POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF USING ENDNOTE IN RESEARCH STUDIES

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Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have increased the number of digital technologies used to attend to digital learning, teaching, and research needs. The current Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) necessitates that HEIs employ digital technologies such as Endnote to aid students struggling with referencing in academic writing across study levels. This paper draws from a qualitative case study of five postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote in research. The five participants were purposively selected for the study as they had used Endnote as a reference management software for their masters research projects. Data were generated using reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis and the Persona-Tech analytical framework were used to analyse and interpret data. The findings of the study revealed that students' experiences of using Endnote ranged from professional learning, to social learning from friends to personal learning. We conclude that strong professional and social learning enable students to have good and positive experiences of using Endnote in their studies and are able to advance their referencing skills. The study recommends that students familiarise themselves with Endnote before or during the early stages of their studies so that they can seek relevant interventions to aid their digital referencing skills.

Keywords: Endnote, Referencing, Personalisation, Socialisation, Professionalisation

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the art of referencing has undergone significant technical advancements, thereby exerting a profound influence on the practice of academic writing. Students have to learn the proper way of referencing in order to write in academically acceptable ways, consistent with a specific style of referencing. Students experience this process in various ways. On the one hand, there are students who find that the reference learning process delays their studies and decide not to learn it explicitly. Thus, they learn it as they write their academic papers (social learning – trial-and-error method). This practice is socialisation learning (Sokhulu, 2021b). As a result of the socialisation learning, the students subconsciously develop habits of ignoring technical errors of citation/ referring and references in their theses or dissertations (Khoza, 2021). This practice frustrates supervisors, reviewers, and other academic stakeholders. When they are frustrated, they may reject/fail the students' theses/ dissertations/ publications because of the technical errors. On the other hand, some students pay attention to all the referencing rules before they engage in their studies so that they can be able to subconsciously apply them even while consciously concentrating on the content of their writing. In other words, such students attend formal training on reference management, to professionally educate themselves on software such as Endnote, to reference according to the required rules.

Higher education institutions have implemented various forms of reference management software, such as EndNote, in response to the imperative to address technical errors in academic writing (Bramer, 2018). Endnote is a Reference Management Software (RMS) that has been progressively developed since 1989 by various

stakeholders, including the recent organisation, Clarivate Analytics (Hupe, 2019). Endnote is one of the many software digital technologies used for conducting online literature searches and keeping track of bibliographies (Bramer & Bain, 2017; Bramer, 2018; Meade et al, 2024). Other reference management software include Mendeley, ReadCube Papers, RefWorks, BibTex, and Zotero (Basak, 2015; Kratochvíl, 2017). However, Endnote is the most popular referencing software enabling over fifty thousand reference storage and management (Agrawal & Rasouli, 2019; Clarivate-Analytics, 2019). Clarivate-Analytics (2019) notes that Endnote has over six thousand referencing styles and has the distinctive advantage of allowing users to cite while they write their academic work (Hupe, 2019). Similarly, Eapen (2006) and Bramer and Bain (2017) observe that the software keeps track of bibliographies in a library file according to different referencing styles. It is for such features that the software has been accredited and employed by many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally.

Siegler and Simboli (2002); and Meade et al (2024) note that Endnote allows researchers to create a library for all cited academic sources such as books, journals, web pages, and other publications. Academics and students use Endnote in their studies to keep track of the academic sources used for their research projects. In addition, software digital technologies such as Endnote are introduced to help students who are struggling with academic referencing and those who wish to manage their bibliographies while writing up their research work (Hupe, 2019). This study explores postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote in their research projects. The article argues that students use Endnote as informed by their socialisation, professionalisation, and personalisation experiences. Each of these experiences is determined by their research and reference needs. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

i.   What are postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote for referencing their dissertations and theses?

ii.   What informs postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote referencing in specific ways?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theorising Endnote experiences

Mpungose and Khoza (2022) and Khoza (2021) opine that students can use digital technologies to address discipline, societal, and personal experiences. Digital technologies can be used to attend to specialised, shared and self-experiences (Bramer & Bain, 2017). Discipline and specialised experiences refer to the use of digital technologies for formal learning (Khoza, 2014; Mpungose, 2020; Ngubane-Mokiwa & Khoza, 2021; Sokhulu, 2021a), whereas, societal and shared experiences relate to using digital technologies through informal learning. Personal and self-experiences speak to the use of digital technologies as informed by formal and informal learning (Bramer & Bain, 2017). In this study, informal experience is theorised as socialisation, formal as professionalisation, and self as personalisation. This theorisation of experiences indicates the ongoing process of using digital technologies in the 21st-century characterised by digitalised practices.

In the context of this study, professionalisation refers to the use of Endnote driven by formal instructions and prescribed rules (Mpungose & Khoza, 2021; Sokhulu, 2021b). Socialisation refers to social engagements that lead to informal learning of the Endnote software (Khoza, 2016). Similarly, Sokhulu (2021b); Khoza and Biyela (2020); Underwood (2016) assert that socialisation experiences involve informal learning that attends to students' social needs (Bramer, 2018). In other words, when students learn the use of Endnote informally from their social groups, it is categorised as a socialisation experience (Amory, 2014). Personalisation is the combination of professionalisation and socialisation experiences to suit students' individual research needs. With regards to the theorised experiences above, studies show that there has been minimal research at the intersection of professionalisation, socialisation and personalisation experiences, particularly with the use of Endnote by postgraduate students (Biesta, 2015; Mpungose & Khoza, 2021; Schiro, 2013; Sokhulu, 2021b).

Postgraduate students' experiences with Endnote: literature findings

Academic writing is a process that involves evidence-based writing, requiring academics and students to consult research-related materials to produce meaningful scholarly work, such as essays, articles, books and dissertations. This process involves developing content that addresses research topics' in-text citations, and creates reference lists (bibliographies) of all academic sources consulted in the research-based papers. Referencing can be a time-consuming task when done manually, as it requires individually organising each citation and ensuring accurate source presentation within a Microsoft Word Document (Smith & Baker, 2007). However, the advent of digital technologies has facilitated the development of Reference Management Software (RMS), such as EndNote, with the primary goal of enhancing referencing processes, saving time, and increasing research productivity (Idris et al., 2019; Smith & Baker, 2007; Sulistyowati & Nataliawati, 2023). EndNote is specifically designed as a digital tool offering its users the ability to securely store citations in a digital library, and providing

an efficient means of managing references. The efficacy of EndNote has been demonstrated in studies by Khoza (2015); Harrison et al. (2005), where students praised the software for effectively organising their reference lists, while simultaneously allowing them to progress with their academic writing. This implies that the students that participated in these studies had the capability to accurately apply Endnote instructions, resulting in an enhanced professional experience with the software, thereby facilitating the process of professionalisation.

Endnote, however, is a software that has certain drawbacks. From a survey conducted by Conrad et al. (2015), comprising 344 postgraduate students across North America, Asia, Middle East, and Europe, it emerged that postgraduate students complained about the time-consuming process of learning to use Endnote. This process involved creating a library and editing it to suit different referencing styles. In another systematic review study by Kratochvíl (2017), Endnote was faulted for leaving out specific details such as page numbers, and for generating URLs when storing references in the software's library (Bramer & Bain, 2017). However, it is worth noting that Endnote enables its users to edit information loaded in the digital library. Therefore, the users in this study may have been victims of a socialisation experience ignorant of the specific instructions and affordances of the software, and consequently blaming it for malfunctions (Makumane, 2021). In this case, Endnote was blamed for making referencing mistakes. These findings and implications suggest the need to explore experiences of using Endnote, to add to existing literature data, using the lens of personalisation, socialisation and professionalisation experiences.

Studies such as Yanli (2013); Smith and Baker (2007) and Idris et al. (2019) still claim that Endnote improves postgraduate students' literature searches and overall writing experience, as the software reduces the process of importing references from websites to its library. Mohammed and Haliru (2019) conducted a study to test this claim by investigating postgraduate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Endnote in improving literature search and academic writing. The findings showed that students perceived Endnote as useful in academic writing and referencing, provided sufficient formal training was offered to them by the school's librarian. Basak (2015) also explored academic perceptions of the ease and usefulness of the Endnote software. The study's findings concurred with that of (Mohammed & Haliru, 2019) as participants perceived Endnote to be useful in reference management given that relevant professional support was provided. Several other studies have revealed similar findings, where participants attest to the usefulness and ease of Endnote use only when relevant professional training is organised for them (Brahmi & Gall, 2006; Khoza, 2023; Motlhake & Bopape, 2021; Nitsos et al., 2021; Ollé & Borrego, 2010; Speare, 2018). These findings suggest that training Endnote users about reference management is pivotal for ensuring successful Endnote implementation, and research productivity (Basak, 2015). Formal training is a characteristic of the professionalisation experience (Ekeroma et al., 2015). Thus, research suggests that professionalisation accounts for the effectiveness of Endnote use.

The literature above provides useful insights on the use of Endnote across international, regional, and local contexts through the theoretical underpinnings of socialisation and professionalisation experiences. However, the research does not take into account students' personalisation experiences of using Endnote. Rather, the reviewed literature considers other phenomena when investigating Endnote use. For example, Speare (2018) explored the usage and non-usage of Endnote by postgraduate students in a Canadian university, within professionalisation parameters. Motlhake and Bopape (2021) report on factors influencing the use of Endnote by postgraduate students at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. The phenomenon explored in their study was factors that accounted for professionalisation and socialisation influences (Motlhake & Bopape, 2021). This current study is different because it explores postgraduate students' use of Endnote using professionalisation, socialisation, and personalisation experiences. In reviewing the studies above, it was apparent that the majority employed survey research methodologies. This approach produces numerical data which does not generate in-depth findings to create meaning. This current study endeavours to contribute to the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of postgraduate students' experiences with Endnote through the Persona-Tech analytical framework.

Persona-Tech Analytical Framework (PTAF)

In this paper we use Sokhulu (2021a) Persona-Tech Analytical framework (PTAF) to frame the study. Through the PTAF, Sokhulu (2021b) proposes that people use digital technologies to inform their professionalisation, socialisation, and personalisation experiences. The PTAF illustrates three dimensions of experiences that can be encountered by technology users when utilising various software resources. The PTAF further shows the interdependence of the socialisation and professionalisation dimension to make up a profound personalisation experience driven by students' individual research needs. In this study, the PTAF allowed us to analyse and understand postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote aligned to their professionalisation, socialisation and personalisation experiences. Figure 1 provides a visual presentation of the PTAF.
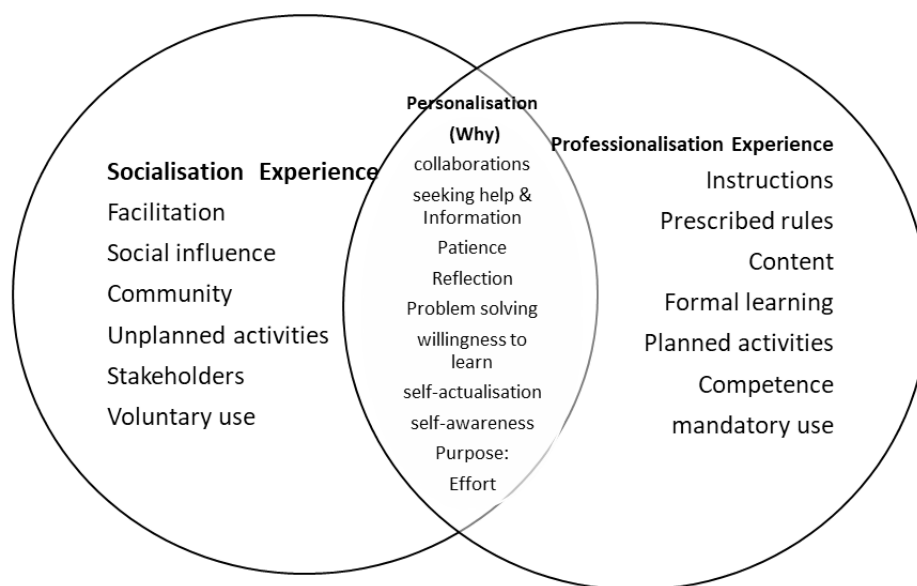
Figure 1. Persona-Tech analytical framework adapted from Sokhulu (2021b)

In this study, personalisation is central to the analysis of postgraduate students' experiences of using Endnote in research as informed by either professionalisation or socialisation processes. Therefore, the PTAF suggests that postgraduate students can use both the strengths of professionalisation and socialisation to benefit from the use of Endnote and form a unique personalisation experience driven by internal intelligence or motivation. The strength of socialisation and professionalisation experience includes using either formal or informal learning to inform the use of Endnote so that postgraduate students can self-actualise. Self-actualisation implies that in order for postgraduate students to use Endnote successfully in their studies, they need to employ specific values to their personalisation identities. Such values include being patient and having the willingness to learn, understanding the purpose and functions of Endnote, being self-aware of competencies and putting in the effort, seeking collaborations from others and solving problems (Sokhulu, 2021b). Such values can stem from socialisation or professionalisation processes and can complement each other to create a personalisation experience that attends to students' individual research needs.

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

This article employed a qualitative case study methodology under the interpretive paradigm philosophical lens (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The interpretive paradigm was selected for this study as it allowed us to construct deeper meaning derived from the postgrad students' experiences of using digital technologies, such as Endnote. Thus, reflective journals and semi-structured interviews were used to generate thick and descriptive data for analysis. Through qualitative case study methodology, the findings of this study were interpreted descriptively (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to foster meaning and understanding.

Participants profiles

Participants were purposively selected to participate in this study, reflecting on their experiences of using Endnote for referencing their Masters research studies. Bernard (2017) and Yin (2011) posit that the purposive selection of participants involves deliberately identifying participants who will provide rich experiences that address a study's research objectives. The identified potential participants of the study were asked if they used Endnote in their Masters studies. Only those who indicated using Endnote in their research were included in the study. The participants studied at the School of Education of a particular university in South Africa, and they used digital technologies to conduct research across all study disciplines. Table 1 below indicates participants' profiles including their discipline specialisation and their progress based on the stage of research, at the time when this study was done. Pseudonyms such as Jessie, Shawn, Nkosi, Akinola and Sinowethu were used to represent the participants' identities thus hiding their real names and gender to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Also, ethical approval was granted by the university's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC).

Table 1: participants' profiles

Participant's pseudonym	Study Discipline	Stage in Masters Research
1. Jessie	History Education Studies	Submitted, waiting for results
2. Shawn	Science and Technology Education Studies	Submitted, waiting for results
3. Nkosi	Gender Education Studies	Finalising dissertation
4. Akinola	Curriculum Studies	Finalising dissertation
5. Sinowethu	Social Science Education	Generating data

Data generation and analysis

Data were generated using reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. Bashan and Holsblat (2017) postulate that reflective journaling is a research method that allows participants to narrate their lived experiences in a document for further analysis by the researcher. Creswell (2014) and Whiting (2008) point out that semi-structured interviews enable researchers to generate thick and descriptive data that can help with understanding participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews contain open-ended questions that allow participants to respond freely thus providing great details about their experiences (Mathers et al., 1998). Participants were given two weeks to journal their experiences of using Endnote in research. Upon submitting their journals, they were interviewed on their experiences with using Endnote for referencing. Telephonic semi-structured interviews were conducted in keeping with social distancing protocols, as data were generated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both reflective journals and semi-structured interviews provided the researchers with descriptive data for analysis.

Data from the semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to create themes for analysis. The thematic analysis process involved identifying patterns within the data and presenting them as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). This thematic analysis allows for cohesive categorisation of findings, which makes it easier for the reader to follow and understand (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thus, the data findings of this study were analysed using thematic analysis and the Persona-Tech analytical framework.

Trustworthiness and authenticity

This study adhered to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to ensure trustworthy and authentic findings. For credibility, participants were given access to the interview recordings and transcriptions to verify their accuracy. Adhering to transferability, methodologies of how the study was conducted and participants' experiences were clearly outlined. For dependability, participants' direct verbatim utterances were used for analysis. For confirmability, the study makes cross references to other studies' findings as a way of confirming our findings. Again, at the point when the participants verified the interview transcripts, it was another form of allowing for confirmation of the captured findings.

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from the data findings which were based on the categories of the Persona-Tech analytical framework. The first theme discussed below refers to the experience of instructional use and formal learning of Endnote which results in a professionalisation experience.

The experience of receiving instructions and formal learning of Endnote

Participants under this theme expressed their thoughts and experiences about using Endnote as a result of receiving mandatory instruction from their supervisors, who are professional stakeholders in their research community. Jessie shared the following:

I remember that my supervisor instructed me to use Endnote. So, I went to the library assistant, and he asked if I know this Endnote. I told him I don't know anything about Endnote, and he asked me if I have been to any

Endnote training sessions, and my answer was "no". The library assistant gave me a quiz with questions about where to find Endnote. I told him I don't know anything about Endnote and he showed Endnote on the Microsoft Word document. Also, I basically started to use Endnote when I was about to submit my thesis.

From the data excerpt above it seems that Jessie lacked prior knowledge of the existence of Endnote prior to receiving instructions from the supervisor. This lack of awareness led her to use Endnote, particularly towards submitting her dissertation for examination. Jessie used Endnote in her study since she was following her supervisor's formal instructions. She also sought professional assistance from a librarian to form a unique personalisation experience that enabled her to collaborate with relevant people in using the software productively in her study. Seeking assistance from the library assistance alludes to the formal learning that she had to undergo in order to gain competence in using Endnote effectively when citing references in her study.

Another participant, Shawn, discussed his instructional experience with Endnote, which he was required to do so by his supervisor. In the excerpt below, Shawn shares how he was initially confused with following his supervisor's formal instructions. However, through other professionalisation influences, Shawn eventually mastered the use of Endnote to benefit their study referencing needs.

Shawn said: *My supervisor said to me, [that] using Endnote for his students is compulsory so I took it like that. He used to say, "this Endnote is not supposed to be like this, I told you to do this and that" which was confusing to me. So, I first learnt to use Endnote from my supervisor for a few days and then he said I must go to the library to look for an assistant. The library assistant helped me a lot on Endnote. He taught me how to extract documents from the internet using Endnote. He also taught me how to reference and gave me a document about APA referencing just to go and read. So, my skills were then improved from there. So, with regards to citing, Endnote made things very easy.*

Similar to Jessie's experience, Shawn received instruction from their supervisor to use Endnote. In other words, Shawn's use of Endnote in his study was a mandatory instruction from their supervisor. These findings suggest that both participants' supervisors formally introduced them to Endnote, which indicates a professionalisation experience. However, at first, Shawn did not understand how the software operated because his supervisor merely explained the functions and operations of Endnote. Certainly, Shawn's supervisor provided him with the instruction to use Endnote but without enough guidance on how to use the software for referencing purposes. Shawn was also confused by the Endnote rules at first, based on his supervisor's instructions. According to Meho and Yang (2007), when users misunderstand Endnote when citing, the software produces in-text reference problems. Like Jessie, Shawn had to form collaborations with others to aid in their understanding of the Endnote software. The data generated from these two participants' experiences concur with literature findings that formal training and collaborations enhance Endnote users' competence in correct referencing (Basak, 2015; Bugyei et al., 2019; Khoza, 2023; Motlhake & Bopape, 2021; Ollé & Borrego, 2010).

Moreover, when Shawn was provided with professional support, he internalised Endnote's use, and the software became effective for their referencing. When an Endnote user gains proficiency, it leads to a productive process of citing whilst writing (Siegler & Simboli, 2002; Yanli, 2013). Thus, Shawn's confidence in using Endnote grew with the help of important stakeholders, such as the library assistant. It can be argued that the instructional experience of using Endnote propelled Shawn to put an effort into learning how to use the software effectively in their writing.

Akinola also shared that she had to formally learn how to use Endnote in her study through library professional services offered by the staff. In her experience, she particularly alludes on the formal Endnote training she received by attending "Endnote classes". She said: *Endnote is a new technology for me in my postgraduate master's study. I had to go to the library staff for them to show me how to use it, for example, how to create an Endnote library. So, somewhere somehow along the way, I was challenged because Endnote would stop working when my laptop needed an update and that was challenging for me. However, our supervisor also helped us a lot, he is the one who referred us to library staff, and we went there and had a class where they taught us about Endnote.*

It is also interesting to note that thus far, all three participants sought assistance from library staff, regardless of whether the use of Endnote was optional or instructional. This observation indicates that students can receive support in utilising Endnote for their research studies. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that despite Akinola's

acknowledgment of the importance of Endnote and the provision of formal support, it was not a smooth learning process; they encountered difficulties when applying it in their writing, especially Jessie and Akinola.

The experience of social influence in adopting Endnote for research

This theme emerged from three participants' responses on their social influences surrounding the adoption of Endnote in their research studies. Participants under this theme attested to being influenced by people in their social communities to use, not use or discontinue using Endnote in their studies.

Akinola commented: *Somewhere along the way, Endnote would become challenging and stop working when my laptop needed an update. I felt very frustrated using Endnote and unfortunately, I didn't know how to use it. So, I used the manual way of referencing which is far better with the aid of Google scholar I was talking to my colleague also the other day and she was saying that Endnote is frustrating, and she just preferred to use the manual way of referencing.*

It is interesting to note that Akinola opted for manual referencing as an alternative to utilising Endnote. Additionally, it appears that Akinola may have been influenced by her socialisation community to discontinue using Endnote due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of its functionalities. These findings align with the argument put forth by Campellone et al. (2016), that social influences can be used by students to inform their decisions on how to conduct their studies. It also appears that the formal learning through the library training did not help Akinola sustain the use of Endnote in her study, as she still chose to stop using it. As a personalisation experience, Akinola relied on both socialisation and professionalisation experiences to inform her decision to use Endnote in her study. However, the social influences were more pertinent in informing her decision not to use Endnote. Nonetheless, Akinola showed great self-awareness when she stopped using Endnote, as she noted that manual referencing worked well for her study.

For Jessie, social influence aided positively in her use of Endnote in her study as the assistance she received from her friend enhanced her expertise in using Endnote for referencing. Jessie said: *Most of the time I am always with my friend, and I ask her, she happens to know a lot about digital technologies. When I forgot how to use Endnote, I asked my friend and she helped me.* In this instance, Jessie demonstrated proactive behaviour and agency by actively seeking assistance from both library services and friends. This action evinces a strong desire to understand the software in order to effectively manage their research referencing. Moreover, from the analysis of Jesssie's experience, she drew from the strengths of both professionalisation and socialisation experiences to try and understand the use of Endnote (Mpungose & Khoza, 2022). This is evident because Jessie received formal Endnote training from a library assistant (professionalisation). As a socialisation experience, Jessie sought guidance from a friend which accounts for informal learning. In accordance with the PTAF, Jessie combined socialisation and professionalisation experiences to learn about Endnote. Therefore, it can be argued that professionalisation and socialisation experiences were influential in Jessie's learning about Endnote.

In the case of Sinowethu, social influence failed in his experience to master the use of Endnote for his study. In the process he discovered that he learnt best through professionalisation, which helped him master the use of Endnote after losing reference list in the past. Sinowethu asserted:

I once heard about Endnote for referencing from peers after losing my references and I asked one of them how it worked, they tried to show me, but I still couldn't understand. Then I went to one of the lecturers who did very well in showing me how it worked going forward. So, I use Endnote for referencing. It was a simple thing; it was just explained by someone who was not sure but after my lecturer explained it to me, I was clear in terms of how Endnote works.

For Sinowethu, his experience further emphasises the essence of formal learning which is required to understand the operation of the Endnote software. Additionally, the findings reveal that to some extent the peer (social) group may lack professional expertise that is needed for one to fully understand Endnote referencing. Moreover, losing his reference list was the main rationale for employing Endnote for his study. The loss contributed to seeking an alternative, such as using Endnote for referencing management. Sinowethu also showed a willingness to learn as he approached various stakeholders to help him understand Endnote. Moreover, exposure to both socialisation and professionalisation experiences enabled Sinowethu to self-actualise and find the best way to learn about Endnote, which was a good experience for him and benefitted his study. Such

combination of socialisation and professionalisation emphasises the essence of using internal intelligence to navigate personalisation experience, which in turn, addresses individual study needs.

The experience of using personal Effort

The theme of effort includes the experience of one participant who displayed effort in trying to learn the functions of endnote by himself through the trial and error method. Nkosi shared: *I first learnt how to use Endnote on my own and then I faulted a bit then someone [a friend] also taught me about Endnote. Now, because I'm in the middle stage of my research I cannot use it, I find it difficult to use it but if I had encountered it at the beginning of my research, I would have grasped its use and learnt it then use it in my research. So, I almost succeeded in teaching myself how to use Endnote. I understand how Endnote works and it does make sense but I'm like "not now".*

Nkosi demonstrated his autonomy as a student by taking the initiative to learn the utilisation of Endnote on his own. However, his experience, shows that his individual efforts were insufficient due to a lack of professional expertise in Endnote referencing. In addition, his lack of confidence in using Endnote stemmed from the fact that he had not received any formal training or instruction on how to use the software. Moreover, both Nkosi and Akinola exemplify that when Endnote usage is optional, it becomes more convenient to discontinue its use. This is unlike participants Jessie and Shawn who were instructed to employ Endnote in their studies and consequently explored alternative avenues to ensure their proficient mastery of the software. Again, narrowing down the analysis to Nkosi's individual experience, another influential factor to Nkosi stopping using Endnote is that he depended on socialisation for learning how to use the software (learning on their own and getting assistance from a friend).

Conclusions

This study employed a comprehensive approach, utilising both literature review and empirical findings, to establish the experiences of students who used Endnote as a Reference Management System (RMS) in their research studies. The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of Masters students and gain insights regarding their experiences in the use of Endnote. The findings of the study revealed that participants experienced the use of Endnote based on instructional use, formal learning, social influences and personal experimental efforts which informed their professionalisation, socialisation and personalisation experiences. The findings also showed that participants who embraced Endnote based on social influences possessed the autonomy to either continue or discontinue its utilisation. However, those participants whose experience of using Endnote emanated from official instructions felt obliged to seek further guidance, hence they received support from their socialisation and professionalisation networks which facilitated their proficiency in its application. It was observed that participants who experienced strong professional and social learning performed well using Endnote in their studies and were able to advance their referencing skills. The analysis of these findings was conducted through the prism of the PTAF which is an analytical framework we used to shed light on the dynamic interplay between personalisation, socialisation, and professionalisation experiences. Through this theoretical lens, we revealed how participants engaged in collaborative efforts with individuals from their social and professional circles and created unique personalisation experiences for themselves. This experience allowed them to confront challenges associated with Endnote, by capitalising on the acquired competencies from both social and professional learning processes. In essence, this study reveals the pivotal relationship between individual agency, communal support, and skill acquisition in the context of Endnote utilisation among students. It stresses the essential role of socialisation and professionalisation experiences in shaping personalised approaches to RMS adoption, thereby contributing to the advancement of referencing skills in the higher education academic space.

Recommendations

This study recommends that students familiarise themselves with RMS software such as Endnote prior to or during the early stages of their studies so that they can seek relevant interventions to aid their digital referencing skills. The study also recommends that undergraduate studies introduce the use of at least one RMS to students to familiarise them with such software and its functions. Moreover, establishing policies that regulate the use of RMS for research purposes will also be beneficial for HEIs that utilise the software on a mandatory basis.

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