

Impact of bibliographic managers on the research training of university students: A systematic review

Impacto de los gestores bibliográficos en la formación investigativa de estudiantes universitarios: una revisión sistemática

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Selman Dennis Condeso Camizan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2984-8385>

scondeso@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

Universidad César Vallejo. Lima-Peru

Freddy William Castillo Palacios

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5815-6559>

fcastillo@ucv.edu.pe

Universidad César Vallejo. Lima-Peru

Groover Valenty Villanueva Butrón

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5195-1784>

gvillanuevabu@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

Universidad César Vallejo. Lima-Peru

Abstract

The aim of this systematic review was to analyze the impact of bibliographic managers on the research training of university students, highlighting their relevance in improving the quality and integrity of academic work. Twenty-five studies published between 2015 and 2025, in Spanish and English, were reviewed, selected from high-impact databases such as Scopus, SciELO, Dialnet, Redalyc, PubMed, and institutional repositories. To ensure a rigorous and transparent selection process, the PRISMA methodology was applied. The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies related to the use of bibliographic managers in university-level education and research. The results show that managers such as Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote, and RefWorks are essential tools for organizing, storing, and citing academic sources. However, several studies point to a lack of training and limited adoption by students and teachers, which affects the quality and efficiency of research work. Quantitative and descriptive studies indicate that these tools improve citation accuracy, prevent plagiarism, and strengthen information literacy skills. Comparative studies highlight differences in functionality, ease of use, and platform compatibility, while theoretical reviews emphasize the need to implement institutional policies that promote their systematic use.

Keywords: bibliographic managers, research training, university students.

Resumen

La presente revisión sistemática tuvo como objetivo analizar el impacto de los gestores bibliográficos en la formación investigativa de los estudiantes universitarios, resaltando su relevancia en la mejora de la calidad e integridad del trabajo académico. Se revisaron 25 estudios publicados entre 2015 y 2025, en español e inglés, seleccionados de bases de datos de alto impacto como Scopus, SciELO, Dialnet, Redalyc, PubMed y repositorios institucionales. Para garantizar un proceso de selección riguroso y transparente, se aplicó la metodología PRISMA. Los criterios de inclusión se centraron en estudios revisados por pares relacionados con el uso de gestores bibliográficos en la educación e investigación a nivel universitario. Los resultados evidencian que gestores como Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote y RefWorks son herramientas esenciales para organizar, almacenar y citar fuentes académicas. No obstante, diversos estudios señalan una falta de capacitación y una adopción limitada por parte de estudiantes y docentes, lo cual repercute en la calidad y eficiencia de los trabajos de investigación. Los estudios cuantitativos y descriptivos indican que estas herramientas mejoran la precisión de las citas, previenen el plagio y fortalecen las competencias en alfabetización informacional. Asimismo, los estudios comparativos destacan diferencias en funcionalidad, facilidad de uso y compatibilidad de plataformas, mientras que las revisiones teóricas enfatizan la necesidad de implementar políticas institucionales que promuevan su uso sistemático.

Palabras clave: gestores bibliográficos, formación investigativa, estudiantes universitarios.

Introduction

In the current university context, the development of research papers constitutes a fundamental skill. However, various studies have identified deficiencies in the use of sources and references in universities. For example, Hernández et al. (2019) indicate that 58% of the papers produced by university students contain errors in citations or references, which poses a risk to academic integrity. Similarly, Pinedo and Valles (2021) found that 60% of university students do not use bibliographic managers to make proper citations, which affects the quality and efficiency of research papers and, in many cases, leads to unintentional plagiarism. Along the same lines, Quispe (2020), in a study conducted at Peruvian universities, revealed that only 33.5% of students are proficient in using managers like Mendeley or Zotero, demonstrating a significant bias in knowledge and application of these tools in research training.

The origin of bibliographic managers dates back to the early 1980s, when the first tools were designed to help researchers organize their bibliographic sources more efficiently. Notable among the early programs are Reference Manager, Procite, and EndNote, developed between 1983 and 1984 (Pérez et al., 2020). Subsequently, in the 1990s, the growth of internet access and the use of bibliographic databases marked a milestone in their evolution by facilitating the collection of information and online citation (Izquierdo, 2018).

The preparation of research papers requires a rigorous review of information, as well as the proper management of citations and bibliographic references (Sánchez et al., 2022). These processes not only ensure the accuracy and quality of content but also reflect the ethics of the researcher by acknowledging the contributions of other authors (Yedid, 2016). However, organizing, selecting, and citing academic sources can be a complex process, underscoring the importance of possessing basic knowledge in the area or, alternatively, utilizing specialized technological tools that facilitate these tasks (Quispe-Farfán & Rojas, 2023).

In this regard, bibliographic managers have become essential tools, as the quality of research largely depends on the relevance and reliability of the sources used (Pinedo & Valles, 2021a). Proper information management, understood as a set of processes and techniques aimed at organizing and retrieving relevant data, is a key aspect of scientific research (Arriola & Rosas, 2015). Therefore, researchers require tools that not only allow them to locate information but also to store, organize, and cite it correctly (Sánchez et al., 2022). These rigorous procedures enable more robust and efficient research by providing a broader perspective than a mere definition of variables (Condeso et al., 2025).

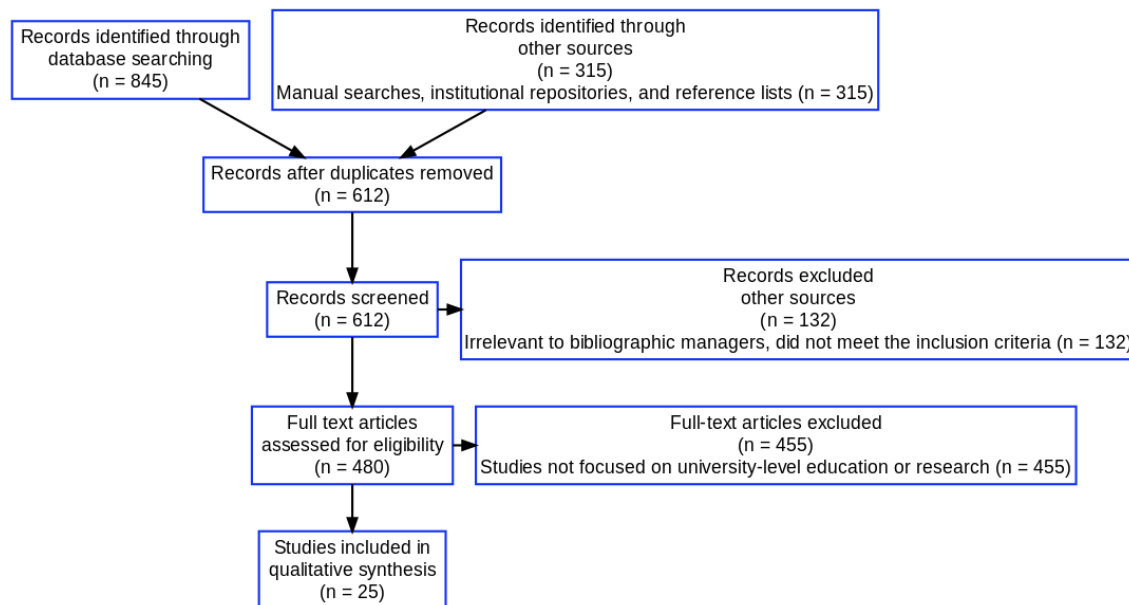
Carreño (2014) classifies bibliographic managers into three categories: classic, web-based, and licensed. The former corresponds to programs like Reference Manager; the latter includes managers like Zotero and Mendeley, which allow information to be stored in the cloud and facilitate remote access; while the third category, such as Bibsonomy, is characterized by sharing and discovering academic content.

In this context, the present article aims to analyze the relevance of bibliographic managers in university research training. It is based on the premise that a lack of knowledge about these technological tools can negatively affect the quality and organization of research papers, impacting students' efficiency in their academic endeavors.

Methodology

This research article corresponds to a systematic review of scientific literature, with an analysis and synthesis of the most relevant results related to bibliographic managers. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method was employed to ensure a more exhaustive and rigorous review (Barrios et al., 2021).

Figure 1
PRISMA flow diagram of the process of identification, selection, and inclusion of the studies analyzed



Note. Content generated from <https://hollyhartman.shinyapps.io/PRISMAFlowDiagram/>

The information search was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO, Dialnet, Redalyc, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories databases, selected for their extensive coverage and recognition in the dissemination of scientific production. The focus was on literature primarily related to the social sciences, education, and technologies applied to the academic field.

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in the selection of studies

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Publications from 2015 to 2025.	• Articles lacking a clear methodological context.
• Studies related to the use of bibliographic managers focused on education and/or research.	• Duplicate articles in the consulted databases.
• Articles published in Spanish or English.	• Studies unrelated to bibliographic managers.
• Peer-reviewed research papers with verifiable access.	• Research focused on non-university educational levels.

Articles published between 2015 and 2025 in Spanish and English were considered, prioritizing those with open access to facilitate review. The search strategy combined keywords in both languages using Boolean operators. The terms used included: bibliographic manager, research studies, bibliographic references, Mendeley, Zotero, citation tools, academic writing, reference manager, and information management. The scope of the search was adjusted to the characteristics of each database using filters for year, language, and document type (scientific articles).

Results and discussion

After applying the PRISMA method, scientific articles were selected from Scopus and SciELO, published in various countries, in educational contexts, within the period 2015-2025. From these studies, the main contributions regarding the impact of bibliographic managers on university education were extracted, with the aim of enhancing the quality of research papers.

Table 2
Analysis of the identified research articles

Authors	Year	Source / Database	Type of study	Country of origin
Castro et al.	2025	<i>Investigación Bibliotecológica</i> (Scopus)	Cross-sectional quantitative study in health sciences students	Mexico
Abad et al.	2024	<i>F1000Research</i> (Scopus)	Survey of university faculty	Colombia, Ecuador, Peru
Guerra et al.	2024	<i>Social Science and Humanities Journal</i>	Experience on collaborative technologies and databases	Peru
Condeso et al.	2025	<i>Revista InveCom</i>	Systematic review on innovation and digitalization in education	Peru
Lima & Martínez	2023	<i>LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades</i>	Evaluation of information source quality	Mexico
Quispe & Rojas	2023	<i>Investigación Bibliotecológica</i> (Scopus)	Survey of students and faculty	Peru
Quispe-Farfán & Rojas	2023	<i>Investigación Bibliotecológica</i> (Scopus)	Survey and analysis of ALFIN training in libraries	Peru
Mercado et al.	2022	<i>Revista Iberoamericana de Educación Superior</i> (Scopus)	Descriptive study on bibliographic managers	Mexico
Sánchez et al.	2022	<i>Dialnet</i>	Descriptive study: bibliographic managers in master's theses	Spain
Sánchez, Corral & Moreno	2022	<i>Dialnet</i>	Support tool in master's theses at UNED	Spain
Ramasamy & Mani	2022	Libro (<i>Muthra Publishers</i>)	Theoretical review on software and bibliographic managers	India
Pinedo & Valles	2021b	<i>Anales de Documentación</i> (Dialnet / Scopus)	Study with university thesis students	Spain
Pinedo & Valles	2021a	<i>Anales de Documentación</i> (Dialnet)	Descriptive study on information management in thesis students	Spain
Roa et al.	2021	<i>e-Ciencias de la Información</i>	Descriptive study on the impact of bibliographic managers	Costa Rica
Rodríguez & López	2021	<i>Revista Cubana de Información en Ciencias de la Salud</i> (SciELO Cuba)	Advanced workshops on using EndNote	Cuba
Rangaswamy & Rajendra	2021	<i>ResearchGate</i>	Researchers' perceptions of Zotero and Mendeley	India
Pérez et al.	2020	<i>Revista Universidad y Sociedad</i> (SciELO Cuba)	Evaluation of usage among university students	Cuba
Quispe	2020	<i>Investigación Bibliotecológica</i> (Scopus)	Descriptive study on the use of managers in ALFIN training	Peru
Ivey & Crum	2018	<i>Journal of the Medical Library Association</i> (PubMed)	Comparative analysis of bibliographic management tools	USA
Izquierdo	2018	<i>Revista Ayer</i>	Theoretical review on digital methodological instruments	Spain
Bhardwaj	2017	<i>Information and Learning Sciences</i> (Emerald)	Comparative analysis of platforms and bibliographic managers	India
Varón	2017	<i>Journals & Authors</i>	Conceptual review of bibliographic managers	Colombia

Orbegoso	2016	<i>HAMUT'AY</i> (Redalyc)	Theoretical analysis of the use and utility of bibliographic managers	Peru
Margolles	2015	<i>NeoScientia</i>	Infographic and dissemination on bibliographic citations	Spain
Navarrete & García	2015	<i>Semantic Scholar</i>	Theoretical review on the importance and advantages of bibliographic managers	Mexico

The analysis of the 25 selected studies reveals a diverse academic production in terms of origin, year, and methodological focus, reflecting the increasing relevance of bibliographic managers in university research training. Most of the works are concentrated between 2015 and 2025, with a significant increase in the last five years, suggesting a recent interest in strengthening the use of these tools in the academic field.

Latin America represents the largest proportion of studies, highlighting countries such as Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, which reflects a regional commitment to integrating bibliographic managers into university research. There is a predominance of quantitative and descriptive studies aimed at identifying the levels of adoption and the impact of managers on students and faculty, although theoretical reviews and comparative analyses are also included, broadening the perspective on their functionality.

The analyzed sources primarily come from indexed databases such as Scopus, SciELO, and PubMed, ensuring the validity and rigor of the findings. Collectively, this evidence confirms that bibliographic managers not only constitute indispensable tools for enhancing academic quality and preventing plagiarism, but also emerge as a key element in strengthening information literacy and the research culture within the university environment.

Table 3

Thematic axes and authors of studies on bibliographic managers

Thematic axes	Authors
1. Use and adoption of bibliographic managers	Quispe & Rojas (2023); Quispe (2020); Mercado et al. (2022); Castro et al. (2025); Abad et al. (2024); Sánchez, Corral & Moreno (2022)
2. Impact on the quality of academic work	Rodríguez & López (2021); Guerra et al. (2024); Roa et al. (2021); Pérez et al. (2020); Varón (2017)
3. Training and educational strategies	Quispe-Farfán & Rojas (2023); Pinedo & Valles (2021b); Pinedo & Valles (2021a); Navarrete & García (2015); Sánchez et al. (2022); Margolles (2015)
4. Comparative evaluation of tools	Ivey & Crum (2018); Bhardwaj (2017); Rangaswamy & Rajendra (2021); Izquierdo (2018)
5. Integration with scientific research	Lima & Martínez (2023); Margolles (2015); Orbegoso (2016); Abad et al. (2024); Quispe (2020)
6. Technological innovation and future trends	Ramasamy & Mani (2022); Guerra et al. (2024); Castro et al. (2025); Condeso et al. (2025)

The identified thematic axes are presented below:

1. Use and adoption of bibliographic managers

The first axis focuses on the level of knowledge and use of tools such as Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote, and RefWorks in university contexts. Quispe and Rojas (2023), Mercado et al. (2022), and Castro et al. (2025) note that while these tools are known, their effective use remains limited due to a lack of training. Abad et al. (2024) complement this perspective by identifying that even in institutions with access to digital resources, faculty members exhibit gaps in their mastery of these tools, which restricts their teaching. Consequently, effective adoption depends not only on availability but also on institutional policies that promote systematic use.

2. Impact on the quality of academic work

This axis demonstrates that the use of bibliographic managers positively influences the organization of sources, proper citation, and reduction of plagiarism. Rodríguez and López (2021) and Pérez et al. (2020) highlight that proficiency in these tools improves the structure of papers, especially among undergraduate students. Guerra et al. (2024) and Roa et al. (2021) add that they promote academic integrity and the establishment of a culture of

good research practices. These findings reinforce the need to incorporate the use of managers into university training programs.

3. Training and educational strategies

Training in the use of bibliographic managers emerges as a recurring factor. Quispe-Farfán and Rojas Lázaro (2023), Navarrete and García (2015), and Pinedo and Valles (2021b) emphasize the importance of workshops and information literacy (ALFIN) programs in libraries and faculties. Sánchez et al. (2022) demonstrate that such training positively impacts the quality of work, especially when it includes practical activities with Zotero and Mendeley. There is a need to strengthen the link between libraries and academic bodies to ensure continuous education.

4. Comparative evaluation of tools

This axis includes studies that analyze the strengths and weaknesses of major bibliographic management tools. Ivey and Crum (2018) and Bhardwaj (2017) compare EndNote, Mendeley, Zotero, and RefWorks, noting differences in citation style compatibility, synchronization, and ease of use. Rangaswamy and Rajendra (2021) highlight that Mendeley and Zotero are preferred for their cost-effectiveness and cross-platform compatibility. This axis allows for the establishment of objective criteria for institutions to select the most appropriate tool.

5. Integration with scientific research

It analyzes how bibliographic managers impact access to quality information and academic productivity. Lima and Martínez (2023) warn that the lack of use limits source verification and rigor. Margolles (2015) and Orbegoso (2016) emphasize that these tools facilitate collaborative work and access to reliable scientific information. Abad et al. (2024) stress that systematic implementation optimizes faculty productivity and strengthens the institutional research culture.

6. Technological innovation and future trends

Finally, this axis addresses emerging trends in bibliographic management. Ramasamy and Mani (2022) highlight the incorporation of automated functionalities and the potential of artificial intelligence in organizing references. Guerra et al. (2024) add that managers are increasingly adapting to collaborative cloud environments, while Castro et al. (2025) emphasize that these innovations respond to the demands of virtual and hybrid education. The future is projected to be marked by automation, integration with high-impact databases, and support for more robust collaborative environments.

Discussion

The results obtained from this systematic review highlight the importance of bibliographic competencies as essential tools for improving the quality of education, strengthening research skills, and fostering an ethical culture in citation (Pérez et al., 2020; Rodríguez & López, 2021). Most studies identify Zotero and Mendeley as the most commonly used managers; however, deficiencies in their proper use by students and faculty are also reported (Quispe & Rojas, 2023; Castro et al., 2025; Abad et al., 2024).

One of the main gaps highlighted by the authors is access to these tools. While they are recognized as high-value resources, there remains a lack of adequate training in the university sector (Quispe-Farfán & Rojas Lázaro, 2023; Castro et al., 2025; Guerra et al., 2024). This situation is exacerbated by the weak integration of these competencies into curricula and the resistance of some faculty members to accept new methods, maintaining traditional knowledge management practices (Abad et al., 2024).

From a technical perspective, studies such as those by Ivey and Crum (2018) and Rangaswamy and Rajendra (2021) compare the strengths and limitations of different versions, highlighting aspects such as automation, citation syntax, and cross-platform organization. However, Bhardwaj (2017) warns of the overall performance inadequacies of these platforms, noting that the most popular ones do not achieve optimal levels of functionality and use, representing an area for improvement for both developers and users.

Additionally, various investigations demonstrate that bibliographic managers can help reduce academic plagiarism, improve information organization, and facilitate collaboration in research (Margolles, 2015; Roa et al., 2021; Guerra et al., 2024). Nonetheless, these benefits depend on the users' level of knowledge and the professional support that enables the development of digital skills.

While there is consensus regarding the capacity of bibliographic managers to enhance the quality of academic work, a gap is observed between the perception of their benefits and their practical application in the

university context. This finding confirms the need to implement continuous training programs, documentation plans, and a greater institutional commitment to ensure their effective use.

Finally, based on the reviewed studies, four key dimensions are highlighted for analyzing and understanding the management of bibliographic managers in universities: training, functionality, ethical impact, and academic appropriation and use.

Conclusions

This systematic review demonstrated that bibliographic managers are fundamental tools for strengthening the research training of university students. Furthermore, studies agree that their proper use contributes to improved organization of sources, quality of academic work, and correct citation of references, fostering a culture of academic integrity.

From the literature review, four dimensions directly related to the impact of bibliographic managers were identified: training in their use, functionality, ethical impact, and academic appropriation. The educational dimension underscores the urgent need for workshops and training that teach students and faculty how to effectively use these tools. The technical-functional dimension highlights the differences between platforms such as Zotero and Mendeley, considering factors like automation, compatibility, and usability. Regarding ethical aspects, it is recognized that these tools not only simplify the citation process but also help prevent plagiarism and promote academic honesty. Finally, the academic appropriation dimension reveals a gap between the theoretical knowledge of administrators and its practical application, reflecting an institutional weakness in the real integration of these tools into training processes.

Therefore, it is concluded that the real benefit of bibliographic managers depends not only on their availability but also on adequate training, pedagogical endorsement, and institutional recognition. In this regard, universities are encouraged to develop information literacy strategies that integrate the use of these tools from the earliest stages of academic training. Moreover, the dimensions identified in this study provide a useful theoretical basis for future research, such as doctoral theses or educational interventions aimed at improving research skill development through the effective use of bibliographic managers.

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