



“We Got Through It and Got There, But Some People Were Left Behind”: Writing Across the Curriculum and in the Formative Stages at University

“Nosotros lo superamos y llegamos, pero hay gente que se quedó atrás”: escribir a través del currículum y de las etapas formativas en la universidad

Fernanda Uribe Gajardo¹, Pablo Lovera Falcón¹,
& Federico Navarro²

¹ Universidad de Chile,

² Universidad de O'Higgins

Abstract

Writing is central to university education and disciplinary specialization, but studies that contrast curricular and formative areas are scarce. This study aims to explore experiences with writing and its teaching among students in six disciplinary areas (Arts, Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Pedagogy in Science and Engineering) and three formative stages (entry, transition, and graduation) in a state, metropolitan, and highly selective university in Chile. Using four focus groups, qualitative coding was carried out through emergent categories with software assistance and following criteria for methodological integrity. The students identify the contrast between school and university in terms of writing demands, highlight the lack of formal teaching opportunities, and report self-managed learning of writing by trial and error. In advanced stages of Health Sciences and Engineering, the students question having received training exclusively oriented toward writing in professional contexts, while in Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities they regret not having been trained to write in work settings. The results show that students have flexible strategies to approach academic writing across the curriculum, but they also reveal an experience of institutional neglect in stages that are critical for student persistence, which underlines the urgent need to implement initiatives to support students throughout their education.

Key words: higher education, writing, literacy, writing teaching

Post to:

Federico Navarro
Av. Lib. Bernardo O'Higgins 611, Rancagua, CP 2820000, O'Higgins.
navarro@uoh.cl
ORCID: 0000-0001-9131-3245

© 2022 PEL, <http://www.pensamientoeducativo.org> - <http://www.pel.cl>

ISSN:0719-0409 DDI:203.262, Santiago, Chile doi: 10.7764/PEL.59.2.2022.7

Resumen

La escritura es central en la formación universitaria y en la especialización disciplinar, pero no son frecuentes los estudios que contrastan ámbitos curriculares y formativos. En esta investigación se caracterizan las experiencias de estudiantes con la escritura y su enseñanza en seis áreas disciplinares (Artes, Ciencias de la salud, Ciencias sociales, Humanidades, Pedagogía en ciencias e Ingenierías) y tres etapas formativas (ingreso, transición y egreso), en una universidad estatal, metropolitana y altamente selectiva de Chile. A partir de cuatro grupos focales, se realizó una codificación cualitativa mediante categorías emergentes con asistencia de software y criterios de integridad metodológica. Los estudiantes identifican el contraste escuela-universidad en las demandas de escritura, señalan la ausencia de instancias formales de enseñanza, y reportan un aprendizaje autogestionado de la escritura por ensayo y error. En etapas avanzadas de Ciencias de la salud e Ingenierías, los estudiantes cuestionan haber recibido una formación exclusivamente orientada a escribir en contextos profesionales, mientras que en Artes, Ciencias sociales y Humanidades lamentan no haberse formado para la escritura en contextos laborales. Los resultados muestran estrategias estudiantiles flexibles para abordar la escritura académica a través del currículum, pero también dan cuenta de una experiencia de abandono institucional en etapas clave para la persistencia estudiantil que abona la necesidad urgente de implementar instancias de acompañamiento a lo largo de la formación.

Palabras clave: educación superior, escritura, literacidad, alfabetización académica, lectura.

Introduction

Academic writing practices have a situated nature, that is, they respond to and support the ways of doing, thinking, and building knowledge and identities in the disciplines (Brandt, 2009; Street, 2005). They thus involve what people do with writing in the personal, collective, and social networks to which they belong, and the purposes, readers, and types of texts that circulate in each setting.

In the case of university education, students are faced with diverse, complex, and specific writing tasks for the different formative stages and disciplinary areas. Indeed, writing in higher education operates across the curriculum (Bazerman et al., 2016), in specific subjects and courses that use it as a means to learn, communicate, and assess learning (Nesi & Gardner, 2012); across the formative stages, that is, in the entry, transition, and graduation stages of the programs and curricula; and across the subjects, in the pedagogical sequences of activities, learning outcomes, and classroom assessments (Navarro, 2021).

This process has been understood considering the notion of disciplinary enculturation (Prior & Bilbro, 2012) and academic literacy (Carlino, 2013), that is, as a process in which the student gradually becomes familiar with and learns what it means to write in his/her respective community of practice (Wenger, 2001). However, this process also involves asymmetrical power relations, and ideological and identity contrasts between students, teachers, and institutions (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This means that students not only learn to read and write in the expected ways at university, but also negotiate and accommodate their prior experiences and expectations within the framework of the institutionalized hegemonic literacy practices in which they participate (Zavala, 2011), particularly considering the recent expansion and diversification of university enrollment in Latin America (Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017).

The study of writing in higher education as a situated practice focused on the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of the subjects who write has become the predominant perspective in the region (Navarro & Colombi, 2022). However, longitudinal studies that follow a case or cohort over time are still uncommon (Ávila Reyes et al., 2021a), as are those that compare cases or cohorts situated at different times (Navarro et al., 2021). These studies offer an insight into the kinds of texts students must write, the conceptions and expectations they display, and the experiences and needs they share at different formative stages in order to understand how they gradually become writers (Bazerman, 2013).

This research describes experiences with writing and its teaching among students in six disciplinary areas (Arts, Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Pedagogy in Science and Engineering) and three formative stages (entry, transition, and graduation) in a state, metropolitan, and highly selective university in Chile. Using four focus groups, we carried out qualitative coding through emergent categories with the assistance of software and following criteria for methodological integrity. The aim was to answer the following research questions:

1. What do university students write?
2. How do university students learn to write?
3. What contrasts and continuities exist in what university students write and how they learn to write across the curriculum and the formative stages?

Examining students' experiences can help us understand the conflicts between institutionalized hegemonic expectations and the recent diversification in university enrollment, along with the dynamics of maturation, and gradual belonging to and familiarity with the different disciplinary fields. In this context, it is relevant to study students regarding their ways of “inhabiting the university” (Martinic & Urzúa Martínez, 2021, p. 164) insofar as they constitute an “instance of production of subjectivities and cultural experiences between the structural and the biographical, the social-historical and the subjective-experiential” (Morandi et al., 2019, p. 2).

Student experiences with writing in higher education

Studies on writing in Latin America have multiplied in recent times, many of which are focused on understanding the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of the subjects who write and are trained in academic contexts (Navarro & Colombi, 2022). These studies conceptualize students as creative writers with agency (Zavala, 2011), who establish relationships and participate in academic, work, and extracurricular activities in higher education (Barragán-Díaz, 2020), while rejecting a perspective of deficit based on purported gaps and shortcomings that have to be remediated by traditional higher education institutions. The studies are usually focused on students with non-traditional trajectories and profiles, such as indigenous people, those from rural environments, individuals from vulnerable social sectors, or first-generation university students.

Velásquez and Córdova (2012) found noteworthy differences between the perspectives on academic writing of students finishing higher education and Biochemistry and Art teachers and concluded that writing is not taught formally in spite of its importance for student trajectories. Concha et al. (2017) also identified contrasts and diverse perspectives on ways of communicating and building knowledge in the History and Sociology communities in Chile and discussed the homogenizing strategies of teaching writing within university courses.

Regarding teaching and learning opportunities, Romero and Álvarez (2019) identified that, despite progressing as writers, students' experiences of training are inadequate or insufficient for participation in a new literate community (Modern Languages course). Martínez et al. (2019) also found that psychology students at two Mexican public universities point to a lack of effective provision of feedback to enable them to develop as academic readers and writers.

Other studies examine the training needs and desires of students. Based on interviews with Spanish Literature and Language students, Betancur (2021) suggests that they aspire to the construction of a pedagogical connection in which the teacher assists writing, but which enables them to develop their own subjectivity. In two studies with students entering Chilean universities through an inclusive admissions program, Ávila Reyes et al. (2020, 2021b) identified the existence of tensions between academic writing, on the one hand, and extracurricular or pre-university writing, on the other, in a dynamic of dialogue, feedback, and occasional resistance and defiance.

Within longitudinal studies, Avila Reyes et al. (2021a) followed the educational process of 21 students admitted through regular and inclusive pathways in a selective and traditional Chilean university over three years. In this research, they found that students assume structural inequities, such as the lack of quality spaces for study and networks, among others, and resignify them as limitations of a personal nature, while suffering from the lack of feedback and clear guidelines and instructions for writing. Meanwhile, Navarro et al. (2021), looking at the qualitative contrast between university admission and graduation, concluded that student conceptions show a somewhat transactional and epistemic perspective of writing, although it is not explicitly taught, and that learning experiences follow a dynamic of trial-and-error.

This brief review of the research background in Latin America over the last decade shows that higher education institutions still have insufficient initiatives to support students and that there are conflicts between student expectations and experiences regarding institutionalized training and writing opportunities at university. At the same time, it reveals that studies that compare student experiences throughout the formative stages, with simultaneous consideration of areas and courses, are still scarce in the region.

Methodology

This research is part of a larger project in which qualitative and quantitative evidence, collected from text analysis, focus groups, and surveys (Navarro et al., 2021), was triangulated to map discourse genres and opportunities for teaching writing in order to inform institutional actions at the university where the research was conducted. In particular, focus groups (Hamui-Sutton & Varela-Ruiz, 2013) enable a constructivist and interpretive perspective of knowledge, while allowing the identification of both consensus and divergent attitudes and negotiations on certain variables in the development of the debate (Clary-Lemon et al., 2021).

In this study, a focus group was carried out with six second-year students (entry stage), two focus groups with groups of six and seven fourth-year students (transition stage), and a focus group with four graduates (graduation stage). All of them included the participation of representatives of each of the knowledge areas of interest (Arts, Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Science and Engineering Education) associated with different faculties.

We prepared a script with defined roles for the different members of the research team (facilitator, coordinator, and observer) based on the following conceptual axes and associated sets of questions:

1. Writing: What kinds of texts do students write during the course? How are they organized throughout the course? What are they called and what are their objectives? What texts did you find most meaningful and why? What texts did you find difficult to write and why?
2. Teaching and learning to write: What writing skills are students expected to have? How are they organized throughout the course? How do they impact the grades? What opportunities are there for teaching students to write these texts? What are they like? Are written/systematic instructions provided (in what subjects)? Has a teacher ever taught you how to write on a course?

The focus groups were conducted in person on the premises of the university studied in 2017 and 2018, and each lasted approximately 60 minutes, while the transcript was 52,608 words long. To analyze the focus groups, we performed qualitative coding based on emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006) and investigator triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). With the assistance of QSR NVivo 11 Pro software, a set of non-exclusive categories and subcategories were proposed and refined through successive exploratory analyses, which served to classify and systematize units of content that were then analyzed in greater depth and interpreted.

We followed criteria of methodological integrity during the research, (Levitt, 2019). The data collection instrument (script and role configuration for the focus group) was adjusted based on advice from external experts and it was tested prior to its implementation. To ensure inter-analyst reliability for the identification of emerging categories, we conducted initial double-blind coding of 50% of the corpus, producing a kappa coefficient of 0.40 (Fleiss et al., 2003), which is considered expected for the analysis of a large number of non-exclusive categories. The researchers subsequently conducted joint coding of 100% of the corpus based on the review of the excerpts and categories that produced disagreements.

Different recruitment mechanisms were outlined to avoid coercion and ensure that the participants took part voluntarily. The participants also signed an informed consent that made these procedures explicit. Regarding the positionality of the researchers involved, they were not teachers, nor did they occupy institutional roles in which they could coerce the students to participate in the study.

Results

From school to university: “Some people were left behind”

The students reported a sharp contrast between their academic and literacy performances in school and at university. Comparisons appear in the specific forms of writing (1) and in the number of texts assigned for reading (2), in addition to accounts of frustrating university experiences that threaten student retention and persistence (3). This is a real cultural, academic, and literacy shock.

1. “I’ve read things I wrote when I was in school and things I’ve written now in university, and there’s definitely a really huge change” (Health Sciences, transition, 01)¹.
2. “In my case, what surprised me the most was that we had to read a lot more than I thought we had to” (Social Sciences, entry, 02).
3. “The environment from high school to university is really adverse ... you enter and it goes really badly and it really causes a problem. We got through it and got there, but some people were left behind” (Health Sciences, transition, 01).

Participants explain these contrasts in terms of training gaps in school trajectories regarding subjects and contents (4) or in the institutional profile and general quality of education in secondary education (5); in a highly segregated school and university system, previous trajectories are related to selectivity mechanisms (PSU, or the University Selection Test) and inclusive admission programs (the Academic Excellence Scholarship, BEA, or the Program for Access to Higher Education, PACE), but even for students who are selected by regular means, the characteristics of the university trajectory can be “overwhelming” (6).

1. In each focus group excerpt, the subject area, the educational stage, and the student's ID at that stage are indicated.

4. “But even so, they never taught me philosophy at school, so I was totally lost. I was lost tons [a lot]” (Humanities, transition, 01).
5. “There’s a difference between those who have a good level from school and those who don’t, I mean, obviously. In the first group there are those who studied in private education and in emblematic² schools, and the others are like the rest who entered, let’s say, through special quotas maybe or they’re from public schools, BEA quotas, PACE quotas, and this is eventually seen when the semester is over and the people who flunk [fail] the subjects are those people” (Social Sciences, transition, 05).
6. “You graduate from high school with certain, that is, with certain pre-established knowledge in theory, you’re supposed to have passed the PSU and that’s why you’re on the [university] course. But the truth is that when you get there, the differences are really overwhelming” (Health Sciences, entry, 04).

Some of the contrasts between experiences in secondary education and when entering university are not found universally across the experiences in higher education, but are situated in disciplinary expectations, such as in the (memory-based) strategies used to approach texts in Health Sciences:

7. “When you’re taught to read texts in high school, the main idea, all of this thing of analyzing the text and what it wants to tell us, and blah blah blah, and we get [to university] and come across texts or books in which every word is important, so you have to get into every word, there’s no main idea in a text, because we’re talking about a book on anatomy, where each line says something different that you have to memorize, or physiology for each enzyme, so we were never prepared (in high school) for this type of reading” (Health Sciences, transition, 10).

Academic writing: “The university leaves you stranded”

The students agree on identifying writing as a high-demand requirement to participate in their formative and disciplinary fields and to succeed in their university trajectories. The narratives illustrate a real burden of assignments and time constraints to meet the requirements.

8. “All the tests throughout the year are written, written, written” (Medicine, transition, 10).
9. “It’s always written, there are always two questions and five hours to answer, twenty pages if you want. Or, if not, the typical format more like an essay or paper, which is always long” (Sociology, graduate, 02).

This identification of writing as a high demand across the curriculum is not immediate, especially in technical and scientific areas, where students show an initial expectation that writing will have a somewhat secondary role.

10. “I also had this belief about the course that I would never have to speak or write again. So, I said: ah, cool, because what I like most is mathematics and the only thing that’s difficult for me is writing. But most of them are like that, but there are still areas that encourage those soft skills that I think, that now I think are very important” (Engineering, entry, 06).

2. Note of the editor: High-achieving public schools.

11. “I study Physics and from minute one you have to be writing and, well, maybe for those who don’t know much when they start, the course is going to tell you that, in the process you realize that the scientist, at least the physicist, [about whom] I can talk, writes papers their whole life and gives speeches their whole life” (Physics, transition, 06).

The central importance of writing reported by students contrasts starkly with the lack of formal teaching as an experience across the university:

12. “I have classmates who are still behind, or people who left the course, and ... partly because they didn’t have the support and did not have the leveling they needed” (Health Sciences, transition, 01).

13. “I feel that, in any case, the training I have in writing is quite insufficient for the level that the discipline currently demands” (Humanities, transition, 11).

The collective interviews thus demonstrate consistency among the students in the different formative stages regarding the lack of institutionalized teaching of writing, even though it is of key importance to their educational processes. As a consequence, students depend to a large extent on their previous educational experiences in the family (14), school (14, 15), or social sphere (16), and the possibilities of success are linked to individual aspects (17) in which institutions have little participation, and writing remains outside the explicit curriculum.

14. “I think that the university doesn’t really focus much on teaching or enhancing that, but rather they take it for granted, and those who bring it from home or school do very well, and they’re the ones who end up running a hospital or being minister of health or those who sell their ideas well” (Health Sciences, graduate, 01).

15. “I come with the basics I have from high school. I know how to write from there because I kept practicing and stuff like that, but at the U [university] there’s no opportunity in which you have to learn how to write more complicated things” (Engineering, entry, 01).

16. “Those who were never taught to write, were never taught to write at the U. So you had to hold on to your classmates, to save yourself as best you could” (Arts, graduation, 04).

17. “Thanks to that kind of external development that I sought out for myself, I was basically able to develop what I needed” (Health Sciences, entry, 04).

The students not only state that they have not been able to participate in opportunities for training to learn academic writing, but also that the teaching and institutional expectations, the tasks requested, and the forms of assessment and feedback have criteria that are mostly implicit regarding writing, since they are not given instructions (18, 19), guidelines, or rubrics with significant orientations (20) to guide their work. This kind of opaque writing instruction generates a sense of frustration and isolation in students.

18. “I feel a bit that the university abandons you regarding certain skills that are required, but they never take the time to teach them. And they’re not very clear when saying what’s required or not” (Humanities, transition, 11).

19. “Anyway, it’s not a language that’s intuitive; they’re forms, and it’s strange because the course doesn’t have all the tools or doesn’t give you all the tools to say ‘look, this is what we expect’” (Social Sciences, graduation, 02).

20. “They give you a grade and you have to say ‘okay, well, where did I go wrong?’ and according to the teacher’s grades say ‘okay, well, I have to straighten myself out this way’” (Health Sciences, transition, 01).

In fact, the students also criticize the relevance and orientation of the writing opportunities they have actually had in their trajectories. Specifically, students from the social and humanities areas (21, 22) state that the writing requested does not relate to the tasks that are carried out when they leave university and in professional environments.

21. "There's not like that sense of professionalization in the oral and written implementation, which is also something that you have to learn later Then, you have to go and convince someone. Very few people learn that, lots fail in that and, also, maybe more than in Engineering, also we, or the people who enter Social Sciences, are really refractory to that in the undergraduate course, I think. When they leave, they realize that they needed it because they have to make ends meet" (Social Sciences, graduation, 02)

22. "There aren't many practical courses that require, I don't know, a text from you to accompany your artwork. That's really insufficient, so that also makes things difficult, when people leave the course, like being a cultural manager, like ... like there are no tools ... So, it's like people fly out and stay up in the air after they leave" (Arts, graduation, 03).

In contrast with students in the humanities and social sciences, students in the health and engineering areas (23, 24) resent the lack of training and opportunities to write academic and persuasive texts.

23. "So the people who don't opt for a clinical specialty afterward but do a master's degree or a doctorate, where they face the process of writing a thesis, not having done it in undergraduate studies, it's twice as difficult for them" (Health Sciences, graduation, 01).

24. "You're incentivized or encouraged to communicate like one-to-one, that's what I understood, empathy. I mean, those words aren't even heard in Engineering and I think it's often shown by the treatment that exists between teacher and student. I think that would be good because sometimes that's missing more than maybe knowing where to put a comma or where to put an accent. I think that's what's missing, I don't know, there's more to language than just writing or speaking, but also what one expresses corporeally or, I don't know, empathy, knowing how to listen is also part of communication" (Engineering, graduation, 03).

According to some students, this lack of explicit teaching and support in the use and learning of writing at university is related to incomplete trajectories or educational gaps. That is, the lack of explicit and institutionalized teaching of writing and individual processes based on previous experiences and knowledge or that are external to the university mean that not all students manage to become competent writers in their disciplinary fields.

25. "I think that not only was it not stimulated, but that you even lost certain abilities with which you came from school" (Health Sciences, graduation, 01).

26. "Sometimes some line of words in between a whole string of equations on a page. I think that doesn't specifically enhance language skills and, in fact, there's a certain pride in saying: 'We're great. We can do this just as well without being able to write well'" (Engineering, graduation, 03).

27. "I'd dare to say that, at the end of the course, not everyone knows how to write, because maybe you were always the guy who drew the graphs, you know, or pasted everything at the end, stuff like that" (Social Sciences, graduation, 02).

This neglect often leads students to describe harsh negative conceptions of their own writing abilities in university, specifically on entry: "impostor" (28), "disgusting" (29), "neanderthal" (30), "horrible" (31), "ignorant" (31). These lonely and frustrating experiences with training in writing thus have the counterpart of strong self-stigmatization that places the responsibility on the student's individual competencies.

28. “Sometimes you don’t have the confidence ... sometimes it’s difficult. For example, this happened to me this year with the pre-thesis, a course called workshop, which is like before going on to the thesis, and at the beginning, you feel impostor syndrome” (Social Sciences, transition, 07).
29. “I consider that my language and writing skills suck and I see it reflected on an everyday basis” (Engineering, entry, 06).
30. “Mostly, we’re a bunch of neanderthals in writing; we don’t know how to write anything at all” (Health Sciences, entry, 04).
31. “You have a course on writing, on writing reports, on clinical records, and you feel horrible. Really, I feel so ignorant when I go to that course because I don’t know how to write, the order in which to write it, the amount. You don’t even know what’s important, what you should write there: does it matter that the lady fell from a fourth floor or does it matter more, I don’t know, that something else hurts her more? It’s really difficult” (Health Sciences, entry, 04).

Learning to write at university: “The hard way”

In this context of the lack of systematic training for writing and self-stigmatization among students, they demonstrate creative and resilient strategies to cope with academic writing tasks, training to be writers at university, and dealing with the writing challenges they face in the professional world. When asked how they learned to write in university, their responses reflect how difficult the process was.

32. “Just the hard way” (Arts, transition, 09).
33. “There’s no training for that. Like, if you brought it with you, fine, and if you were able to adapt by imitating what you were able to see as good examples, fine, but if not, you work it out for yourself” (Health Sciences, graduation, 01).
34. “Just reading, reading. The teaching assistants help a lot, but it’s also quite a lot of failing” (Social Sciences, transition, 07).
35. “You just learn along the way” (Humanities, transition, 11).
36. “In the end, you have to learn to write on your own, on your own reflections” (Arts, graduation, 04).

Learning writing is presented as a self-managed, painful (by failures), and solitary process, based on the individual responsibility of the learner and using implicit or limited strategies such as reading or imitation.

One of the most clearly identified forms of learning is the exploratory and unaccompanied learning practice that the students at all stages of training called “trial and error”.

37. “I’ve learned it and I’ve really improved it a lot, but it has basically been through errors, by professors crossing things out, through someone calling me out” (Health Sciences, entry, 04).
38. “You learn through trial and error for five years and, even after leaving, I think lots of those who never wrote formally in this format besides the assessments, then, of course, you send a paper to a journal and they send it back to you with a thousand changes and you’re left with the feeling: ‘I didn’t learn anything’” (Social Sciences, graduation, 02).

39. "I think that you improve through trial and error, but to a certain extent, because I feel that you go on acquiring to please the person who's reviewing. You're not writing feeling that you're writing correctly, but to please the other person ... and that, I think, is because of the lack of training because you're not sure of what you're really doing" (Engineering, transition, 03).

40. "The way you learn: either by trial and error or following the guidelines well because they're clear. And, at least in my case, I feel that it's trial and error" (Physics, transition, 06).

In this exploratory and solitary educational context, students provide examples of self-managed and creative strategies they use to overcome and survive the literacy requirements of the university. Specifically, students collect examples that have been graded highly (tests, medical case histories) by the teachers in charge, they "infer" patterns or features they can recognize, and "apply" them to their own productions (41); alternatively, they "copy" those previous examples and, on that basis, "add" or adjust whatever they consider necessary (42).

41. "I read like three tests of people who had got 6, 6.5, 7³, and I was able to infer certain rules of response that I then applied in the two subsequent tests and I got into that language and I did well" (Social sciences, graduation, 02).

42. "Also, when you have a corrected medical case history and you have to take another one, you take the one you have and copy, copy, copy, copy and add all the corrections and so on until you get used to it" (Health Sciences, transition, 10).

Despite not identifying formal spaces for learning how to write, the students recognize the presence of some teachers and assistants who were essential for their training as writers. These mentors or sponsors of literacy support a process of discursive formation and metalinguistic awareness applied to the disciplinary area (43), or rather the analysis and structuring of texts (44).

43. "The accompaniment that's done week by week, in which they correct you, you're taught how to write, what the language is, what the vocabulary is like and, above all, and which is essential in medicine in the end, is to have the ability to realize what the patient has" (Health Sciences, transition, 01).

44.) "The teaching assistants help a lot because they kind of help you to break down the text from the beginning and that same teacher also gives us a lot of emphasis on speaking well and doing things" (Social Sciences, transition, 13).

Discussion and Conclusions

The results presented reveal that academic writing learning experiences in a university environment that contrasts with previous formative instances are solitary, exploratory, and frustrating, particularly in the critical period of the first few years of higher education (Gallardo et al., 2019). Despite the central importance of writing throughout academic training and in the various disciplinary areas, the results provide new evidence on the lack of support mechanisms and curricular actions that promote its teaching (Ávila Reyes et al., 2021a; Martínez et al., 2019; Romero & Álvarez, 2019; Velásquez & Córdova, 2012); writing is restricted to a secret rite (Lillis, 2001) or *hidden curriculum* (Schleppegrell, 2004), with the resulting threat to student persistence. This situation is particularly problematic insofar as the direct teaching of writing can positively impact students' self-confidence and professional identity (Natale et al., 2016).

3. In the Chilean university system, 7 is the highest grade.

In a context in which there is scant institutional and curricular support for learning to write at university, academic cultural capital and the family context can also have a decisive influence on this process. The lack of correspondence between the cultural and literacy practices of the family or the closest community environment and the practices of educational institutions can increase the likelihood of dropout (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021), particularly in the Latin American higher education system, which has been characterized as reflecting the inequities of society (Ezcurra, 2019; Poy, 2018). This may explain why some students perceive the transition to higher education as an experience of shock (Gallardo et al., 2019; Zittoun, 2008), which is especially apparent in learning to write.

By contrast, it is encouraging to find the use of creative and resilient strategies among students, as reported by other recent research on the subject (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020, 2021a). Such strategies are linked particularly to collecting and imitating examples that are assessed positively by teachers and trial and error methods to enable students to cope better with the demands of writing at university. At the same time, the students highlight experiences in which they were supported by literacy sponsors (Brandt, 2009), even though they are uncommon.

As for the contrasts by the educational levels, it is possible to establish certain distinctive features for each of the different stages. During the first stage of higher education, we observed that the main difficulties are related to the challenges of the transition, as well as the influence of previous experiences and poor prior school training to address the demands of writing at university, which frequently leads to self-stigmatization (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020, 2021a). Throughout the intermediate stage, even when students state that they feel they are better writers than when they arrived at university and have a more profound understanding of the writing requirements of their courses, their experience is particularly marked by a feeling of frustration and the notion of writing as a process that is learned “the hard way.” Finally, during the final stage of education, the students highlight the inadequate connection between the writing learned, taught, and practiced in the previous educational levels with the needs of postgraduate environments.

The student experiences shared in this research suggest the need to promote teaching and learning of academic literacy throughout the disciplines and student trajectories, considering the concerns and experiences of writers during their education. Likewise, it is also necessary to promote opportunities for support that allow common challenges to be addressed, along with those that are specific to each stage of initial university education.

Acknowledgments. We would like to offer our thanks for the financing provided by ANID/PIA/ Fondos Basales para Centros de Excelencia FB0003 and by FONDECYT 1191069 from ANID.

The original paper was received on January 10, 2022

The reviewed paper was received on May 2, 2022

The paper was accepted on June 1, 2022

References

- Ávila Reyes, N., Figueroa, J., Calle-Arango, L., & Morales, S. (2021a). Experiencias con la escritura académica: un estudio longitudinal con estudiantes diversos. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 29(159). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.6091>
- Ávila Reyes, N., Navarro, F., & Tapia Ladino, M. (2020). Identidad, voz y agencia: claves para una enseñanza inclusiva de la escritura en la universidad. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(98). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.4722>

- Ávila Reyes, N., Navarro, F., & Tapia Ladino, M. (2021b). "My abilities were pretty mediocre": Challenging deficit discourses in expanding higher education systems. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000366>
- Barragán-Díaz, D. M. (2020). La experiencia estudiantil universitaria en América Latina: una revisión de literatura. *Revista Colombiana de Educación*, 1(78). <https://doi.org/10.17227/rce.num78-6708>
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated literacies. Reading and writing in context* (pp. 7-15). Routledge.
- Bazerman, C. (2013). Understanding the lifelong journey of writing development. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 36(4), 421-441. <https://doi.org/10.1174/021037013808200320>
- Bazerman, C., Little, J., Bethel, L., Chavkin, T., Fouquette, D., & Garufis, J. (2016). *Escribir a través del Currículum. Una guía de referencia* (F. Navarro, Ed.). UNC.
- Betancur, D. (2021). Firmar en nombre propio. Representaciones de jóvenes universitarios sobre la escritura académica. *Enunciación*, 26(1), 92-105. <https://doi.org/10.14483/22486798.17083>
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *La reproducción*. Laia.
- Brandt, D. (2009). *Literacy and learning: Reflections on writing, reading, and society*. Jossey-Bass.
- Carlino, P. (2013). Alfabetización académica diez años después. *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, 18(57), 355-381. <https://www.comie.org.mx/revista/v2018/rmie/index.php/nrmie/article/view/250>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage Publications.
- Chiroleu, A., & Marquina, M. (2017). Democratisation or credentialism? Public policies of expansion of higher education in Latin America. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 1(2), 139-160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2017.1303787>
- Clary-Lemon, J., Mueller, D., & Pantelides, K. (2021). Working with people. In *Try this. Research methods for writers* (pp. 89-108). WAC Clearinghouse.
- Concha, S., Miño, P., & Vargas, M. P. (2017). Representaciones sociales sobre el conocimiento y la escritura en el pregrado en dos comunidades discursivas: implicancias para la enseñanza de la escritura en la educación superior. *Lenguas Modernas*, 50, 109-130. <https://estudiosdeadministracion.uchile.cl/index.php/LM/article/view/49254>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5a ed.). Sage Publications.
- Ezcurra, A. M. (2019). Educación superior: una masificación que incluye y desigual. In A. M. Ezcurra (coord.), *Derecho a la educación. Expansión y desigualdad: tendencias y políticas en Argentina y América Latina* (pp. 21-52). EDUNTREF.
- Fleiss, J. L., Levin, B., & Cho Paik, M. (2003). The Measurement of Interrater Agreement. In *Statistical Methods for Rates and Proportions* (pp. 598-626). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0471445428.ch18>
- Gallardo, G., Goñi, F., Sanhueza, M., & Cruz, M. S. (2019). Transición Secundaria-Educación Superior: Desafíos para los estudiantes, desafíos para las instituciones. *Educación Superior Inclusiva*. CINDA.
- Hamui-Sutton, A., & Varela-Ruiz, M. (2013). La técnica de grupos focales. *Investigación en Educación Médica*, 2(5), 55-60. <http://riem.facmed.unam.mx/index.php/riem/article/view/451>
- Ivemark, B., & Ambrose, A. (2021). Habitus Adaptation and First-Generation University Students' Adjustment to Higher Education: A Life Course Perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 94(3), 191-207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211017060>
- Levitt, H. M. (2019). *Reporting Qualitative Research in Psychology: How to Meet APA Style Journal Article Reporting Standards* (revised edition). APA.
- Lillis, T. (2001). *Student writing. Access, regulation, desire*. Routledge.
- Martínez, M. E., Hernández, G., & Vélez, M. (2019). Las prácticas de escritura académica de estudiantes de psicología de dos universidades públicas. *Revista Electrónica Leer, Escribir y Descubrir*, 1(4), 1-11. <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/led/vol1/iss4/5>
- Martinić, R., & Urzúa Martínez, S. (2021). Experiencias estudiantiles en el primer año universitario. Una aproximación desde la sociología de la educación francesa. *Estudios pedagógicos (Valdivia)*, 47(2), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07052021000200161>
- Morandi, G., Ungaro, A. M., Arce, D., & Gallo, L. (2019). Los procesos de afiliación académica en el ingreso a la Universidad Pública: la experiencia estudiantil. *Actas De Periodismo y Comunicación*, 5(2). <https://www.perio.unlp.edu.ar/ojs/index.php/actas/article/view/5760>

- Natale, L., Stagnaro, D., Pérez, I., & Ríos, L. (2017). El Programa de Desarrollo de Habilidades de Lectura y Escritura a lo largo de la carrera de la Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Argentina. In L. Natale & D. Stagnaro (Eds.), *Alfabetización académica. Un camino hacia la inclusión en el nivel superior* (pp. 161-199). UNGS.
- Navarro, F. (2021). Más allá de la alfabetización académica: las funciones de la escritura en educación superior. *Revista Electrónica Leer, Escribir y Descubrir*, 1(9), 38-56. <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/led/vol1/iss9/4/>
- Navarro, F., & Colombi, M. C. (2022). Alfabetización académica y estudios del discurso. In C. López Ferrero, I. E. Carranza, & T. Van Dijk (Eds.), *Estudios del discurso / The Routledge Handbook of Spanish Language Discourse Studies* (pp. 495-509). Routledge.
- Navarro, F., Uribe Gajardo, F., Montes, S., Lovera Falcón, P., Mora Aguirre, B., Sologuren Insúa, E., Álvarez, M., Castro Acuña, C., & Vargas Pérez, S. (2021). Transformados por la escritura: Concepciones de estudiantes universitarios a través del currículum y de las etapas formativas. In N. Ávila Reyes (Ed.), *Multilingual Contributions to Writing Research. Toward an Equal Academic Exchange* (pp. 261-285). The WAC Clearinghouse. <https://doi.org/10.37514/INT-B.2021.1404.2.11>
- Nesi, H., & Gardner, S. (2012). *Genres across the Disciplines. Student Writing in Higher Education*. CUP.
- Poy, S. (2018). *Juventudes desiguales: oportunidades de integración social*. Educa.
- Prior, P., & Bilbro, R. (2012). Academic Enculturation: Developing Literate Practices and Disciplinary Identities. In M. Castelló & C. Donahue (Eds.), *University Writing: Selves and Texts in Academic Societies* (pp. 19-31). Emerald. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781780523873_003
- Romero, A., & Álvarez, M. (2019). Representaciones sociales de los estudiantes universitarios de grado sobre la escritura académica. *Íkala*, 24(1), 103-118. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.v24n01a05>
- Schleppegrell, M. J. (2004). *The Language of Schooling. A Functional Linguistics Perspective*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Street, B. (2005). *Literacies Across Educational Contexts: Mediating Learning and Teaching*. Caslon Pub.
- Velásquez, M., & Córdova, A. (2012). Cultura escrita en las licenciaturas en bioquímica y en arte: un acercamiento a través de las representaciones sociales de profesores y estudiantes. *Argos*, 29(57), 52-79.
- Wenger, E. (2001). *Comunidades de práctica: aprendizaje, significado e identidad*. Paidós. (1998)
- Zavala, V. (2011). La escritura académica y la agencia de los sujetos. *Cuadernos Comillas*, 1, 52-66.
- Zittoun, T. (2008). Learning through transitions: The role of institutions. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 23(2), 165-181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03172743>