




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Academic Writing: Perceptions and Evaluation of Students at a Chilean University.

La escritura académica: percepciones y evaluación de estudiantes de una universidad chilena.

Escrita acadêmica: percepções e avaliação de estudantes de uma universidade chilena

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ABSTRACT

Writing is considered a complex activity as it involves cognitive, social, psychological and emotional processes. The aim of this study is to establish a characterization of first-year students of three careers in a Chilean public university by identifying their initial writing skills and their perception of this process in the context of an initial academic literacy course. The methodology is of a mixed, exploratory, descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional, non-experimental type, through two instruments: a questionnaire of perception on writing practices and a diagnostic test. One of the main findings of the questionnaire revealed a low knowledge of written production, focused on form, poor mastery of the phases of writing and incipient experience in these practices of students in the last years of school. The test showed a low performance in written texts (basic initial and basic intermediate writer). This made it possible to characterize them as novice writers, with basic performance in terms of writing stages, textual dimensions and writing experience. This information is projected as an opportunity for the configuration of a pedagogical-didactic strategy proposal suitable for a literacy course in the first year of university.

RESUMEN

La escritura es considerada una actividad compleja pues involucra procesos cognitivos, sociales, psicológicos y emocionales. El estudio tiene como objetivo establecer una caracterización de los estudiantes de primer año de tres carreras de una universidad pública chilena mediante la identificación de sus habilidades escritas de entrada y la percepción que tienen sobre este proceso en el marco de un curso de alfabetización

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académica inicial. La metodología es de tipo mixta, exploratoria, descriptivo-correlacional, transversal, no experimental, a través de dos instrumentos: un cuestionario de percepción sobre prácticas de escritura y una prueba diagnóstica. Uno de los principales hallazgos del cuestionario reveló un bajo conocimiento en producción escrita, centrado en forma, escaso dominio de las fases de escritura e incipiente experiencia en dichas prácticas del alumnado en los últimos años del nivel escolar. La prueba arrojó un desempeño bajo en textos escritos (escritor básico inicial y básico intermedio). Ello permitió una caracterización de escritor novato, con desempeño básico en cuanto a las etapas escriturales, las dimensiones textuales y experiencia escritural. Esta información se proyecta como una oportunidad para la configuración de una propuesta estrategia pedagógico-didáctica adecuada para un curso de Alfabetización en el primer año universitario.

RESUMO

A escrita é considerada uma atividade complexa, pois envolve processos cognitivos, sociais, psicológicos e emocionais. O objetivo do estudo é estabelecer uma caracterização de alunos do primeiro ano de três cursos de uma universidade pública chilena, identificando suas habilidades de entrada na escrita e a percepção que eles têm desse processo no âmbito de um curso inicial de alfabetização acadêmica. A metodologia é mista, exploratória, descritiva-correlacional, transversal, não experimental, por meio de dois instrumentos: um questionário de percepção sobre práticas de escrita e um teste diagnóstico. Um dos principais resultados do questionário revelou um baixo conhecimento na produção escrita, centrada na forma, pouco domínio das fases da escrita e experiência incipiente nas referidas práticas dos alunos dos últimos anos do ciclo escolar. A prova apresentou baixo desempenho em textos escritos (escrita básica inicial e básica intermediária). Isso possibilitou caracterizar um escritor iniciante, com desempenho básico em termos de etapas da escrita, dimensões textuais e experiência de escrita. Essas informações são projetadas como uma oportunidade para configurar uma proposta de estratégia didático-pedagógica adequada para um curso de Alfabetização no primeiro ano da universidade.

Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chilean Ministry of Education decided to develop and apply a curricular prioritization to the school system for the years 2020 - 2025 (MINEDUC, 2023a). Regarding writing, this prioritization indicates that the production of texts should be worked on in a coherent and cohesive manner, paying attention to the topic, stages, genre, as well as their writing purposes (MINEDUC, 2023b), so it is interesting to know the writing skills of students leaving school with this prioritized context, and thus, to show their strengths and weaknesses when facing the writing of texts. Regarding the specialized literature, there is already research that shows that students entering Higher Education (HE) should have the optimal writing skills to develop and successfully complete the tasks that will be entrusted to them in their discipline, but in practice this is not the case because writers, as issuers of a written discourse, do not put themselves in the place of the receiver, for example (Carlino, 2004; Rodríguez & García, 2015; Errázuriz, *et al.*, 2015). Taking this into consideration, it is necessary to verify this statement, and if it is not completely fulfilled, to develop strategies that are directly related to the generation of teaching-learning activities that are able to provide students with the writing strategies of a university context.

Thus, the task of writing at the university implies the acquisition of writing skills, a process that should be generated gradually, from undergraduate to graduate studies, understanding the context in which the Chilean student body is inserted. Some of these skills are to present an original and own voice; to know how to efficiently implement intertextuality; and finally, to carry out a work of construction by phases,

paying attention to the information that unfolds in them (Carlino, 2003, 2004, 2005a and 2013; Carrasco et al., 2013; Cassany, 1988; Castelló, 2007a and 2007b; Castro and Sánchez, 2013; Finocchio, 2009; Vieiro et al., 1997; Teberosky, 2007). The purpose of the above is that students can move from saying to transforming knowledge (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1992), so it is imperative that this process be taught and modeled systematically.

Under this scenario, several Chilean and international universities have decided to incorporate in their curricula Academic Literacy (AL) and professional courses, aimed at teaching strategies of academic discursive practices (Bazerman, 2012; Castelló, *et al.* 2012; Natale, 2013a; Castelló, 2014; Navarro, 2017; 2018; 2021). In the case of the Universidad de Playa Ancha, two courses of 64 semester hours are established, called Academic Communication Skills Workshop in which the researchers teach. Initial courses that promote the processes of enculturation of disciplinary codes.

In this scenario, the question that guides this research is: how to establish a characterization of first year students of three careers in a Chilean public university by identifying their entry written skills and the perception they have about this process in the framework of an initial academic literacy course? This question is especially valuable for the new configurations of university students given the prioritized curriculum.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to establish a characterization of first year students of three careers of a Chilean public university by identifying their entry written skills and the perception they have about this process in the framework of an initial academic literacy course. The methodology is of a mixed, descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional, non-experimental nature where 58 argumentative texts belonging to a diagnostic test applied to students who entered the university in 2022 are analyzed, and in addition, a questionnaire related to their previous experiences in writing is analyzed.

This article is organized as follows: to begin with, the study is contextualized from the perspective of OA and writing. Then, the methodology used is presented, as well as a description of the instruments. Next, the results and their discussion are presented in the light of the theoretical-conceptual proposal. Finally, some final reflections are offered.

Academic Literacy (AL)

AL is understood as "the set of notions and strategies necessary to participate in the discursive culture of the disciplines, as well as in the activities of production and analysis of texts required to learn at the university" (Carlino, 2003, p. 409). Therefore, university students require learning the discursive practices of the discipline so that they can access and participate in it. This learning process is complex, arduous and is achieved throughout university education, since it implies that students learn to read and produce texts of a complex density, a specialized lexicon and genres of the disciplines in which the topics of the student's areas of education are addressed. In order to achieve its development, the culture of the specific area of knowledge must be taught, that is, the conventions regarding how to write or read in each of them must be made known, since each discipline has its own modes of interaction and communication (Carlino, 2003).

In HE, a large part of the formative activities developed are linked to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge. This is achieved through interaction with teachers, peers and content through various exercises that seek to rework topics and build new knowledge. In this learning process, the aim is not only to learn the disciplinary topics and their conceptualization, but also to acquire the specific ways that disciplines have of communicating knowledge, recreating it and building new versions of it (Navarro, 2021; Miras and Solé, 2007). In other words, in university education, students are expected to develop diverse notions and strategies that will allow them to be part of the discursive culture of a disciplinary area. From this, they will be able to transmit their acquired knowledge through a scientific and specialized language, respecting the conventions and characteristics that differentiate them from other fields. Therefore, being part of the disciplinary discursive culture means decoding and using its language. As Cassany (2006, p. 12) puts it, "learning a discipline necessarily requires knowing how to process its discourses".

In the last two decades, several Chilean universities and those of other Latin American countries have curricularly assumed the teaching of scientific-academic and professional reading, writing and orality through specialized courses (Sologuren, *et al.*, 2019). Such courses tend to be compulsory, massive and common

to all undergraduate programs (Navarro, 2018) and aim to promote the literate practices of the discipline to students, and in this way, encourage a work by competencies, giving the student the tools to be able to perform in various real contexts (Herrera *et al.*, 2020).

Writing and its teaching at the university

Written expression, a complex cognitive skill, has led to the emergence of different theoretical models. For this study, we adhere to the cognitive model of Flower and Hayes (1981) and the model of Scardamalia and Bereiter (1987), which distinguishes the cognitive processing of novice and expert writers. Also, the Didactext Group's model of written production with a sociocognitive, linguistic, and didactic framework is considered (Didactext, 2015). The Didactext Group's vision integrates movements such as Writing in the Disciplines (WID) (Bazerman *et al.* 2005; 2016); Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) whose successful developments in HE are initiatives of more than five decades in academic settings in mainly Anglophone and Francophone countries (Bazerman, 2012). It also incorporates movements such as Academic Writing; Writing to Learn (Emig, 1971); and Scaffolding Academic Literacy (Rose *et al.* 2003). All of the above: "conceive of writing as an optimal tool for the development of thinking and entry into academic discursive communities" (Didactext, 2015, p. 221).

In writing, students put into practice cognitive skills and knowledge of the language, as well as text composition strategies (Cassany, 1988). The management of the linguistic code requires the subject to know the grammar of a language, the elements and mechanisms of coherence and cohesion, the lexicon and register. Also, the act of writing necessarily involves higher order cognitive processes such as the selection and analysis of information, the planning of the text structure, the elaboration of ideas, among other operations (Cassany, 2006), as well as the critical revision and editing of the written text.

Therefore, writing is conceived as a process by which knowledge is not only communicated but can be transformed based on an analysis of what is to be said with the text and to whom it is to be said (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Thus, writing is considered a social and situated act, a linguistic and cognitive act, where the writing subject applies a series of strategies of his/her linguistic and thematic knowledge to a specific writing situation (Didactext, 2015; Tarullo and Martino, 2019).

The writing processes in HE impose a series of demands on students, for example, they need to synthesize and organize information from multiple sources through the preparation of summaries or reviews; they must cite and discuss the bibliography; build their own authorial voice, among other demands. However, research has evidenced that students tend to repeat content from each source in their respective papers without an analysis or organization of the content (Sologuren *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, writing becomes a key practice in university education as a main access to disciplinary culture. Through writing, the genres of the disciplines are also learned (Navarro, 2018), deploying a series of cognitive, metacognitive, communicative and self-regulatory processes and skills, as well as critical academic habits (Ezcurra, 2011).

Regarding difficulties in writing, Carlino (2004) refers to four problems that influence the written production of university students: first, the difficulty in writing considering the reader to whom the text is addressed; second, the low use of the epistemic potential of writing; third, the tendency to review the superficial aspects of the text (form) and not to modify the ideas (content); and fourth, the postponement of the moment of the beginning of the writing process.

Rodríguez and García (2015), on the other hand, indicate that writing difficulties in student teachers are located in the three moments of the writing process: before, during and after writing:

- For the macroprocess, before writing, four problems are pointed out: first, the lack of clarity in the establishment of the objectives that guide writing, including the determination of the reader of the text; second, the lack of knowledge about academic discursive genres and their characteristics; third, the lack of planning of writing; fourth, the affective or emotional aspects linked to the writing task, such as personal insecurity, motivation, among others.
- In the macro-process, during the writing process, the problems are related to the difficulty in presenting different positions in the text; the configuration of an authorial voice of his own (to emit his voice based on what he has written); and the difficulty of presenting the text in a different way.

The following are some of the reasons for this: the lack of a scientific language specific to the discipline; the lack of evidence or support for the information written (arguments); and the absence of discursive strategies to conclude the text.

- In the macro-process, after writing, the problems are: the rush to deliver the text (disseminate it) without a thorough revision; the absence of criteria or dimensions to guide the revision of the text and contribute to an improved version of it; and the limited capacity to incorporate the comments or feedback of the reviewers or evaluators of the text.

In sum, writing is a complex activity, with interdependent processes and operations, which is linked to perceptions about the writing process (Vine-Jara, 2020). In the following, the notion of perception is presented in order to understand the students' responses in the writing experiences questionnaire.

Writer profiles and perceptions about writing

An individual who has already spent several years performing writing tasks has developed a series of routines, techniques, activities, and attitudes that are linked to this task, which gives him/her a certain profile that configures him/her as a writer (Castelló, 2007a). Castelló (2007a) takes the proposal of Creme and Lea (2000) who suggest four profiles based on reflections gathered on the way of approaching the writing of a text: the diver writer, the patched-up writer, the writer who conceives the great plan and the architect writer. Each profile has a way of approaching the task of writing, each with its advantages and disadvantages.

The concept of 'writer profile' is related more than to the individual writing style to the mastery of scientific-academic writing possessed by the writing subjects. The term is then linked to the categories of 'novice' (or beginner) and 'expert', even considering that the sample are not expert writers, in the full sense. This concept makes it possible to account for the aspects that shape academic identity, where cognitive and attitudinal components are present, both towards oneself and towards the other members of the community of practice (Padilla, 2020). There are several studies that use the notion of writer's profile, where this concept is reviewed in terms of various components of written production. For example, Padilla and López (2019) present an investigation on the writing of a paper in first-year students of an Argentine public university and establish how these writers operate with the written comments of their teachers and peers, in the collaborative revision processes. Thus, the writing profile is configured on this basis, recognizing between novice and expert writers. Also, Padilla (2020) in his study on graduate students' writing in the humanistic area of northwestern Argentina, reveals a characterization of students among novice writers, writers in transition and more expert writers based on academic argumentation, participatory appropriation and impact of collaborative review.

For the construction of a writer's profile, the previous experience of the subject who writes must be considered, which is why it is necessary to take into account the perception of his or her own performance as a writer. Perception, a concept studied from psychology, is defined as:

The cognitive process of consciousness that consists of the recognition, interpretation and significance for the elaboration of judgments about the sensations obtained from the physical and social environment, in which other psychic processes intervene, among which are learning, memory and symbolization (Vargas, 1994, p. 48).

According to this definition, perception influences our attitudes and these in turn affect our behavior. In the words of Vargas (1994), perception "brings into play ideological and cultural references that reproduce and explain reality and are applied to the different daily experiences to order and transform them" (p. 49). Therefore, perceptions influence and guide people's actions or behaviors. Therefore, such mental process that students have about their school writing experiences can influence their writing practices in higher education (Cuevas-Solar & Arancibia, 2020).

It should be noted that perceptions are considered as a cognitive process that recognizes, interprets and signifies in order to elaborate a judgment in relation to the stimulus obtained from the environment. In addition, they depend on the ordering, classification and elaboration of categories that are compared with the stimuli that the subject receives. Therefore, through them new experiences can be identified, transforming them into recognizable and understandable events (Vargas, 1994; Cuevas-Solar and Arancibia, 2020). Therefore, knowing the students' perceptions about their writing experiences can provide knowledge about this practice and serve as a basis for actions aimed at qualifying the practices that were developed in the school stage (Chois-Lenis, *et al.*, 2017).

Methodological framework

This research has a mixed methodology, descriptive-correlational in nature. In turn, it is transversal, non-experimental, descriptive, inductive, fundamental considering that elements developed at a specific moment will be analyzed, such as the application of the scriptural diagnosis to 58 students (Law, 22; Psychology, 21 and Kindergarten Education, 15) of a population of 83, and its relationship with another variable is identified, such as the criteria established in an analytical rubric of scriptural evaluation. Likewise, the answers given by the students in the questionnaire applied by the researchers are described. In this sense, there is no manipulation of variables since only "phenomena are observed in their environment to later analyze them" (Cubo de Severino *et al.*, 2014, p. 129), these phenomena correspond to the texts produced by the students in their initial stage of higher academic instruction as well as the application of the questionnaire during the beginning of the first semester 2022. Consequently, it is possible to identify the following phases:

Phase 1. Bibliographic search: We searched for relevant information related to academic literacy, teaching writing at the university, characterization of novice writers and student perception of writing.

Phase 2. Design of instruments: Two instruments were designed: the writing perception questionnaire and the diagnostic evaluation of written production. The purpose of the first instrument is to identify the students' perceptions of their previous experiences in relation to the writing they developed during their school years, as well as the support strategies used by their teachers. This instrument was submitted for validation by experts (Escobar and Cuervo, 2008), who reviewed the representativeness and relevance of the items and their relationship with the purpose proposed for this research. It consisted of eight questions: open and closed with response options where one or more options had to be marked, depending on the type of question. The topics of the closed questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Types of questions and topics consulted in the questionnaire.*

Type of question	Topics
Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual genres produced in the school stage. • Number of written texts during the period 2020-2021. • Type of accompaniment by the teacher. • Degree of preparation for writing a text in college and its rationale. • Performance in writing texts.

Source: Own preparation.

The second instrument, the diagnostic evaluation, had the objective of collecting the writing obtained in a real classroom context, within the framework of an initial literacy course, in order to learn about the written text production skills of first-year students in three careers at a public university in the region of Valparaíso. The writing practice was based on the presentation of two problematic cases, from which they had to select one and develop an argumentative text evidencing their own opinion.

At the same time, a table was attached to remind them that texts of this type are structured around a thesis and supporting arguments, as well as counterarguments and a conclusion. Following this line, the analytical rubric was prepared with five dimensions to be evaluated (Table 2). The stimulus and rubric counted on expert judgment in accordance with the proposed subject matter (Galicía Alarcón, *et al.* 2017) and a piloting phase. The following scores are assigned for the four levels of achievement: 1 point, not achieved (lowest level); 2 points, deficient; 3 points, moderately achieved; and 4 points, achieved (highest level); with a total of 20 points.

Table 2. Dimensions of the analytical rubric of the diagnostic writing assessment and their associated maximum score.

Dimensions	Description	Maximum score Level achieved
Discursive genre	Element focused on the mastery of textual superstructure, theories, arguments and counterarguments.	4
Consistency	Hierarchical order of the ideas, presenting one of them for each paragraph.	4
Cohesion	Evaluates the constitution of thematic unity in the text, as well as the anaphoric elements, relationships between ideas and adequate use of deictics.	4
Regulations	It focuses on respecting spelling rules in the use of letters, capitalization and punctuation.	4
Adequacy	It measures a varied and precise lexicon in accordance with the communicative situation.	4

Source: Own preparation adapted from Cassany (2009).

Phase 3. Application: The questionnaire was applied to the students through *Google Forms* during one of the first weeks of the Communicative Skills I course of the first semester of the year 2022. Subsequently, the writing diagnosis was applied. The researchers fulfilled the task of supervising both instances.

Phase 4. Analysis: The closed questions of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively, that is, the closed questions were grouped and segmented the options marked by the students in terms of textual typologies produced in the school stage, number of texts written in 2020 and 2021, type of accompaniment by the teacher, degree of preparation to face a text and how they felt about their performance in the writing task. Subsequently, percentages were used in order to identify the differences between items and careers in the study. As for the open-ended questions, they were analyzed qualitatively through grounded theory, i.e., they were constructed based on the data obtained. This with the purpose of identifying the processes through the construction of theory from the data, relieving the constant link with the experience in which it arises and the theoretical framework of the researcher (Jiménez-Fontana *et al.*, 2016). To this end, emerging categories were identified: strengths for text production, weaknesses for text production and the foundations of the degree of preparation for writing a text in college (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Tree with the categories that emerged from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire applied to the following respondents



Source: Own preparation.

students

Regarding the writing diagnosis, the texts written by the students were analyzed manually by the researchers using the analytical rubric designed (Table 2) and going through correction and calibration processes (Bitran, *et al.* 2009). This rubric made it possible to measure student performance in four dimensions of writing as indicated by Cassany (2009): coherence, cohesion, normative and appropriateness. In turn, and given the characteristics of the research, it was decided to add a fifth category, discursive genre. In addition to these five dimensions, all the essays were evaluated holistically. After reviewing the texts, and taking into account the scores achieved by each student, four levels can be described: unsatisfactory writer, initial basic, intermediate basic and outstanding (Table 3).

With the results obtained from both instruments, we were able to characterize the previous writing experiences and the writing skills in which the participants presented greater and lesser mastery.

Table 3. *Writer's levels of the writing diagnosis*

Featured Writer	Basic writer intermediate	Basic entry-level writer	Unsatisfactory writer
The student who is at this level:	The student who is at this level:	The student who is at this level:	The student who is at this level:
Master the textual superstructure evidencing thesis, arguments and a counterargument.	Produces a text respecting textual superstructure and line of argument but does not include counterargumentation.	Produces a text evidencing an opinion but no line of argument to support it.	Produces a text that does not respect the textual superstructure of the discursive genre academic essay.
Organizes ideas hierarchically, presenting a text only with relevant information and developing one idea per paragraph.	Presents some digressions in the preparation of your text, along with information that is irrelevant.	Presents minimal organization of ideas and without a clear logic to support it, it has several irrelevant ideas and the punctuation practically does not match the meaning.	Presents information in the text in a disjointed manner and preponderates irrelevant information.
Uses fluently the anaphoric procedures (pronominalization, lexical substitution, paraphrasing, etc.), lexical substitution, paraphrase, designative, ellipsis) and the relationships between ideas are made explicit by means of appropriate connectors.	Correctly employs the use of anaphoric elements and connectors typical of argumentative discourse, but shows little variety.	Connectors are used sparingly or poorly, and there is little variety in the use of anaphoric elements.	Use the resources of cohesion (connectors, markers, ellipsis, nominalizations, pronominalizations, etc.) in an inadequate manner or appear in excess; as well as several concordance errors.
Respect spelling rules in the use of letters, capitalization and punctuation.	Writes your text with some spelling problems (5 or less spelling problems (5 or less errors).	Presents several literal, accentual and punctuation spelling problems (between 6 and 10 errors).	Write the text with literal, punctuation or accentual spelling errors (more than 10 errors).
Uses a varied and precise vocabulary in accordance with the communicative situation (academic addressee).	It uses formal language, but does not satisfactorily achieve the depersonalization and objectivity that are features of academic writing.	Uses informal language or uses the first person singular or plural throughout the writing, not appropriate for academic writing.	Uses informal language, a little varied and everyday lexicon, not in accordance with the (formal) communicative situation.

Source: Own preparation.

Results and discussions

In accordance with our research objective, we will proceed first to present the information provided by the perception questionnaire on writing practices. Secondly, the results of the diagnostic test are presented, as well as the discussion of the results.

The findings of the analysis of the questionnaire applied to the student body, in terms of their perception, yielded the following information (Table 4):

Table 4. *Closed-ended questions perception questionnaire*

	<i>Law</i>	<i>Psychology</i>	<i>Kindergarten Education</i>
Textual genres produced during the school period			
Literary texts	9	13	8
Expository texts	1	0	3
Argumentative texts	11	7	2
Other types of texts	1	0	1
All of the above	0	1	1
Number of texts written during the period 2020-2021			
0 a 2	10	11	2
3 a 5	6	8	4
6 a 8	2	2	4
9 or more	4	0	5
Type of accompaniment by the teacher			
Classroom planning instances	2	2	1
Writing feedback from your teacher during the writing process.	3	4	4
Clear explanation of how to proceed in writing the text (topic, audience, length, format, among others).	7	7	7
Presentation of the evaluation criteria of the written	3	5	0
Writing feedback from your teacher upon completion of your writing.	3	2	1
Raising questions that made you write better (guiding the process)	2	1	0
Other activities	0	0	1
All of the above	2	0	1
Text writing performance			
I felt satisfied with my performance	13	3	8
I felt I could have done better	7	17	7
I felt dissatisfied	2	1	0
Degree of preparedness to write a text in the university and its foundation			
Prepared	11	8	10
Not prepared	11	13	5

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the textual genres produced during their school years, the survey of 58 students indicates that 51.7% of them wrote literary texts during their schooling. Specifically in Law, out of a total of 22 respondents, 50% of the students reported having written argumentative texts, which differs from the other careers if we consider that, on the one hand, in Psychology (out of a total of 21 respondents) only 33.3% reported having written argumentative texts; on the other hand, in Early Childhood Education (with 15 students surveyed) the percentage drops even more, since 13.3% mentioned having written this type of text. The above data are relevant when considering that in HE students must submit to the writing of diverse textual typologies such as: academic essays, reports and written tests that contain an argumentative and expository component. The production of these texts is directly related and linked to their previous practices, their literate conceptions and the discursive communities where they have been related scripturally (Camps, 2003), so having information about their previous experiences is essential to begin to make an overview of their previous knowledge in scriptural production.

In relation to the number of texts written during the period 2020-2021, only 15.5% of the total declared having written 9 or more texts; 13.7% between 6 and 8 texts; 39.6% between 0 and 2 and 31% between 3 and 5. At this point, it is important to remember that for the school period in which the respondents were in secondary education, the Chilean ministerial proposal put into practice the curricular prioritization of the contents to be worked on, so that although written production was contemplated in the subject of Language and Literature, paying attention to the stages, purpose, discursive genre, audience and theme (MINEDUC, 2023a), the written work in the classroom is not in accordance with the elements selected by MINEDUC as indispensable.

The type of support provided by the teacher for the writing process showed that although the students state that they have received some type of support for writing a text, this support is focused on the description of the writing task, since 36.2% state that they received a clear explanation of how to proceed with the writing of the text (topic, audience, length, format, among others). On the other hand, the percentage of planning instances decreases, since only 8.6% of the students declare having had this activity. For feedback during the process and after writing, the responses declared show a low percentage, only 5.1% report that the teacher raised questions to guide the process; 18.9% report having received some type of feedback during the writing of a text and 10.3% at the end of a piece of writing. A total of 13.7% stated that their teacher presented the evaluation criteria before the writing assignment. Although the objective of this study is not to investigate the teaching-learning processes of writing at the school stage, the data obtained in this dimension refer to the scarce accompaniment by the teacher throughout the writing production process. A vision of writing as a product is perceived, more linked to novice writers who do not usually use metacognitive strategies in their writing process and who limit themselves to the faithful reproduction of knowledge (White and Bruning, 2005), which is far from the ministerial proposal and the study texts, since writing is conceived focused on the process. This information constitutes an important fact and a challenge for the teaching of academic writing in schools and higher education (MINEDUC, 2023a).

Regarding the degree of preparation for writing a text at the university, 50% of the respondents say they feel prepared, while the remaining 50% are not prepared. The latter is related to the specialized literature that identifies the writing process as a complex activity in which information must be sought, in addition to the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to perform the task optimally. In turn, the writer is required to position him/herself as an active entity in making decisions in order to achieve his/her writing objective (Castelló, 2009).

The perception questionnaire showed that for writing performance, 53.4% of the students indicated that when they had to write a text in high school, they felt they could have done it better; 41.3% felt satisfied when they had to write a text and only 5.1% felt dissatisfied with their performance. Consequently, the majority of students perceive themselves as competent in writing, expressing their satisfaction with their writing and the process. This may be related to the lack of knowledge of the stages to be carried out for textual production, as well as the work and the view of writing only as a product.

From the systematization of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire applied to the students, the following categories emerge according to grounded theory (Jara Holliday, 2018): strengths for text production, weaknesses for text production, and the foundations of the degree of preparation to write

a text at the university (Figure 1). Recurrent elements emerge in each of these notions that interconnect with the others.

Regarding the strengths for the production of texts, the perceptions of the students of the three careers refer to some superficial aspects of writing such as the normative (spelling and punctuation), which Carlino (2004) points out as one of the problems of university students, the tendency to focus on the form rather than on the content.

- Informant 48, Law: "I consider that one of my strengths when writing is my good spelling and my writing which has been improving".
- Informant 12, Kindergarten: "the search for information in scientific sources".
- Informant 51, Psychology: "I have good spelling".

Other aspects referred to as strengths are its coherence and cohesion, formality, creativity, among the most important. Emphasis is placed on the writing and normative aspects. Castelló (2007) points out that beginning writers tend to focus their correction on aspects they consider important, such as spelling.

Regarding weaknesses in the production of texts, students perceive as a difficulty aspects of the normative dimension such as the lack of knowledge in the use of punctuation marks and accents:

- Informant 10, Psychology: "Spelling and not knowing very clearly where periods and commas should go," as well as difficulties with spelling rules."
- Informant 11, Kindergarten Education: "Sometimes I get confused in one word or another if it goes with s, c or z".
- Informant 14, Kindergarten Education: "My weaknesses are undoubtedly spelling mistakes, at this point I still find it difficult to use spelling and grammar correctly".

Few students refer as weaknesses problems related to the way in which they begin their writings. Following Castelló's (2007) ideas, students who express this weakness may not be planning adequately for complex expository or argumentative texts that may pose a discursive challenge to themselves.

- Informant 2, Right: "I have a hard time starting to write."

With respect to the fundamentals of the degree of preparation for writing a text at the university, in general, the perceptions declared by the informants show a scarce knowledge and mastery of the process of written production (planning, textualization, revision, consideration of the reader, feedback from the teacher, among others), since they do not refer to these aspects as reasons why they feel prepared, nor as aspects to consolidate if they do not feel prepared for written production. Previously, in the results of the closed questions it was evident that the stages of planning, textualization and revision of writing are instances that teachers during the pandemic have not favored, both Castelló (2007) and other authors agree that the application of their own strategies to self-regulate the writing process is relevant to carry out the writing task with confidence.

The students who perceive themselves as prepared indicated, mainly, three types of reasons: first, for having had some preparation in a workshop or course:

- Informant 35, Psychology career: "I feel prepared because I had a predominance in communicative and differentiated language and specialized writing workshops that helped me to prepare myself when writing reports or essays".

Second, by their own ability to search for available information online or otherwise:

- Informant 3, Law career: "[...] if I had any doubt, I could look it up to make an essay that fits the level they ask for".

Third, by its own capacity according to its accumulated experience:

- Informant 48, Early Childhood Education major: "I have experience writing this type of text, so I find it easy and entertaining".

The students' answers only refer to the experience in workshops or accumulated over time or their ability to search for information as reasons why they perceive themselves well prepared to face the task of writing. But none of them name aspects, strategies or skills related to any of the four writing competencies, such as those pointed out by Castelló (2009) and which would be essential for a writer at university: having developed the ability to select, organize, integrate and transform information from different sources; the ability to recognize writing as a rhetorical problem and self-regulate the process involved in this activity; being aware of the social and dialogic dimension of the task of writing; the ability to recognize the specialized audience to which one writes (the scientific community) and to write from the conventions of the same discipline.

On the other hand, students who perceive that they do not feel prepared to write a text note as a weakness the use of elements that should be worked on throughout their school years, such as the correct use of the orthographic rules of Spanish. In addition, it is possible to mention that there is no work on writing as a process if we consider that students do not use the planning phase to begin their writing task (Rodríguez & García, 2015). Three types of reasons are indicated: first, due to a feeling of insecurity:

- Informant 10, law student: "I don't feel completely prepared, since in school I felt a little insecure when writing, so now I feel more pressure and more difficulty since the demands are greater".

Secondly, the perceived need for knowledge:

- Informant 50, Kindergarten: "Because I need more knowledge".

Third, they indicate a lack of experience in written production at the school stage:

- Informant 26, Psychology major: "Because during my academic education they didn't make me write texts, so I wouldn't know how to write one correctly".

This situation may be related to the low writing competence and the scarce writing experiences that lead to students graduating from high school not being able to be writers who carry out a metacognitive process that allows them to transform knowledge, they are only reproducers of this same knowledge who fail to adapt the content to an objective and write without considering their receiver who in the university will be an expert in the disciplinary area (Errázuriz *et al.*, 2015, Carlino, 2004; Rodríguez and García, 2015).

In summary, the three emergent categories (open-ended questions of the questionnaire) of this study prove to be closely related to each other, allowing us to observe how they perceive the writing practice they have had.

The questionnaire applied in this study to learn about the students' perceptions of writing is a relevant input to broaden the view on how to improve their performance. Knowing their previous experiences in this area, the configuration they give it, how it was worked on at school, among others, contributes to the extent that as teachers and training actors we can generate actions to produce a conceptual change (Errázuriz, 2017).

In relation to the students' writing performance through the applied diagnosis, the results indicate a decreased level, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Number of students evaluated*

Total corpus	Attendance: 83 (100%) Average score: 5.6 points (37.3% achievement)	Selected sample: 58 (69,8%) Standard deviation: 2.28
Degrees		
Law	Attendance: 26 (100%) Average score: 6.6 points (44%)	Selected sample: 22 Standard deviation: 1.59

Psychology	Attendance: 29 Average score: 7.6 points (50.6% achievement)	Selected sample: 21 Standard deviation: 1.49
Education Kindergarten	In attendance: 24 Average score: 5.5 points (36.6%)	Selected sample: 15 Standard deviation: 1.06

Source: Own elaboration.

Of the 83 texts written by the students, only 58 textual productions were considered, since one exclusion criterion was having attended school in 2020 and 2021. From this corpus, which corresponds to 69.8%, an average score of 5.6 out of a total of 20 points was obtained in the diagnostic test, which is equivalent to 37.3% of achievement and a standard deviation of 2.28.

In particular, the Law program had an achievement percentage of 44%, which corresponds to 6.6 points, while the standard deviation is 1.59. As for Psychology, it is possible to point out that they obtained a percentage of achievement of 50.6%, which corresponds to 7.6 points and a standard deviation of 1.49. In Early Childhood Education, they have 36.6% achievement with 5.5 points and a standard deviation of 1.06 (Table 5). Most of the students are at a basic or initial level of achievement and some of them at an intermediate level as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Overall behavior and associated writer's profile

Score by level	%	Level of achievement associated with type writer's	Law	Psychology	EPA	Total students
11,9- 15	80%-100%	Outstanding Writer (Achieved)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7,9 -11, 8	53% - 79%	Intermediate Basic Writer (Intermediate)	6 (27 %)	17 (80,9%)	1 (6,6%)	24 (41,3%)
4,0 - 7,8	27% - 52%	Basic Beginning Writer (Initial)	16 (72,7%)	4 (19%)	14 (93,3%)	34 (58,6)
0- 3,9	0- 26%	Unsatisfactory writer (Deficient)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of achievement levels, four types can be characterized: outstanding writer, intermediate basic, initial basic and unsatisfactory (Table 3). As outstanding writers (achieved) are identified those students who achieved a score of 11.9 to 15 points in the evaluation of their diagnostic test, which is equivalent to 80% - 100% achievement. In the present investigation, 0 students achieved this category (Table 6).

In turn, intermediate basic writers (intermediate) are those who obtained from 7.9 to 11.8 points, which corresponds to 53% to 79% achievement. In this research, 24 students achieved this category, which corresponds to 41.3% of the sample.

Regarding the initial basic writers (initial), it can be mentioned that they achieved from 4.0 to 7.8 points, which corresponds to 27% - 52% of achievement. Some 58.6% of the participants belong to this category, which is equivalent to 34 students.

Finally, unsatisfactory (deficient) writers are those who obtained a score of 0 to 3.9, as well as 0% to 26% achievement. In this study, none of the participants met these characteristics. In summary, the profile of the associated writer by career can be seen in Table 6, and the careers fluctuate mostly in the level of achievement: intermediate basic writer and initial basic writer. However, with respect to the performance obtained by the students in each dimension, the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the diagnostic evaluation in each one of the dimensions

	Discursive genre	Consistency	Cohesion	Regulations	Adequacy
Law	1.8 points	1.4 points	1.3 points	1.0 points	1.2 points
Psychology	0.8 points	1.4 points	1.4 points	1.9 points	2.1 points
Kindergarten Education	0.9 points	1.1 points	1.0 points	0.9 points	1.5 points
Average	1.2 points	1.3 points	1.2 points	1.3 points	1.6 points

Source: Own elaboration.

The results show that the students have not yet become familiar with the basic aspects needed to perform in academic and highly specialized contexts of written production, as is the case of the University. As can be seen, the category Adequacy is the one with the highest average score (1.6 out of 4 points), while Coherence and Normative are with 1.3 points. The categories of Discursive Genre and Cohesion have the lowest scores with 1.2 points.

Specifically, regarding the category Discursive Genre, the average result was 1.2 out of an expected maximum of 4 points, this item is related to the writer's ability to structure a text according to the elements of argumentation, thesis, arguments, counterarguments. It can be evidenced in Table 7 that this is the lowest result together with Cohesion, which could be related to the low number of texts that students reported writing during 2020 and 2021, considering that 39.6% reported having written between 0 to 2 texts and 31% between 3 to 5 texts. According to the Chilean ministerial proposal of curricular prioritization, written production was contemplated in the subject of Language and Literature, specifically the work on types of genres and writing stages, so this data reflects that there is not always a connection between the curriculum and school reality. That is to say, the students have not had extensive recent writing experiences and only 34.4% indicated having written argumentative texts during that period of time, therefore, the difficulty they had to give a clear superstructure to their texts is understandable.

Following this line in terms of the scriptural dimensions, Table 8 shows examples of the corpus in which the difficulties presented by the analyzed writers are made clear.

Table 8. Scores achieved in each of the dimensions evaluated in the diagnostic test

Dimension	Total score obtained	Example	Explanation
Discursive genre	1,2	"But if we look further in the personal case of this girl, I can also see a case of silence, since out of fear she did not go to her parents instantly and made her commit a very punishable accident. But if we talk about her case of recovery and for her sake, she should not return to the establishment and worry about her well-being, seek psychological help, professional help or guidance with what happened and lived, since it is not easy to have to live these unnecessary harassments by people who do not know how to act with their actions, since each problem has its beginning and yes, it is unfair that probably they have not taken drastic measures in everything that happened and to stop all that, both the harassment towards the student and the suicide attempt". (Informant 45, Kindergarten).	Although an argumentative construction and a thesis are evident, these elements are not clearly constructed. The argumentation introduced is incorporated in a disorderly manner through adversative connectors that are repeated in the paragraph. A mastery of the essay genre is not recognized because when considering the complete writing, the text lacks a prototypical rhetorical structure for the presentation of the topic, the thesis, the arguments and then a conclusion that reformulates the thesis with the purpose of reinforcing it.

Consistency	1,3	"Based on my opinion I can say that I totally disagree with the attitudes that Chilean inhabitants had towards illegal aliens." (Informant 16, Psychology).	The fragment corresponds to the first paragraph of the text, so the presentation of the topic is not noticed. Although it gives an account of the thesis, it begins with a verb in the first person singular, so there is no impersonalization of the text. In short, the discourse only presents an opinion, but without solid foundations, an element typical of an argumentative text.
Cohesion	1,2	"In relation to the harassment that happens constantly in educational establishments throughout the country, it is possible to say that it is a very worrying social problem" (Informant 7, Psychology).	It is possible to observe two errors in terms of syntactic construction and use of orational nexuses: first, the locution "in relation to" is used "in relation to (...)", so in this case the preposition is elided to give way to the use of another preposition and a definite article that acts as a determiner of harassment, namely, "a + el". Second, error in the construction of the preposition "al" as "a + el" is used, i.e., the contraction is not applied correctly. Both errors show a poor writing style that makes it difficult to read and present the textual sections of the argumentative constructions.
Regulations	1,3	In the cases of non-compliance with the law are manyyava by the cases of crime and public disorder by immigrants as well as the attacks produced by the demonstrators who also attacked families with children was the largest xenophobic attack to which the attacks should be for a punishment since the focus was to demonstrate not to attack with this the politicians should be in favor of the demonstrators x immigrants who want to arise in our country since for something they immigrated from their native country (Informant 21, Psychology).	The fragment shows errors in the use of orthographic and grammatical elements: absence of commas to embed information and to clarify elements that are listed; inadequate sentence construction where the canonical positioning of subject and predicate is not respected, together with their complements; use of an x to represent the preposition "por"; redundancy in the use of common nouns and adjectives that qualify situations of interest to the writer.
Adequacy	1,6	"On many occasions these types of situations are minimized or turned a deaf ear to until it gets out of control and a disgrace like the Columbine High School massacre occurs" (Informant 5, Law Ed.).	The example shows the use of expressions typical of an informal register: "deaf ears", "it gets out of control". These lexical preferences do not fit the formal situation of an academic writing evaluation, nor of an argumentative text.

Source: Own elaboration.

The examples presented in Table 8 show the most frequent shortcomings or problems in the corpus texts, namely: poor command of the essay genre, the exposition of the thesis in an unclear or weak manner, without the presentation of forms of validation. In the dimension of Textual Coherence, the errors are related to the absence of strategies for presenting the topic and maintaining the topic. In turn, there is a low knowledge of elements used in the written language for sentence construction and connectors (Cohesion), as well as little use of punctual, accentual and literal spelling resources (Normative) and incipient use of a formal register (Adequacy). The results presented indicate that school training in writing is not sufficient, or does not cover what refers to argumentative writing and the elements that should be used in its preparation.

According to the dimensions evaluated by the diagnostic test, it is possible to note that the five dimensions evaluated present low results (Tables 7 and 8). The dimensions Discursive Genre and Cohesion were the most descended and correspond to those that require the development of higher cognitive skills, therefore, they are more difficult to consolidate (Flotts et al, 2016; Errázuriz, 2017). The Discursive Genre dimension, essay, is considered in the curricula as part of the teaching in the writing process (MINEDUC, 2023b), so its low result may respond to causes such as problems associated with a reading comprehension level, minimal experience in the resolution of written assignments at this level and little development in instances where self-regulation processes are deployed when writing, for example, the lack in performing the mental exercise of retaking the writing task and checking the type of text that has been requested (Flotts et al., 2016).

Regarding the Cohesion dimension, we agree with the reasons given by Flotts *et al.* (2016) where it is indicated that students do not have consolidated awareness of morphosyntactic phenomena such as the maintenance of referents, the use of connectors and discourse markers (nexuses) that help the local sense of the ideas presented or the completeness of the text. Therefore, by not mastering the use of these mechanisms, the resulting cohesion process is not satisfactory. In other words, there is not a complete knowledge of the language.

Another aspect to highlight is related to the reliability in the measurement of writing skills; we agree with Bitran *et al.* (2009) on the sensitivity that may exist when it is the language that is subjected to interpretation. To overcome this barrier, the study planned instances of discussion, where aspects of the use of the analytical rubric were clarified; group corrections were made; moments of calibration were established to clarify differences in criteria among reviewers or to express inaccuracies in the application of the correction criteria; determination of typical examples; among other variables of the process. It should be noted that the above was carried out under equal conditions and the workload minimized the bias derived from 'fatigue' (Bitran, *et al.* 2009).

With the results obtained from both instruments, it can be indicated that the shortcomings to communicate in writing of the students of the three careers under study can be developed in an initial literacy course with writing instances founded on deliberate practice and timely *feedback* (Navarro, 2018; Sologuren *et al.*, 2019). Then, during the formative path they are instaurated in marked subjects as proposed in current writing movements (Didactext, 2015). In this regard, as postulated by Bitran *et al.* (2009), it is the responsibility of HEs to provide students with opportunities to overcome the written communication deficiencies they bring from secondary education. As well as providing new teachings related to academic and professional literacy.

Conclusions

In this article we proposed to answer the following question: how to establish a characterization of first-year students of three careers in a Chilean public university by identifying their initial written skills and the perception they have about this process in the framework of an initial academic literacy course? In order to provide an answer to this question, it was proposed as an objective to establish a characterization of first year students of three careers of a Chilean public university through the identification of their initial written skills and the perception they have about this process in the framework of an initial AL course.

The analysis of their perceptions about their writing experiences in the school formative cycle and the evaluation of their writing skills through a formal test, allow the researchers to obtain a concrete panorama of their notions and performance in writing, which makes possible the configuration of a proposal for a basal course of academic and disciplinary communication adjusted to the needs of the students.

Regarding the writing skills and knowledge declared in the perceptions, there are discrepancies with respect to the preparation declared by the respondents, considering that some feel prepared to write a text at university and others do not. The reasons given in this topic reveal a lack of knowledge and little mastery of the process of written production, in addition, it should be taken into account that they are students with little practical writing experience in their last years of schooling (period 2020-2021). Among the strengths they point out there is a relation of writing with aspects such as writing, normative, formality and creativity; and the weaknesses are focused on normative aspects such as spelling. The above reveals that students relate writing with superficial elements, without paying greater attention to the key components of this process, which agrees with what is postulated by Carlino (2004); Rodríguez and García (2015); Sologuren, et al. (2019) and Giraldo (2021). These topics are directly related to what was stated by the respondents regarding the support they received from their teachers, since it focuses on the explanation of the writing task to be performed and the presentation of the criteria to be evaluated, elements that are not directly related to the writing work as a process, nor does it pay attention to the elements of the textual genre.

The written texts analyzed allow us to determine that the participants are positioned at the intermediate basic writer level (41.3%) and at the initial basic level (56.8%). In other words, these are students who can write argumentative texts, but with various shortcomings linked to textual genre, formulation of their arguments and cohesion of their writings. On the other hand, it is not possible to categorize any student as an outstanding writer, that is, one who has a thorough knowledge of the writing stages and their characteristics.

Taking into consideration the above, it is possible to characterize the students of Law, Psychology and Kindergarten Education as writers who, although they are able to communicate in writing, specifically through an argumentative text, do not have the basic notions of the process that should be followed in the preparation of a text, namely: planning, textualization and revision. This is a group of writers who, on some occasions, fail to perceive their writing deficiencies because they consider themselves prepared and competent in the subject, but this vision only takes into account superficial elements of textual production such as spelling and regulations, for example.

With the information gathered, it is possible to mention that the configuration of a basic writing course should pay attention to the context of the task, the writing of different textual typologies and complexity, as well as the modeled and gradual instruction of the elements that guide writing (Didactext, 2003). In short, the following elements should be considered: reflection and search for information oriented to the given task as well as the activation of previous knowledge; organization of the ideas obtained in the previous step, through the preparation of an outline and the establishment of the writer's personal strategies; writing drafts of the text; and finally, the revision of the text paying attention to the topic, intention and target audience of the writing.

In turn, it is relevant to incorporate didactic strategies in the training of students around academic writing, so the course proposal must integrate: first, learning to write (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 2013; Flower, 1979; Marincovich, 2002), processual approach to learning writing and reading, where the notions of task representation (purposes, reader, genre, among others) and the application of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to approach the processes of academic communication are developed. Secondly, writing to learn (Carlino, 2005a, 2005b; Castelló, 2007a; Klein and Boscolo, 2016), that is, the epistemic value of writing and that promotes the knowledge of the genres that are read and written in the disciplinary community, as well as the approach to the topics of the area in which they are immersed and the appropriation of an academic and disciplinary voice. Thirdly, writing in the disciplines (Bazerman, 1988), which implies a conception of reading and writing as situated social practices that present rhetorical conventions unique to each community. Therefore, instances of analysis of the different discursive genres, of the technical register used for the co-construction of disciplinary knowledge and the discursive modes (exposition, argumentation, among others) to transmit and disseminate knowledge should be encouraged (Aguirre, 2023; Natale, 2013b; Núñez and Moreno, 2017).

It is concluded that this type of research is useful to move towards a design of materials conducive to the development of academic writing for a basal AL course (Gevehr et al., 2019). And the application of a questionnaire and test of writing production is planned for the completion of the course so that the impact of the designed learning resources can be evaluated.

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