Use of Reference Management Software by Faculty and Research Scholars at IIT Gandhinagar: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the adoption and utilization patterns of Reference Management Software (RMS) among research scholars and faculty at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar. Through comprehensive surveys conducted across various departments, the research identifies key trends in software preference, the extent of usage, and the challenges encountered in managing bibliographic references. The findings reveal that while RMS tools like Mendeley and Zotero are widely recognized, actual usage varies significantly between faculty and research scholars. The study also examines the role of library services in supporting RMS adoption, highlighting the need for enhanced institutional support to optimize research workflows. The insights gathered provide valuable recommendations for improving the effectiveness of research support services in academic institutions.

Keywords: Reference Management Software, Research Scholars, Faculty, IIT Gandhinagar, Academic Libraries, Research Support Services, Mendeley, Zotero, Citation Management Software, Digital Tools Adoption.

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INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of academic research, the adoption of digital tools has become increasingly important for streamlining various aspects of the research process. Among these tools, Reference Management Software (RMS) has emerged as a crucial asset for researchers. RMS platforms such as Mendeley, Zotero, and EndNote offer a range of functionalities that go beyond simple citation management. These tools assist researchers in organizing their bibliographic references, ensuring consistency in citation styles, and facilitating collaboration through shared libraries and document annotation features. As research becomes more interdisciplinary and collaborative, the need for efficient and reliable tools to manage the growing volume of references is more critical than ever.

At the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar, research scholars and faculty are deeply engaged in cutting-edge research across various disciplines. The effective management of references and citations is a fundamental part of the research process,



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directly impacting the quality and integrity of their academic output. However, the extent to which these tools are adopted and utilized by the research community at IIT Gandhinagar varies, influenced by factors such as awareness, accessibility, and individual preferences. Understanding these patterns is essential for optimizing the use of RMS in the academic environment of IIT Gandhinagar.

This study aims to explore how research scholars and faculty at IIT Gandhinagar are utilizing RMS and how the library's research support services can further enhance the adoption and effective use of these tools. By understanding the current landscape, the study seeks to provide recommendations for improving the integration of RMS into the research workflow at IIT Gandhinagar.

Research Support Services

The role of academic libraries in supporting research has evolved significantly with the advent of digital technologies. Libraries are no longer just repositories of physical books and journals; they have become hubs of digital resources and tools that support the entire research lifecycle. In this context, the integration of RMS into the services provided by academic libraries is of paramount importance. Libraries at premier institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of

Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) etc., are increasingly offering training sessions, workshops, and one-on-one consultations to help researchers make the most of RMS.

These research support services are designed to enhance the productivity and efficiency of researchers by reducing the time and effort required to manage references manually. By promoting the use of RMS, libraries can help ensure that researchers adhere to best practices in citation management, thereby reducing the risk of errors and plagiarism. Moreover, by providing access to subscription-based RMS tools or promoting open-source alternatives, libraries can democratize access to these essential tools, ensuring that all researchers, regardless of their funding or department, can benefit from the efficiencies that RMS offers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand the work done in this direction, a broad review of existing literature was undertaken and the same is presented under various facets pertaining to the study.

Promotion and Adoption of RMS

Research has shown that student awareness and knowledge can be enhanced through the classroom integration of RMS, which could substantially improve their usage (Cortez, 2022). Additionally, librarians can play a key role in encouraging the adoption of these tools to promote academic integrity and boost research productivity (Bapte & Bejalwar, 2021).

RMS Usage Across Disciplines

The use of RMS among practitioners of Allopathy, Ayurveda, and Homeopathy shows distinct patterns and tool preferences (Barman *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, Humanities and Social Science postgraduate students exhibit a lower adoption rate, mainly due to insufficient training and awareness (Melles & Unsworth, 2015).

Awareness and Usage of RMS

Faculty perspectives at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, reveal varying levels of awareness and usage of RMS, with many lacking sufficient knowledge of these tools (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, researchers at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in Ghana demonstrate moderate awareness but limited application of RMS in their research processes (Bugyei, Kavi, & Obeng-Koranteng, 2019).

Challenges in RMS Adoption

Understanding user needs and providing adequate support are crucial for the effective adoption of RMS, especially in terms of grasping their functionalities and integrating them into the research workflow (Berry *et al.*, 2020; Hendal, 2019). Barriers to adoption are also evident, as seen in a study conducted at the

University of Torino, where researchers faced several challenges in using these tools effectively (Francese, 2013).

Innovation and Future Direction

Key factors influencing researchers' selection of RMS include ease of use, compatibility with other software, and strong citation functionalities, all of which are essential for broader adoption (Nilashi *et al.*, 2019). Enhancing the literature review process through RMS also requires innovative software features that address the varied needs of researchers (Lubke *et al.*, 2017).

Comparative Analysis of RMS Tools

The effectiveness of web-based citation management systems depends largely on user-friendly interfaces and strong support structures (Steeleworthy & Dewan, 2013). A comparative analysis of four RMS tools further highlights their respective strengths and limitations, offering valuable insights to help users choose the most suitable option for their research needs (Gilmour & Cobus-Kuo, 2011).

The review of the literature pointed to the fact that there is a lack of efforts by the libraries regarding the various RMS and the elements of user friendliness; compatibility needs to be enhanced in the RMS to promote usage of RMS among research scholars.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a questionnaire-based survey approach using Google Forms to collect empirical data on the adoption and usage of Reference Management Software (RMS) among research scholars and faculty at IIT Gandhinagar. Two separate surveys were designed and distributed -one targeting research scholars and the other faculty members across various departments. The primary objective of these surveys was to collect comprehensive data on several key aspects related to RMS, including awareness levels, usage patterns, preferred features, and the challenges faced by users in managing references and citations.

The Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar (IIT GN) is committed to fostering a robust academic and research environment, providing its community with a diverse collection of over 40,500 resources, including books, journals, and electronic databases. The IIT Gandhinagar Library plays a pivotal role in supporting research activities, offering a range of services and facilities that enhance users' access to information. Regular workshops on Reference Management Software such as Zotero and Mendeley are conducted, equipping students and faculty with the skills needed to efficiently manage their citations and references.

The survey for research scholars focused on understanding their familiarity with different RMS tools, the frequency of use, and the specific functionalities they find most valuable in their academic work. Additionally, it explored the barriers that might obstruct their effective use of these tools, such as lack of training or perceived complexity. On the other hand, the faculty survey aimed to capture their experiences with RMS, including the extent to which they incorporate these tools into their research and teaching practices, as well as their perspectives on the role of library support in enhancing RMS usage.

Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure focused and representative data collection, the study targeted two distinct respondent groups, faculty members and research scholars reflecting their integral roles in research and academic engagement at IIT Gandhinagar. Separate, structured questionnaires were designed for each group to capture their specific experiences and perspectives on the adoption and use of Reference Management Software (RMS). The structured questionnaires were distributed online to facilitate easy access and a broad reach across the targeted academic community.

The questionnaires were meticulously designed to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing for a blend of quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended questions captured quantifiable data on aspects such as the specific RMS tools used, the frequency of use, and the importance of various features. Open-ended questions provided respondents the opportunity to share detailed insights into their personal experiences and challenges, offering a deeper understanding of their RMS usage behaviors.

Out of 504 research scholars, a total of 77 responded to the questionnaire and 61 faculty members out of 100. Upon collection, the survey data was analyzed through a rigorous process. Quantitative data were subjected to statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns in RMS usage across different demographic groups, specifically comparing research scholars and faculty members. The findings were summarized to highlight key insights, including the most commonly used RMS tools, how frequently they are used, and users' overall perceptions of their ease of use.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed thematically. This involved systematically reviewing and organizing the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns, offering deeper insights into the challenges, preferences, and perceived barriers faced by RMS users at IIT Gandhinagar. The thematic analysis helped to contextualize the quantitative findings, providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing RMS adoption and utilization.

The combination of these quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a comprehensive view of RMS usage at IIT Gandhinagar. This approach enabled a robust examination of the

research questions and facilitated the development of targeted recommendations aimed at improving RMS adoption, training, and support within the academic community.

RESULTS

The level of awareness and adoption of Reference Management Software (RMS) tools varies between research scholars and faculty at IIT Gandhinagar.

Use of RMS by Faculty

Among faculty members, the preference for RMS tools shows a similar trend. Mendeley is the most used RMS, followed by Zotero and EndNote as presented in Figure 1. However, some faculty members prefer manual citation management or use simpler tools like Google Scholar. The adoption rate is generally higher among faculty with more extensive research experience.

- A: I do not use reference management software in classes.
- B: Encourage students to use reference management software.
- C: Demonstrate/teach reference management software in class.
- D: Encourage students to use reference management software, I do not use reference management software in classes.
- E: Demonstrate/teach reference management software in class, encourage students to use reference management software.

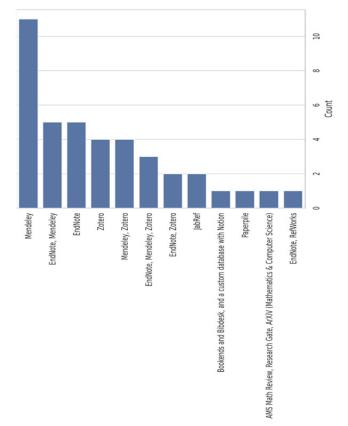


Figure 1: Reference Management Software Usage Among Faculty.

F: Demonstrate/teach reference management software in class, require students to use reference management software,

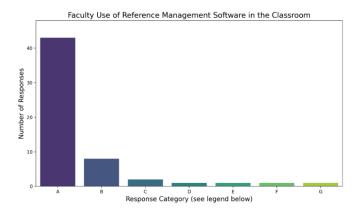


Figure 2: Faculty Use of Reference Management Software in Classroom.

encourage students to use reference management software.

G: Require students to use reference management software, I do not use reference management software in classes.

The survey results reveal that the most common response (as presented in Figure 2) among faculty regarding the use of Reference Management Software (RMS) in classroom instruction was category A – "I do not use reference management software in classes" – with 43 respondents selecting this option. This dominant response underscores a prevalent lack of integration of RMS tools into teaching practices, indicating that many faculty members may either be unfamiliar with these tools or do not perceive them as essential for instructional use.

The second-highest response was category B – "Encourage students to use reference management software" – reported by 8 respondents. This suggests that while these faculty members may not use RMS themselves during instruction, they recognize its value and promote its use among students. The contrast between the top two responses reflects a potential awareness gap: faculty may appreciate the benefits of RMS for student work but are not incorporating it into their own pedagogical practices.

Faculty respondents identified several key features (as presented in Table 1) of Reference Management Software that they find most useful. The most frequently used functions include importing references from databases, organizing them into folders, and generating formatted bibliographies. Additionally, many faculty members value editing and managing references, storing full-text PDFs, and using plugins with word processors. Fewer respondents reported using advanced tools like annotation, tagging, and reference sharing, indicating that while foundational features are widely adopted, collaborative and semantic features are still emerging in use.

The findings reveal that faculty at IIT Gandhinagar predominantly rely on interactive learning formats for support with Reference

Table 1: Key Features Used in Reference Management Software by Faculty.

Rank	Feature	Number of Responses
1	Importing references from databases/ websites	30
2	Creating folders and organizing references	28
3	Generating bibliographies in selected citation styles	25
4	Editing and formatting references	22
5	Storing and managing PDFs	18
6	Plugin for Word or other processors	15
7	Annotating and tagging PDFs	10
8	Sharing references with others	8

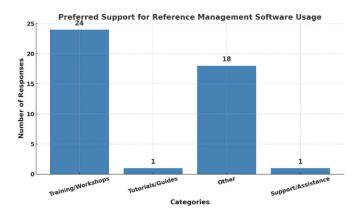


Figure 3: Faculty-Suggested Library Support for RMS Promotion.

Management Software (RMS). As presented in Figure 3, training sessions and workshops were the most preferred option (n=24), indicating a strong demand for structured, hands-on learning. A considerable number of respondents (n=18) selected the "Other" category, suggesting the presence of informal or institution-specific support mechanisms. In contrast, tutorials/guides and direct assistance were minimally chosen (n=1 each), reflecting limited reliance on passive or individualized formats. These results highlight the importance of institutional investment in experiential and peer-driven training approaches to support effective RMS adoption.

Use of RMS by Research Scholars

Building on the faculty analysis, the adoption patterns of Reference Management Software (RMS) among research scholars are presented in Figure 4. The data indicate that a substantial proportion of scholars are aware of RMS tools, with Mendeley being the most commonly used. Zotero also sees moderate use, while EndNote and RefWorks have limited uptake within this group. Notably, some scholars continue to rely on general-purpose platforms such as Google Scholar for managing references, suggesting varying levels of tool familiarity and integration into

research workflows. These findings point to a broader spectrum of RMS usage among scholars compared to faculty.

Further insight is provided in Figure 5, which captures scholars' perceptions regarding the advisability of using RMS. A substantial majority of respondents (94.7%) indicated that the use of reference management software is advisable, while only 5.3% expressed the opposite view. Two participants did not respond to this item. These findings reinforce the widespread acceptance of RMS among scholars and highlight its perceived value in improving citation accuracy, organizing bibliographic data, and enhancing overall research productivity.

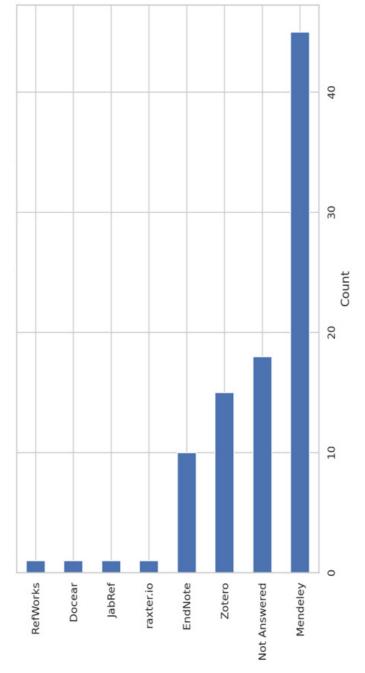


Figure 4: Reference Management Usage Software Among Research-Scholars.

The preferences outlined in Table 2 underscore a pronounced emphasis on functional integration and practical utility within the broader research workflow. The relatively uniform distribution of response frequencies across multiple features suggests that users do not prioritize a singular core function; rather, they value a comprehensive set of capabilities that, in combination, facilitate research efficiency. Notably, the prominence of citation style formatting and compatibility with word processing software indicates that reference management systems (RMS) are predominantly perceived as integral components of the academic writing process. Additionally, the strong preference for organizational features and streamlined import functionalities highlights the growing need to manage expanding volumes of scholarly literature effectively. These findings collectively suggest that users of RMS tools are primarily function-oriented, favouring systems that reduce manual tasks and enable holistic management of bibliographic data throughout the research lifecycle.

Barriers to the effective use of Reference Management Software (RMS) are summarized in Figure 6. The predominance of training as a cited challenge underscores the necessity for systematic instructional support. The substantial representation of other barriers indicates a diversity of user-specific issues not captured by standard categories. Mentions of support and resource availability further emphasize the need for institutional facilitation. In contrast, awareness and integration were cited less frequently, suggesting these are comparatively minor but

Table 2: Key Features Used in Reference Management Software by Research Scholars.

Research Scholars.			
Rank	Feature	Number of Responses	
1	Creating a list/bibliography of references for theses, dissertations with selected style	46	
2	Plugin for Microsoft Word or other word processors	45	
3	Creating folders and organizing references	44	
4	Editing and formatting references in the needed style	43	
5	Importing and saving references from databases like Web of Science, SciFinder, etc.	41	
6	Automatically generating reference entries from Google Scholar	33	
7	Storing and managing research data	29	
8	Searching references and PDFs stored in the library	27	
9	Creating new entries and saving them manually	27	
10	Storing and managing full-text PDFs	24	

still relevant impediments. Overall, the data highlight that while users seek robust functionality, effective adoption hinges equally on resolving educational and infrastructural limitations.

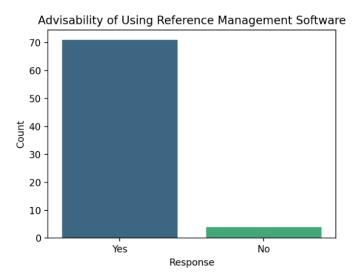


Figure 5: Advisability on Using Reference Management Usage Software by
Research-Scholars

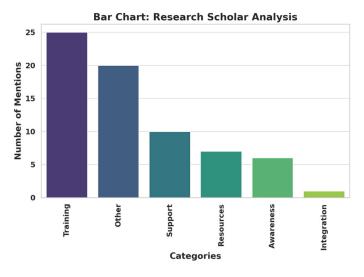


Figure 6: Barriers to the adoption and effective use of Reference Management Software (RMS) based on number of mentions across categories.

DISCUSSION

Role of Library Services

IIT Gandhinagar library plays a pivotal role in promoting the use of Reference Management Software (RMS) among research scholars and faculty. However, the current support provided by the library, though beneficial, appears to be somewhat limited in scope. The survey responses indicate that many users, especially

research scholars, are aware of RMS tools primarily through informal channels rather than structured library interventions. This suggests that while the library is instrumental in introducing RMS tools, there is considerable room for enhancing its impact.

Available Library Support

The library currently offers basic guidance on RMS tools and may provide occasional workshops or information sessions. However, the frequency and depth of these sessions may not be sufficient to meet the growing needs of the academic community. Many users including researchers and faculty expressed a need for more detailed, hands-on training that covers not only the basics of RMS but also advanced features like collaboration tools, integration with academic databases, and the customization of citation styles.

Potential for Expansion

Comprehensive Training Programs

There is significant potential for the library to expand its services by offering more comprehensive training programs. These could include beginner and advanced workshops, regular drop-in sessions, and one-on-one consultations tailored to the specific needs of different user groups, such as new research scholars versus experienced faculty.

Online Resources

Developing online tutorials, video guides, and providing FAQs on the library's website could strengthen ongoing support for users. This would allow users to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed.

Dedicated RMS Support Staff

Assigning dedicated staff members with expertise in RMS to provide continuous support and troubleshooting could greatly enhance the user experience. These staff members could also gather feedback to continuously improve the library's RMS services.

By expanding its RMS-related services, IIT Gandhinagar library can significantly improve the adoption and effective use of these tools, thereby supporting the academic community in achieving higher levels of research productivity and efficiency.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH EFFICIENCY

While there is an initial learning curve, many respondents felt that the long-term benefits justified the effort. One response noted, "They are worth getting used to as, in the long run, they do improve productivity." This reflects a common sentiment that, although it may take time to adapt, RMS tools ultimately streamline research processes, allowing users to achieve more in less time.

STREAMLINING RESEARCH WORKFLOWS

One of the primary benefits of RMS tools is the automation of citation management. By automatically generating citations in various formats and ensuring consistency across documents, RMS tools save researchers a significant amount of time that would otherwise be spent on manual citation management. This is especially beneficial for large-scale projects, such as dissertations or multi-author papers, where the volume of citations can be substantial.

Reducing Time Spent on Administrative Task *Efficient Organization of References*

RMS tools like Mendeley and Zotero allow researchers to store and organize PDFs, notes, and references in a single, searchable database. This not only reduces the time spent searching for sources but also ensures that all relevant materials are easily accessible during the writing process. The ability to annotate PDFs and attach notes directly to references further enhances the efficiency of the research process.

Improving the Quality Research Output

Enhancing Collaboration

RMS tools that offer collaborative features can significantly improve the quality of research output by facilitating seamless collaboration among co-authors. Shared libraries, group annotations, and real-time updates ensure that all members of a research team are on the same page, reducing the risk of miscommunication and ensuring that all relevant sources are considered. A relevant example of RMS-facilitated collaboration is the Priya *et al.*, (2024). In this research, authors from Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar and National Brain Research Centre used RMS tools to manage references, maintain synchronized resources, and integrate insights efficiently across institutions.

REDUCING ERRORS

By automating the citation process, RMS tools significantly reduce errors associated with manual citation, such as incorrect formatting and missing references. This automation enhances research accuracy and credibility, which are crucial for academic publishing. As Mufid (2014) notes, the use of Reference Management Software (RMS) in academic settings improves the writing process and the quality of scientific work by minimizing citation errors.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the adoption and utilization of Reference Management Software (RMS) among research scholars and faculty at IIT Gandhinagar, focusing on tools like Mendeley, Zotero, and EndNote. The objectives were to assess awareness, usage patterns, and challenges associated with RMS, and to propose strategies for enhancing effective usage. Using survey-based methodology, the findings reveal that while awareness of RMS tools is high, actual adoption varies, with Mendeley as the most popular choice.

An important finding of the study relates to faculty engagement with RMS in instructional settings. The most frequent response among faculty was "I do not use reference management software in classes" (n = 43), indicating a lack of direct integration of these tools into classroom teaching. The second most common response (n = 8) was from those who encourage students to use RMS, even if they do not incorporate it into their teaching practice.

In contrast, research scholars at IIT Gandhinagar overwhelmingly consider the use of RMS to be advisable. As shown in the data, 71 (out of 77) scholars responded "Yes" to the advisability of using RMS, while only 5 indicated "No." This strong consensus points to a widespread understanding among scholars of the value RMS tools offer in managing citations, enhancing research efficiency, and ensuring accuracy in academic writing.

The juxtaposition of these findings highlights a crucial implementation gap. While scholars are generally positive and motivated toward using RMS, faculty engagement lags, particularly in terms of classroom teaching and training. This disconnect signals the need for institutional interventions, such as professional development workshops, peer-led training, and curriculum integration, to bridge the divide and ensure consistency in research and instructional practices.

Ultimately, fostering greater alignment between faculty usage and scholar expectations can significantly enhance the research ecosystem at IIT Gandhinagar. It will also contribute to a more robust academic environment that supports the efficient and ethical use of reference management software across all levels of scholarly activity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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