



# Higher Educational Transformation and Institutional Policies in the use of Bibliography for Peer Review Journals

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## ABSTRACT

The use of bibliographies in academic research and peer-reviewed journals has been criticised due to evolving higher education dynamics. Critics highlight that bibliographies are often manipulated to exclude or favour certain works, resulting in citation cartels where authors and journals artificially inflate citations. Additionally, institutional policies can be exploited for personal or political gains. Despite these issues, the importance of bibliographies in showcasing the quality and rigour of academic work remains. This study, through a systematic literature review using a deductive thematic synthesis approach, examines the impact of higher educational transformation and institutional policies on bibliography use in peer-reviewed journals. The findings indicate that citation practices significantly influence the social dynamics of academic culture and interdisciplinary collaboration. However, the influence of institutional policies and ideologies on bibliography usage raises concerns about research quality and integrity, particularly regarding the promotion of specific research agendas. To address these challenges, policymakers should prioritise research quality over citation metrics, promoting transparency and accountability in research evaluation. This approach would enable academics to use diverse sources and not limit themselves to a few. Additionally, Higher Education Institutions need to consider researchers' strategic behaviours and use bibliometric methods to inform, rather than dictate academic progression decisions. This study contributes to ongoing debates by proposing alternative methods to safeguard the integrity of bibliographies and ensure rigorous academic research.

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have undergone a significant transformation in recent years, as technology has revolutionised the way that students and faculty members engage with academic content. One area of particular interest is the use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals, which have long been considered a key indicator of scholarly rigour and credibility. However, the role of bibliographies in academic research and publishing has been subjected to institutional policies that impact their use and

value.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the use of bibliographies as a criterion for evaluating the quality of research contributes to the development of citation cartels, where authors and journals collaborate to artificially inflate their citation counts.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of these challenges, many HEIs have begun to explore alternative forms of peer review and evaluation that prioritise open access, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement.<sup>3</sup> These efforts have included the development of new evaluation metrics that consider a broader range of research outputs including databases, data sources, software code, citation metrics and multimedia content.<sup>4</sup> HEIs have also involved the use of new technologies and platforms that enable more collaborative and transparent review processes, such as open peer review, post-publication peer review and Mendeley.<sup>5</sup> Despite these advances, the operations of the citation cartels to either inflate citations or politically manipulate institutional policies for their benefit are still growing.<sup>6</sup> Since bibliographies are integral to academic research and publishing, it is important to explore alternative approaches to protect their value. Therefore, HEIs must explore new ways of evaluating research and research outputs without being constrained by the institutional policies and citation cartels that have compromised the values of bibliographies.

A significant concern with bibliographies is the growing pressure on academics to publish in top-tier journals, which often favour specific research methods and processes. This emphasis narrows the range of topics and methodologies, limiting the diversity of perspectives in academic publishing. Peer-reviewed journals, which play a critical role in disseminating research findings, rely on experts to evaluate submitted papers—a process that can take weeks or months to ensure high-quality, accurate, and reliable work. Bibliographies are essential in this system, allowing authors to cite relevant sources and demonstrate the credibility of their research. However, a few influential academics, often serving as reviewers, have compromised this process by acting as gatekeepers for these journals.<sup>7</sup> This can lead to unethical practices like Reference List Manipulation (RLM), where certain authors are cited more frequently to artificially boost the visibility of their research.<sup>8</sup> Such manipulation distorts the objectivity of academic publishing and weakens the integrity of bibliographies.

The use of bibliographies and bibliometric tools in higher education transformation presents further challenges, particularly regarding fairness, exclusivity, and bias.<sup>9</sup> Standard indexes often exclude certain materials based on format, subject matter, or geographic coverage, making them ineffective for evaluating creative works or reflecting local scholarly practices. Moreover, the increasing reliance on citation metrics for academic hiring and promotion exacerbates these issues, as these metrics often prioritise quantity over quality.<sup>10</sup> Researchers working in large teams may show higher impact metrics, but these do not accurately reflect individual contributions.<sup>11</sup> The growing dependence on citation metrics can pressure academics to inflate citations through self-citation or manipulation of the review process, further distorting scientific behaviour. While the reliance on bibliometric approaches for recruitment and

<sup>1</sup> Aksnes, Dag W., Liv Langfeldt, and Paul Wouters. "Citations, citation indicators, and research quality: An overview of basic concepts and theories." *Sage Open* 9, no. 1 (2019): 2158244019829575.

<sup>2</sup> Dag W. Aksnes, Liv Langfeldt, and Paul Wouters, "Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories," *Sage Open* 9, no. 1 (January 7, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019829575>.

<sup>3</sup> Hiram E. Fitzgerald et al., "The Centrality of Engagement in Higher Education," in *Building the Field of Higher Education Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 220–28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003443353-12a>.

<sup>4</sup> Raminta Pranckutė, "Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus: The Titans of Bibliographic Information in Today's Academic World," *Publications* 9, no. 1 (March 12, 2021): 12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications9010012>.

<sup>5</sup> Aksnes, Langfeldt, and Wouters, "Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories."

<sup>6</sup> Bertrand Malsch and Sophie Tessier, "Journal Ranking Effects on Junior Academics: Identity Fragmentation and Politicization," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 26 (February 2015): 84–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2014.02.006>.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander W Levis et al., "Comparison of Self-Citation by Peer Reviewers in a Journal with Single-Blind Peer Review versus a Journal with Open Peer Review," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 79, no. 6 (2015): 561–65.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan D. Wren and Constantin Georgescu, "Detecting Anomalous Referencing Patterns in PubMed Papers Suggestive of Author-Centric Reference List Manipulation," *Scientometrics* 127, no. 10 (October 8, 2022): 5753–71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04503-6>.

<sup>9</sup> M. Kivimaki et al., "Don't Let the Truth Get in the Way of a Good Story: An Illustration of Citation Bias in Epidemiologic Research," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 180, no. 4 (August 15, 2014): 446–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwu164>.

<sup>10</sup> Marco Seeber et al., "Self-Citations as Strategic Response to the Use of Metrics for Career Decisions," *Research Policy* 48, no. 2 (March 2019): 478–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.12.004>.

<sup>11</sup> Björn Brembs, Katherine Button, and Marcus Munafò, "Deep Impact: Unintended Consequences of Journal Rank," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2013.00291>.

promotion is unlikely to diminish soon, these practices highlight the need to explore alternative evaluation methods to maintain academic integrity.

In terms of academic research and publishing, the transformation of higher education, according to Burnes,<sup>12</sup> would require a fundamental shift in the way that we think about scholarly communication and the role of academic research in society. As a result, higher education institutions are undergoing significant transformation processes, with changing priorities and funding constraints leading to a re-evaluation of academic publishing practices.<sup>13</sup> This re-evaluation has led to increased scrutiny of the role of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals, with some scholars arguing that they are being misused and overemphasised in the peer-review process but, at the same time, essential in demonstrating the quality and rigour of research. This study aims to examine the use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals within the context of higher education transformation and institutional policies, analyzing existing scientific research while exploring alternative approaches to maintaining quality and rigour.

To achieve the main aim of this paper, the following objectives would be achieved.

- To establish how the evolution of bibliographic practices influenced the integrity and diversity of scholarly writings.
- Determine the relevance of the bibliography in research in the context of Higher Education Transformation.
- Analyse the degree of control an institution or journal has on researchers in the use of bibliography and publishing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals is a complex and contested issue, with different scholars and institutions taking different approaches to their use. While some scholars argue that bibliographies should be limited in length and scope, we also add from our shared experience the need for only the most recent sources not older than ten years to be cited.<sup>14</sup> This approach to Kelly ensures that only the most important research is included in the bibliography while reducing the workload on peer reviewers and ensuring that the published research is of high quality.<sup>15</sup> However, Hammarfelt and Rijcke<sup>16</sup> and Aksnes et al.,<sup>17</sup> argue that limiting the use of bibliographies in this way is counterproductive, as it reduces the transparency and replicability of research. Hence, by citing a wide range of sources, authors can demonstrate that their research is based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature. This approach ensures that the published research is transparent and replicable, enabling other researchers to build on the findings. The following conceptualisation was made to answer key research questions.

### The Evolution of Bibliography Amidst Higher Education Transformation

In addressing objectives one and two, the researchers formulated the research question as follows “How has the evolution of bibliographical practices influenced the integrity, diversity, and importance of scholarly writings in the context of Higher Education Transformation? The evolution of bibliographic practices has profoundly impacted the integrity and diversity of scholarly writings, shaping research methods and knowledge dissemination. Initially, Mairi and Nurse<sup>18</sup> held that bibliographies ensured academic integrity by allowing scholars to trace ideas and build on reliable research foundations. This classical practice was essential for maintaining honesty and traceability in academic work. However, in today's HEIs, bibliographic practices have sometimes devolved into educational malpractices like self-

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Burnes, Petra Wend, and Rune Todnem By, “The Changing Face of English Universities: Reinventing Collegiality for the Twenty-First Century,” *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 6 (July 3, 2014): 905–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.754858>.

<sup>13</sup> Burnes, Wend, and By, “The Changing Face of English Universities: Reinventing Collegiality for the Twenty-First Century.”

<sup>14</sup> Ivan Zupic and Tomaž Čater, “Bibliometric Methods in Management and Organization,” *Organizational Research Methods* 18, no. 3 (July 22, 2015): 429–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114562629>.

<sup>15</sup> Jacalyn Kelly, Tara Sadeghieh, and Khosrow Adeli, “Peer Review in Scientific Publications: Benefits, Critiques, & a Survival Guide,” *Ejtfcc* 25, no. 3 (2014): 227.

<sup>16</sup> B. Hammarfelt and S. de Rijcke, “Accountability in Context: Effects of Research Evaluation Systems on Publication Practices, Disciplinary Norms, and Individual Working Routines in the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University,” *Research Evaluation* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvu029>.

<sup>17</sup> Aksnes, Langfeldt, and Wouters, “Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories.”

<sup>18</sup> Mairi Cowan and Andrew Nurse, “Teaching Academic Integrity as Good Historical Practice,” in *Handbook of Academic Integrity* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), 1–20, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-079-7\\_99-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-079-7_99-1).

citation or reference list manipulation.<sup>19</sup> The advent of the digital age and citation metrics for academic promotion has revolutionised bibliographic practices, with digital databases and citation software streamlining citation management and enhancing reference accuracy.<sup>20</sup> Despite these advancements, new challenges have emerged, such as citation manipulation and the formation of citation cartels which can compromise scholarly integrity.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the pressure to publish in tier-one journals has narrowed research topics and methodologies, thereby marginalising diverse perspectives and potentially stifling intellectual diversity and innovation in scholarly writing.<sup>22</sup>

The use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals has become increasingly important in the context of higher education transformation. HEI is today faced with the pressure to produce high-quality research with practical applications. That is, researchers are expected to conduct thorough literature reviews and use credible sources, making bibliographies essential as they provide a solid foundation of knowledge to build upon. In affirmation of this view, Burnes et.al. note that the transformation of higher education aims to deliver quality education, meet the needs of a changing world, and maintain institutional competitiveness.<sup>23</sup> Such an environment, the researchers believe, has fostered a "publish or perish" mentality, where the emphasis on quantity over quality may compromise the integrity and diversity of academic research.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding, bibliographies remain vital for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, which is increasingly promoted by HEIs to tackle complex societal issues.<sup>25</sup> Such research requires collaboration across various academic disciplines and necessitates the use of diverse sources. According to Krester, therefore bibliographies facilitate this by providing a framework for researchers to acknowledge and incorporate sources from different fields, thus supporting comprehensive and integrative scholarly work.<sup>26</sup>

### **Institutional Policies and the use of Bibliography**

The key question here is, "To what extent do institutions or journals control researchers in their use of bibliographies and publishing?" Institutional policies represent power dynamics within institutions that affect decision-making and policy implementation. Liu et.al., argue that these policies influence the adoption of new technologies and practices in bibliographic references.<sup>27</sup> While some institutions may favour traditional referencing styles such as APA, Harvard, MLA, or Chicago, others are more receptive to digital technologies that support collaborative authoring and citation tracking.<sup>28</sup> Institutional policies thus affect how bibliographic references are evaluated in the peer-review process, particularly regarding impact factors and citation metrics. Impact factors are numerical scores assigned to journals based on the average number of citations received by their articles. Similarly, citation metrics assess the impact of individual articles or authors.<sup>29</sup> While these metrics provide insights into research influence, we are of the view that they can favour certain disciplines or topics, prompting scholars to prioritise citation counts

<sup>19</sup> Elena Denisova-Schmidt, "The Challenges of Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Current Trends and Prospects. CIHE Perspectives 5. The Boston College Center," *International Higher Education*, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, "Accountability in Context: Effects of Research Evaluation Systems on Publication Practices, Disciplinary Norms, and Individual Working Routines in the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University."

<sup>21</sup> Denisova-Schmidt, "The Challenges of Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Current Trends and Prospects. CIHE Perspectives 5. The Boston College Center."

<sup>22</sup> Denisova-Schmidt, "The Challenges of Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Current Trends and Prospects. CIHE Perspectives 5. The Boston College Center."

<sup>23</sup> Burnes, Wend, and By, "The Changing Face of English Universities: Reinventing Collegiality for the Twenty-First Century."

<sup>24</sup> Alison Kretser et al., "Scientific Integrity Principles and Best Practices: Recommendations from a Scientific Integrity Consortium," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 25, no. 2 (April 27, 2019): 327–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-019-00094-3>.

<sup>25</sup> Hilde Tobi and Jarl K. Kampen, "Research Design: The Methodology for Interdisciplinary Research Framework," *Quality & Quantity* 52, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 1209–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0513-8>.

<sup>26</sup> Tobi and Kampen, "Research Design: The Methodology for Interdisciplinary Research Framework."

<sup>27</sup> Qian Liu, Susan Geertshuis, and Rebecca Grainger, "Understanding Academics' Adoption of Learning Technologies: A Systematic Review," *Computers & Education* 151 (July 2020): 103857, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103857>.

<sup>28</sup> Tessa Withorn et al., "Library Instruction and Information Literacy 2018," *Reference Services Review* 47, no. 4 (November 28, 2019): 363–447, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-08-2019-0047>.

<sup>29</sup> Marlo M. Vernon, E. Andrew Balas, and Shaher Momani, "Are University Rankings Useful to Improve Research? A Systematic Review," *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 3 (March 7, 2018): e0193762, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193762>.

over other factors. Globally, some institutions emphasise these metrics in research evaluations as they contribute towards their ranking, while others remain sceptical due to existing gatekeeping.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, institutional policies influence the publication process through the preferences and biases of editors, reviewers and sometimes postgraduate supervisors. Shahzad argues that citation politics can affect research visibility and impact.<sup>31</sup> As such, researchers from prestigious institutions, journals, or research areas often receive more citations than those from less known and less influential entities, regardless of research quality. This bias can skew the citation network, and impact research visibility further through the selection of bibliographies for a systematic literature review. These identified weaknesses, authors' and reviewers' preferences, as well as biases,<sup>32</sup> though not entirely could still lead to citing supportive sources while omitting contradictory ones.

A significant issue in the institutional politics of bibliography use is the pressure to cite sources that align with specific ideologies or theories. This pressure can stem from funding sources, academic departments, or institutional policies. For instance, Aksnes et al., found that authors from certain countries, are more inclined to cite domestic papers, reflecting political and institutional influences on citation practices.<sup>33</sup> Funding agencies on the other hand might also push for the citation of research they have financed, sidelining unfunded but relevant work.<sup>34</sup> These citation biases which have been documented in several studies can dictate the use of bibliographies.<sup>35</sup> That is, some journals require authors to cite specific articles or authors as a publication condition, leading to the exclusion of other pertinent research.<sup>36</sup>

### **Theorising the Role of Bibliography in Peer-Reviewed Journals**

The quality of the bibliography can impact the acceptance or rejection of the paper.<sup>37</sup> In the peer review process, the bibliography is often scrutinised for accuracy, completeness, and relevance. As part of the review processes based on the researchers experiences, the peer reviewers will check the bibliography to ensure that the sources are reliable and up to date. Should the bibliography be found to be inadequate, the paper may be rejected or returned for revision. Thus, it plays a crucial role in peer-reviewed journals as it allows authors to acknowledge the sources of their information and ideas. It is important to note that bibliographies provide readers with a comprehensive list of resources that they can use to learn more about a particular subject or topic. Amongst the benefits of using a bibliography in a study is that it allows scholars to build on each other's work by providing a foundation of knowledge that can be expanded upon hence promoting transparency and accountability in scholarly communication.<sup>38</sup> By providing readers with a list of sources used in an article, authors can demonstrate that their work is based on sound research principles and that they have conducted a thorough literature review. This practice, however, has been limited to certain authors and their publications in what this current study described as the rituals of research citation. An indication in the use of a bibliography where authors from specific journals and in some instances, based on the degree of their contribution in the area has resulted in the ritual of citing almost, if not every sentence in research writing.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen Hazelkorn and Andrew Gibson, "Global Science, National Research, and the Question of University Rankings," *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (November 7, 2017): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0011-6>.

<sup>31</sup> Dasimah Bt Omar et al., "The Impacts of Off-Campus Students on Local Neighbourhood in Malaysia," *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2011): 1221–27.

<sup>32</sup> Kivimaki et al., "Don't Let the Truth Get in the Way of a Good Story: An Illustration of Citation Bias in Epidemiologic Research."

<sup>33</sup> Aksnes, Langfeldt, and Wouters, "Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories."

<sup>34</sup> Burnes, Wend, and By, "The Changing Face of English Universities: Reinventing Collegiality for the Twenty-First Century."

<sup>35</sup> Burnes, Wend, and By, "The Changing Face of English Universities: Reinventing Collegiality for the Twenty-First Century"; Kivimaki et al., "Don't Let the Truth Get in the Way of a Good Story: An Illustration of Citation Bias in Epidemiologic Research."

<sup>36</sup> Kivimaki et al., "Don't Let the Truth Get in the Way of a Good Story: An Illustration of Citation Bias in Epidemiologic Research"; Brembs, Button, and Munafò, "Deep Impact: Unintended Consequences of Journal Rank."

<sup>37</sup> Jeroen Baas et al., "Scopus as a Curated, High-Quality Bibliometric Data Source for Academic Research in Quantitative Science Studies," *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 2020): 377–86, [https://doi.org/10.1162/qss\\_a\\_00019](https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00019).

<sup>38</sup> Baas et al., "Scopus as a Curated, High-Quality Bibliometric Data Source for Academic Research in Quantitative Science Studies"; Hammarfelt and de Rijcke, "Accountability in Context: Effects of Research Evaluation Systems on Publication Practices, Disciplinary Norms, and Individual Working Routines in the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University."

Amongst the many articles that have theorised the issue of institutional politics and the use of a bibliography are Mott and Cockayne<sup>39</sup> who explore how institutional politics can influence the citation behaviour of scholars. The authors surveyed scholars in the social sciences and found that the pressure to cite colleagues from their institution was a significant factor in citation behaviour. The study also found that scholars who cited colleagues from their institution more frequently received higher evaluations from their peers. Similarly, in a study by Frandsen et.al.,<sup>40</sup> the authors explored the relationship between institutional prestige and citation practices in scientific articles. The study found that scholars from prestigious institutions were more likely to cite publications from the same institution, as well as publications from other prestigious institutions. The authors argue that this behaviour may reflect a desire to maintain the reputation of the institution. In a more recent study, Zahedi et.al., investigated the relationship between institutional prestige and bibliometric indicators.<sup>41</sup> The authors analysed the publication and citation behaviour of researchers at four different Dutch universities and found that researchers from more prestigious universities tended to publish more papers and receive more citations. However, the authors also noted that these differences could not be entirely explained by the quality of the research.

## METHODOLOGY

Using the social constructivism theory which focuses on how knowledge and social realities are constructed through shared practices, language, and rituals, this study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This is aimed at exploring the existing body of scientific research on higher education transformation and institutional policies related to the use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals. The SLR plans to answer three key questions including the impact of evolving bibliographic practices on the integrity and diversity of scholarly work, what is the role of bibliography in research within the context of Higher Education Transformation, and the extent of institutional or journal control over researchers' use of bibliographies and publishing.

### Data Sources

The researchers downloaded articles using the following English electronic databases: Web of Science, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Sociological Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, ABI/Inform Collection, Business Source Premier, Public Administration Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts, and International Political Science Abstracts. During the manuscript review process on 04 May 2023, the entire OVID Medline, including PubMed, was searched. These are international bibliographic databases that contain high-rated journals from a variety of publishers and are globally recognised as reputable indexing bodies.

In all databases, the same search terms were used. These include the transformation of higher education, institutional politics, and the use of a bibliography in peer-reviewed journals. One of the authors extracted all studies, while two others double-checked all extractions for accuracy and consistency.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- To be included, the study must focus on higher education transformation and institutional politics in the use of bibliographies for peer-reviewed journals, regardless of discipline, research design (observational or experimental), analysis method (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed), and country or geographical region.
- To reduce the number of results, the researchers restricted the searches to full-text peer-reviewed journal articles.
- The researchers did not limit it to a year of publication so as to reduce publication biases.

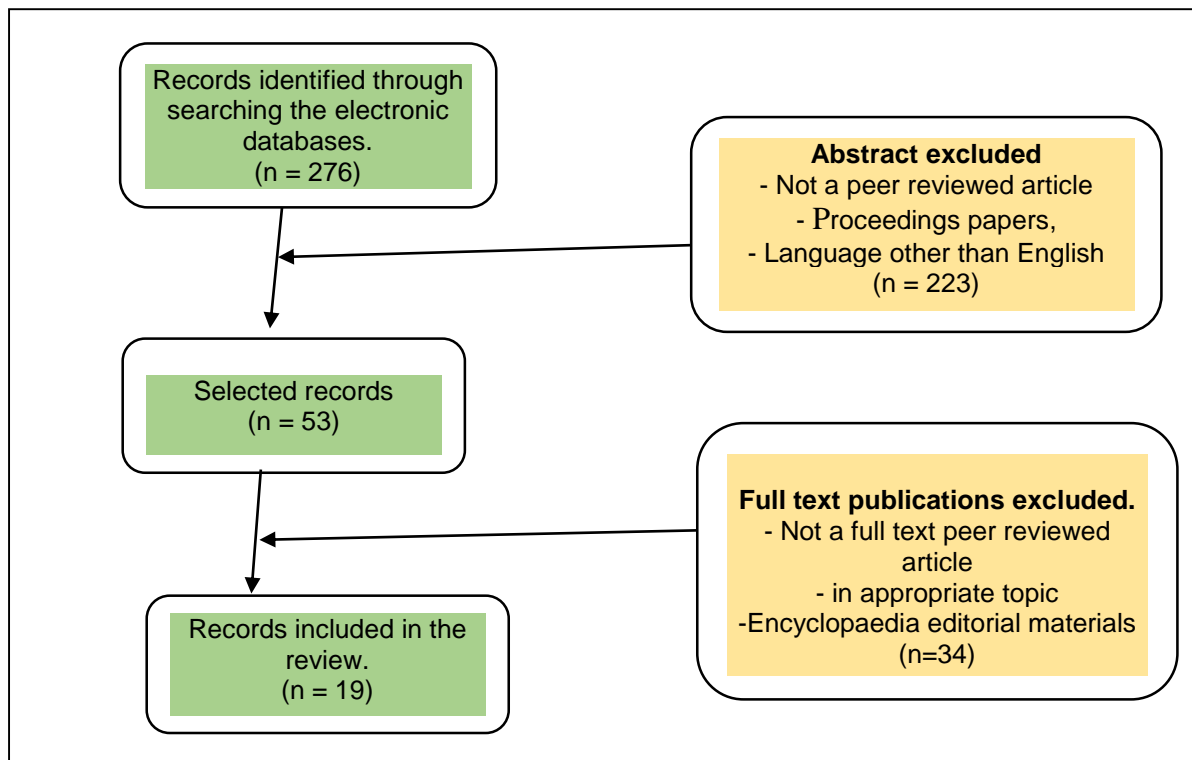
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<sup>39</sup> Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne, "Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation toward a Practice of 'Conscientious Engagement,'" *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no. 7 (July 3, 2017): 954–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1339022>.

<sup>40</sup> Tove Faber Frandsen and Jeppe Nicolaisen, "Effects of Academic Experience and Prestige on Researchers' Citing Behavior," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 63, no. 1 (January 21, 2012): 64–71, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21666>.

<sup>41</sup> Aksnes, Langfeldt, and Wouters, "Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories."

- Also, other materials such as proceedings papers, books, book chapters, encyclopaedia editorial materials, and reviews were excluded because they illustrate a trade-off between quality and attainability. Moreover, book reviews, books, and book chapters were excluded as it is beyond the scope of our research to conduct book reviews.



**Figure 1: SLR Flow Diagram**  
Source: By Authors

A reflection on the above figure indicates that after the preliminary search, a total of 276 publications were identified. This was followed by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as quality evaluation. A final pool of 16 unique publications was included in this SLR as shown in the flow diagram in Figure 1.

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers used a deductive thematic synthesis approach to synthesise the findings of the studies, which involves categorising the results (themes). Based on the analysis of these publications, the researchers developed six broad themes addressing the research objective – to examine higher educational transformation and institutional politics in the use of a bibliography for peer-reviewed journals. These themes are presented in Table 1 and used as variables in subsequent discussions.

**Table 1: Themes identified in the literature**

Theme	Author and year of publication	Title of article	Peer-reviewed journal name
Citation rituals in academic writing	Rose (1998)	Citation Rituals in Academic Cultures	Issues in Writing; Stevens Point
	Plum (1994)	Academic Libraries and the Rituals of Knowledge	<i>RQ</i> ,
	Mammola et al. (2021)	Impact of the reference list features on the number of citations	<i>Scientometrics</i>

Referencing previous authors within the same journal	Anderson & Lemken (2023)	Citation Context Analysis as a Method for Conducting Rigorous and Impactful Literature Reviews.	Organizational Research Methods
	Mammola et al. (2021)	Impact of the reference list features on the number of citations	<i>Scientometrics</i> ,
	Aksnes et al. (2019)	Citations, Citation Indicators, and Research Quality: An Overview of Basic Concepts and Theories.	<i>SAGE Open</i> ,
	Tahamtan et al. (2016).	Factors affecting number of citations: a comprehensive review of the literature.	Scientometrics
Prioritising References to Leading Experts	Zhi & Zhengxiang (2023)	Developing literature review writing and citation practices through an online writing tutorial series: Corpus-based evidence.	Frontiers in Communication
	Tahamtan & Bornmann (2018)	Core elements in the process of citing publications: Conceptual overview of the literature.	Journal of Informetrics
	Tahamtan et al. (2016).	Factors affecting number of citations: a comprehensive review of the literature.	Scientometrics
Self-citation approach	Mishra et al., (2018).	Self-citation is the hallmark of productive authors, of any gender	PLoS ONE
	Glänzel et al. (2004)	A bibliometric approach to the role of author self-citations in scientific communication	Scientometrics
	Ahlgren et al. (2018),	Exploring the relation between referencing practices and citation impact: a large-scale study based on Web of Science data	Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology,
Diversity in the authors affiliation	Sanflippo et al. (2018)	Plurality in multi-disciplinary research: multiple institutional affiliations are associated with increased citations	PeerJ
	May (1967)	Abuses of citation indexing	Science
	Li et al. (2023)	Developing literature review writing and citation practices through an online writing tutorial series: Corpus-based evidence	<i>Frontier in Communication</i> ,
The relevance of the bibliography list	Fox et al. (2016)	Citations increase with manuscript length, author number, and references cited in ecology journals.	Ecology and Evolution
	Mammola et al. (2021)	Impact of the reference list features on the number of citations	<i>Scientometrics</i> ,
	Webster et al. (2009)	Hot topics and popular papers in evolutionary psychology: analyses of title words and citation counts in Evolution and human behaviour, 1979–2008	Evolutionary Psychology

Source: Authors

### Citation Rituals in Academic Writing

From a social constructivist perspective, citation practices in academic writing are not merely technical requirements but deeply embedded social rituals that construct and maintain the reality of academic culture. The quality of a scientific publication, as some scholars argue, is often equated with the quality of the science it cites, because citation acts reflect collective values shared within the scholarly

community.<sup>42</sup> These citation rituals are more than mechanical actions; they are practices through which scholars enact and reaffirm their adherence to the norms and values of their discipline.<sup>43</sup> By participating in these citation practices, scholars affirm their belonging to the community, and failure to do so, such as by not citing work from recognised journals, risks marginalising them from the community.

Social constructivism emphasises that knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative social processes. The analysis found that Citation rituals help construct the social reality of academic culture in general and specific disciplines or areas of inquiry in particular and so is an essentially collaborative action. Thus, institutional politics in the use of a bibliography for peer-reviewed journals may be understood as attempts to establish separation from the community, attempts to disrupt the community by attacking these rituals that enact the community's values, or attempts to change those values. This explains why editors and reviewers often take such care or should take such care about the citation practice of essays or books submitted for publication consideration.<sup>44</sup>

### **Referencing Previous Authors within the Same Journal**

One of the contemporary trends in the use of bibliography is the referencing of previous authors within the same journal which is not simply a technical requirement but a socially constructed practice that reinforces the journal's legitimacy and academic community. This practice is shaped by institutional norms that frame acceptable forms of knowledge production, aligning individual researchers with the collective values of the journal's community. By requiring authors to cite previous works from the same journal, the practice strengthens the journal's perceived influence and authority within the discipline which signifies a high level of social constructivism within an academic community.

The success of a scientific publication, as Iman et.al., suggests, is influenced not only by the scientific content but also by broader social factors like institutional policies, including citation practices.<sup>45</sup> In line with social constructivism, these requirements ensure that authors demonstrate alignment with a given journal's established body of knowledge, reinforcing its intellectual continuity and credibility. In this way, this study argues that citation rituals function as a mechanism of social control, guiding researchers to adhere to shared norms, and influencing their inclusion in the academic community. Also, through the social constructivist lens, the referencing of previous authors becomes a collaborative effort to sustain the journal's standing and to reaffirm its relevance.<sup>46</sup> Such practices, however, while contributing to scholarly continuity, may also limit the diversity of perspectives, as they prioritise reinforcing institutional power structures over academic innovation.

### **Prioritising References to Leading Experts**

While using the Lens of social constructivism theory, the study argues that the practice of prioritising references to leading experts in a field can be viewed as a social mechanism that shapes academic discourse and reinforces power structures within the scholarly community. Social constructivism emphasises that knowledge is co-created through social interactions and is influenced by shared norms and values within a community. In this context, citing leading experts or articles from top-tier journals not only enhances the credibility of the research but also perpetuates the dominance of certain voices in the field.<sup>47</sup> This reinforces the status quo, marginalising emerging scholars and alternative perspectives, and contributing to the centralisation of authority within academic circles.<sup>48</sup> Such citation practices can

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<sup>42</sup> Per Ahlgren, Cristian Colliander, and Peter Sjögarde, "Exploring the Relation between Referencing Practices and Citation Impact: A Large-scale Study Based on Web of Science Data," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 69, no. 5 (May 8, 2018): 728–43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23986>; Charles W. Fox, C. E. Timothy Paine, and Boris Sauterey, "Citations Increase with Manuscript Length, Author Number, and References Cited in Ecology Journals," *Ecology and Evolution* 6, no. 21 (November 5, 2016): 7717–26, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.2505>; Stefano Mammola et al., "Impact of the Reference List Features on the Number of Citations," *Scientometrics* 126, no. 1 (January 29, 2021): 785–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03759-0>.

<sup>43</sup> Shirley K Rose, "Citation Rituals in Academic Cultures," *Issues in Writing* 6, no. 1 (1993): 24.

<sup>44</sup> Rose, "Citation Rituals in Academic Cultures."

<sup>45</sup> Iman Tahamtan, Askar Safipour Afshar, and Khadijeh Ahamdzadeh, "Factors Affecting Number of Citations: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature," *Scientometrics* 107, no. 3 (June 15, 2016): 1195–1225, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-016-1889-2>.

<sup>46</sup> Iman Tahamtan and Lutz Bornmann, "Core Elements in the Process of Citing Publications: Conceptual Overview of the Literature," *Journal of Informetrics* 12, no. 1 (February 2018): 203–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2018.01.002>.

<sup>47</sup> Tahamtan and Bornmann, "Core Elements in the Process of Citing Publications: Conceptual Overview of the Literature."

<sup>48</sup> Tahamtan, Safipour Afshar, and Ahamdzadeh, "Factors Affecting Number of Citations: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature."

be seen as a form of institutional politics, where the act of referencing is used strategically to align with influential figures and institutions, ultimately shaping what is accepted as legitimate knowledge. Consequently, these dynamics limit diversity and innovation by favouring established paradigms and discouraging unconventional approaches.

### Self-Citation Approach

Consistent with previous evidence from Ahlgren,<sup>49</sup> the researchers discovered that another institutional politics in the use of bibliography for peer-reviewed journals is self-citation. Although often criticised Mammola, self-citations contribute to the cumulative nature of knowledge creation, reinforcing an author's presence in ongoing research discussions.<sup>50</sup> According to Social Constructivism, such practices are shaped by communal norms and institutional pressures, which dictate how knowledge is valued and disseminated. While self-citations may artificially inflate citation metrics, Wolfgang et.al., argue that both excessive and minimal self-citation can skew the perceived influence of research.<sup>51</sup> In this light, self-citation not only advances individual careers but also reflects the collaborative construction of knowledge, where visibility is a key marker of academic worth.

### Diversity in the Authors' Affiliation

According to the literature, a high-quality bibliography, as suggested by Li et.al.,<sup>52</sup> may reflect the intellectual heritage and diversity of authors that support an article's findings. The social constructivist theory emphasises that these choices are informed by communal expectations of what constitutes valid knowledge. Sanflippo et.al.,<sup>53</sup> found that diversity in author affiliations often correlates with higher citation counts, suggesting that scholarly impact is influenced by social dynamics. As these practices evolve, there is a growing call to prioritise research quality over mere citation metrics, as this fosters a more inclusive scholarly community.<sup>54</sup> Through the lens of social constructivism, the study argues that the challenge is to maintain academic integrity while promoting diversity, as bibliographic choices shape the construction of knowledge and scholarly discourse.

### The Relevance of the Bibliography List

Evans made an intriguing attempt to evaluate the properties of a peer-reviewed journal article bibliography list using a database of more than 30 million journal articles from 1945 to 2006.<sup>55</sup> The results reveal a general trend toward referencing more recent articles, channelling citations toward fewer journals and articles, and shortening the length of the reference list over time. These findings reveal that longer bibliography lists may make papers more visible in online searches. This the researchers consider important because scientific knowledge is progressive and builds upon previous findings. Another explanation by Fox et.al., is that peer-reviewed articles with longer bibliography lists may cover a wider range of ideas and topics, resulting in more credible information.<sup>56</sup> However, a long bibliography list may attract and encourage cited authors to cite the papers that cited them.<sup>57</sup> These results contradict those

<sup>49</sup> Ahlgren, Colliander, and Sjögarde, "Exploring the Relation between Referencing Practices and Citation Impact: A Large-scale Study Based on Web of Science Data."

<sup>50</sup> Mammola et al., "Impact of the Reference List Features on the Number of Citations."

<sup>51</sup> Glänzel Wolfgang, Thijs Bart, and Schlemmer Balázs, "A Bibliometric Approach to the Role of Author Self-Citations in Scientific Communication," *Scientometrics* 59, no. 1 (2004): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SCIE.0000013299.38210.74>.

<sup>52</sup> Liu, Wang, and Li, "Developing Children's Humanity: The Unique and Interactive Role of Parents' and Peers' Humanity"; Kelechi Johnmary Ani and Patrick Austin Alegu, "The Christian Missionary Activities in Igboland: A Study on Language and Social Distortions," in *Religious Conflicts and Dialogue Initiatives in Nigeria*, ed. Isidore U. Nwanaju, vol. 4 (Abakaliki: Citizens' Advocate Press, 2015), 131–45.

<sup>53</sup> T. K. Mackey and B. A. Liang, "Combating Healthcare Corruption and Fraud with Improved Global Health Governance," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 12, no. 23 (2012): 1–7.

<sup>54</sup> Chin-Tsu Chen et al., "A Study of the Effects of Internship Experiences on the Behavioural Intentions of College Students Majoring in Leisure Management in Taiwan," *Journal of Hospitality Leisure Sport & Tourism Education* 10, no. 2 (2011): 61–73.

<sup>55</sup> James A. Evans, "Electronic Publication and the Narrowing of Science and Scholarship," *Science* 321, no. 5887 (July 18, 2008): 395–99, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1150473>.

<sup>56</sup> Fox, Charles W., CE Timothy Paine, and Boris Sauterey. "Citations increase with manuscript length, author number, and references cited in ecology journals." *Ecology and Evolution* 6, no. 21 (2016): 7717–7726

<sup>57</sup> Gregory D. Webster, Peter K. Jonason, and Tatiana Orozco Schember, "Hot Topics and Popular Papers in Evolutionary Psychology: Analyses of Title Words and Citation Counts in *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 1979 – 2008," *Evolutionary Psychology* 7, no. 3 (July 1, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1177/147470490900700301>.

of Fox et.al., who found that there is no direct relationship between bibliographic lists and institutional practices of citations.<sup>58</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above discourse, it is recommended that academic institutions and journals develop more transparent and inclusive citation practices. That is, citation metrics should not be the sole measure of research quality. Instead, a broader evaluation should consider the diversity of authors, perspectives and disciplines cited. Also, journals should discourage excessive self-citations by implementing guidelines to ensure a balance between referencing one's previous work and incorporating external sources. Furthermore, editors should promote the citation of diverse authors and avoid policies that enforce referencing from the same journal, which may limit the breadth of scholarship. Moreover, it is important for academic evaluation systems to prioritise the quality of research contributions over citation metrics to avoid reinforcing institutional power structures that may stifle innovative ideas.

## CONCLUSION

The use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals is crucial in research evaluation, offering a foundation of knowledge for future studies and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. This study highlights the challenges posed by current institutional policies regarding the use of bibliographies in peer-reviewed journals. While many journals place restrictions on the use of citations, this restriction may be unnecessary as more journals move toward an open-access format. The study highlights how citation practices in peer-reviewed journals function as socially constructed rituals that influence the academic community. By adhering to these rituals, scholars align themselves with the values of their discipline, but this can also limit diversity in academic discourse. The practice of prioritising leading experts among others reinforces existing power structures, often marginalising alternative voices. A more inclusive and transparent approach to bibliographic practices is therefore needed to balance the pursuit of academic integrity with the promotion of diverse perspectives and disciplines. As the scholarly community evolves, balancing citation metrics with qualitative assessments will be crucial to fostering a more equitable academic environment.

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