (Kusumaningsih et al., 2024). It not only increases efficiency but also reinforces academic integrity by teaching students the importance of citing sources correctly (Saudah et al., 2023).

Mendeley is widely used in academic research and has become an essential tool for students and professionals alike (Simarmata et al., 2020). It offers cloud-based library management, integration with word processors, and easy sharing of references through its "Groups" feature. Mendeley also automatically detects document metadata, which helps reduce citation errors (Hafizd et al., 2024). These features make Mendeley a valuable tool for students to enhance the quality of their writing while adhering to ethical citation practices.

In conclusion, Mendeley provides a digital solution to many of the challenges faced by students in scientific writing. By introducing Mendeley to students at Halu Oleo University, the department can help students improve their reference management skills, adhere to academic ethics, and produce high-quality, ethically sound academic work. This initiative aligns with the growing need for interdisciplinary learning and collaboration in the social sciences (Kim & Kim, 2022).

## 2. Method

This activity employed a quantitative descriptive approach with a pretest-posttest design to assess the impact of Mendeley training on students' reference management skills. The program was conducted in December 2024 at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Halu Oleo University.

A total of 44 final-year students participated in the activity. Prior to the training, the implementation team distributed pretest questionnaires to evaluate students' baseline knowledge and familiarity with reference management and Mendeley. The results of this pretest revealed a general lack of understanding regarding citation techniques and limited exposure to reference management tools.

Following the initial assessment, the team conducted a structured training session that included: a) Introduction to academic ethics and the importance of proper referencing; b) Technical instruction on installing and using Mendeley; c) Hands-on exercises on integrating Mendeley with Microsoft Word; d) Guidance on citation styles and collaboration features within Mendeley. The session was delivered through a combination of lectures, demonstrations, and interactive discussions facilitated by experts in academic writing and digital tools.

At the end of the training, a posttest questionnaire was administered to measure the improvement in students' understanding and skills related to reference management. The results of the posttest were then compared with the pretest data to assess the effectiveness of the program. In addition to quantitative assessment, qualitative feedback was also gathered through open-ended questions and group discussions to better understand the participants' perceptions and learning experiences. This mixed-method approach allowed the program team to capture both measurable improvements and contextual insights from the participants.

## 3. Result

The implementation of this program involved several key stages designed to address the challenges faced by students in reference management and academic writing. These stages were carried out with a clear focus on improving students' skills in proper citation practices, the use of reference management tools such as Mendeley, and fostering a deeper understanding of academic integrity. Through these activities, the implementation team aimed to not only enhance students' technical abilities but also to instill important ethical practices that are essential for high-quality academic writing.

### 3.1 Socialization of the Training Program and Community Mentorship Collaboration

The socialization was carried out with the target group after first coordinating with the Head of the Sociology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, on December 2, 2024. This meeting not only discussed the objectives of the Community Service Program as part of the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education but also provided an overview of the issues related to reference writing in students' scientific papers from both the Sociology and Social Welfare Science programs.

The response from the Head of the Department was highly positive, recognizing the importance of efforts to improve the quality of academic writing among students. The implementation of Mendeley as a reference management tool is expected to enhance the quality of scientific papers and improve students' understanding of the importance of ethical citation practices in academic writing.



**Figure 1.** Socialization of the Training Program and Community Mentorship Collaboration

a. Provision of Activity Facilities

In order to support these activities, the team had prepared proactive, constructive, and innovative steps so that the activity runs well and successfully. Preparations carried out before the implementation of socialization, among others: preparation of materials, modules, drawings, and props that will be delivered in the training session. Other facilities prepared are projectors and screens, participant attributes, sound systems, room layout and decoration, photocopies of materials/materials, seminar kits, consumption during training, activity documentation, and so on.

As well as to maximize the training process, the team also invited resource persons who are competent in the field of reference management and the use of Mendeley to share practical experiences and provide inspiration to students in improving the quality of scientific paper writing. Evaluation and feedback are also an important part of this activity, where the team always evaluates the program and asks for feedback from participants, including students, to continuously improve and adjust the material and socialization methods.



**Figure 2.** Provision of Activity Facilities

The provision of these tools is able to provide an effective and positive training experience for students, help them understand how to use Mendeley well, and provide tools to improve the quality of scientific writing that is more structured and efficient.

#### b. Program Implementation

The Community Service activity began with the submission and distribution of invitations to participants consisting of students of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Halu Oleo University, as well as several lecturers and teaching staff who are competent in the field of scientific writing. This activity was held in December 2024 in Rekson Room 4, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, which was attended by seventy students.

The activity began with an opening by the Head of Community Service who was welcomed by the MC. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees explained the importance of skills in using Mendeley for the preparation of scientific papers, as well as encouraging the socialization of activities. The highlight of the event continued with the provision of material by a facilitator from regarding the use of Mendeley, which is a reference and citation management tool that can greatly help students in compiling quality scientific papers. Students were then given the opportunity to discuss and ask questions related to the problems they faced in the preparation of their scientific papers, as well as how Mendeley can be an effective solution in managing references and citations.

Following the provision of material, the impact of the Mendeley training was evaluated through a pretest and posttest. The table below demonstrates the significant improvements in students' reference management and Mendeley usage skills because of the training:

**Table 1.** Pretest and Posttest Comparison of Reference Management Skills

No	Aspect Tested	Pretest (Average)	Posttest (Average)	Change (%)
1	Understanding of reference management	40%	80%	+40%
2	Basic knowledge of using Mendeley	30%	75%	+45%
3	Using Mendeley with Microsoft Word	25%	70%	+45%
4	Understanding of academic ethics in writing	50%	85%	+35%
5	Accuracy in compiling bibliographies	35%	80%	+45%
6	Ability to format citations (APA, MLA, etc.)	30%	70%	+40%

As shown in the table above, the results from the pretest and posttest highlight a substantial improvement in all aspects tested, including understanding of reference management, ability to use Mendeley, and academic ethics in writing. The posttest scores indicate a marked increase in students' proficiency across various skills, with some areas, such as "Using Mendeley with Microsoft Word" and "Accuracy in compiling bibliographies," showing an improvement of 45%. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the Mendeley training program in addressing the challenges students faced prior to the socialization sessions. There are several program components agreed upon in this service activity so that the quality of student scientific work is of higher quality:

a. Periodic Education on the Use of Mendeley

Educational activities about Mendeley will be carried out periodically within one year. This program collaborates with lecturers from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Halu Oleo University, and involves collaboration with academic assistants and related parties in higher education. This activity is designed to be carried out once every three months in one year, both in regular class meetings and wider seminars/workshops in the faculty or at the department level. the formation of discussion groups or mendeley clubs on campus.

b. Student Assistance and Guidance in Using Mendeley

Assistance will be provided directly to students who need further help in using Mendeley. This mentoring process aims to offer technical and academic support in utilizing the application for scientific writing. The assistance activities include assigning mentors or Mendeley usage guides, individual or group mentoring sessions, and specialized training for students facing technical difficulties.

#### 4. Discussion

The pretest and posttest assessments revealed notable improvements in students' citation and reference management skills following the training. The data demonstrated that students' understanding of reference management techniques nearly doubled, and their proficiency in using Mendeley increased significantly. For instance, students showed a 40% improvement in their ability to understand and apply reference management strategies, and a similar gain in their ability to use Mendeley for organizing citations and formatting documents. Additionally, their awareness of academic ethics, including proper citation practices, saw a substantial boost, with students gaining greater confidence in avoiding plagiarism and adhering to citation standards. These results highlight the effectiveness of the training in addressing the common challenges students face in citation management and academic writing (Elander, et al., 2010).

Academic writing requires not only a strong grasp of research methods but also the ability to manage sources and citations effectively. One of the key skills in scholarly writing is the ability to cite sources correctly, as it not only supports the validity of the research but also upholds the ethical standards of academic integrity (Suherman, et al., 2023). Citation practices are essential for avoiding plagiarism, ensuring that the work of others is properly acknowledged, and contributing to the overall credibility of the research. However, students often face challenges in mastering these practices, leading to common issues such as improper citations, inconsistent formatting, and a lack of understanding of the underlying ethical principles (Rathore, et al., 2018).

This section addresses these challenges by focusing on the importance of ethical citation practices, the role of citation management tools, and the strategies for improving students' abilities to properly manage and format citations. Specifically, the session aimed to educate students on how to use Mendeley, a popular reference management tool, and how proper citation techniques contribute to the overall quality of academic writing.

a. Ethics and Student Challenges in Citation

In this session, participants were given an understanding of ethical citation practices and scientific writing. The main focus was on proper citation techniques, avoiding plagiarism, and understanding the importance of academic integrity in scholarly writing. The discussion also

addressed common citation issues faced by students, such as inconsistencies in citation formats, improper citation practices, and strategies to avoid citation errors.

The session's focus on ethical citation practices, plagiarism awareness, and academic integrity aligns closely with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of citation ethics in academic development. Proper citation is not only a technical skill but also a reflection of a scholar's integrity and intellectual honesty (Panjaitan et al., 2024). Teaching students how to cite correctly and avoid plagiarism fosters responsible academic behavior and helps prevent academic misconduct, which has become a growing concern in higher education (Perkins et al., 2020).

The emphasis on understanding citation ethics reflects principles discussed Chapman (2021), who argued that students often struggle with integrating sources due to a lack of instruction in rhetorical and ethical use of citations. This is reinforced by studies that suggest many instances of plagiarism arise from ignorance rather than intentional deception (Ashworth et al., 1997). By addressing these issues directly through targeted instruction, as was done in this session, students are more likely to internalize the values of academic honesty.

#### b. The Importance of Using Reference and Citation Managers

This session focused on the benefits of using reference and citation management tools in scientific writing. Reference manager such as Mendeley was explained in detail, with an emphasis on their ability to streamline reference organization, accelerate the writing process, and ensure consistency in citation formatting. Students were also educated on how using reference management tools can enhance writing efficiency and minimize citation errors.

Reference management tools have been widely recognized for their ability to improve the efficiency, accuracy, and overall quality of scholarly writing (Hafizd et al., 2024). Understanding the benefits of these tools is crucial, especially for novice researchers who often struggle with organizing and formatting references manually. Research by Ordu and Aondowase (2020) demonstrates that students who utilize tools like Mendeley and Zotero report fewer citation errors and show improved adherence to formatting standards, which contributes significantly to academic credibility and publication readiness.

Familiarity with various reference managers and the ability to identify efficient reference practices are in line with recommendations by Wichor et al. (2015), who argue that understanding the functionalities of different reference tools enables researchers to select the most suitable platform based on their research needs and technical preferences. For instance, while Mendeley is known for its user-friendly interface and integration with word processors, EndNote and Zotero may offer better collaboration features or customization options depending on the context.

In conclusion, the focus of this session on reference management tools not only supports the technical dimensions of academic writing but also enhances students' scholarly practices through the promotion of accuracy, consistency, and ethical source use. These practices are essential for developing sustainable academic skills in the digital age.

#### c. Mendeley Usage Guide

This practical session provided hands-on training on how to use Mendeley as a reference management tool. Students were taught how to install Mendeley, import references, create folders for storing references, and add citations to their scientific writing documents. The guide also covered Mendeley's advanced features, such as sharing references with peers, collaborating in groups, and accessing references from multiple devices. Additionally,

students were introduced to citation style customization based on the requirements of Halu Oleo University and other academic publications.

The hands-on session on using Mendeley as a reference management tool aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that advocate for the integration of digital literacy into academic skills training. Teaching students how to install, manage, and apply Mendeley features supports the development of essential competencies in research and scholarly communication, as discussed in prior studies (Saudah et al., 2023).

The ability to install and set up Mendeley addresses the foundational digital skills necessary for modern academic work. As noted by Subagiyo & Budiman (2024), technical familiarity with digital research tools is a key factor influencing students' ability to effectively engage in research practices. Introducing Mendeley setup in a structured environment allows learners to overcome initial barriers and gain confidence in using technology for academic purposes.

In conclusion, this session not only developed students' technical proficiency with Mendeley but also reinforced broader academic skills such as organization, collaboration, and adherence to scholarly norms, all of which are central to successful academic and professional research.

## 5. Conclusion

This community service program demonstrates that the implementation of Mendeley as a reference management tool has significantly benefited students in their scientific writing endeavors. The students who participated in this activity showed a remarkable improvement in their understanding of proper reference management and citation practices, with posttest results reflecting a 40% improvement in reference management skills and a 45% increase in their ability to use Mendeley effectively. There was also a noticeable enhancement in their adherence to academic ethics, particularly in correctly citing sources, with a 35% improvement in understanding academic integrity in writing.

Additionally, Mendeley has proven to be an effective tool for organizing references, streamlining the citation process, and minimizing errors in compiling bibliographies. The use of Mendeley facilitated not only technical skills but also improved students' overall writing efficiency. Students acquired valuable skills such as importing references, utilizing automatic citation features, and generating bibliographies in various citation styles, which are crucial for enhancing the quality of their academic work.

To ensure the continued development of these skills, it is recommended that Mendeley training be integrated into the research methodology or proposal seminar curriculum. This will provide students with ongoing support in reference management throughout their academic careers. Furthermore, establishing a peer mentoring system within each department could help maintain the continuity of these practices, promoting a culture of academic integrity and fostering long-term academic success.

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