

Exploring Student's Perception and Experiences of Challenges in Academic Writing: A Qualitative Study

Nadira Nasim^{1*} & Tahseen Raana²

¹Nursing Officer, Tertiary Care Hospital, Peshawar, Pakistan. ²Nursing Officer, Tertiary Care Hospital, Bannu, Pakistan.
Corresponding Author (Nadira Nasim) Email: naseem.ija:8@gmail.com*



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46431/MEJAST.2024.7306>

Copyright © 2024 Nadira Nasim & Tahseen Raana. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Article Received: 14 May 2024

Article Accepted: 19 July 2024

Article Published: 25 July 2024

ABSTRACT

Academic writing is a critical skill for nursing students, essential for effective communication, critical thinking, and evidence-based practice in healthcare settings. With advancements in healthcare technology and the increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice, nursing students must develop strong academic writing skills to navigate the complexities of healthcare documentation and contribute to the evolving body of nursing knowledge. However, little is known about the specific challenges faced by nursing students in this domain. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, this study investigates the multifaceted nature of challenges encountered by nursing students in academic writing.

Methodology: A qualitative study design is used at College of Nursing AFPGMI using purposive sampling; a sample of five MSN students was collected. Thematic analysis was done to get results.

Results: Findings reveal several key themes that highlight the complexities of nursing students' experiences. Language proficiency emerges as a significant challenge, with students struggling to master grammar, syntax, and academic vocabulary. Integration of evidence-based practices into writing presents difficulties, including identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings. Time management and workload pressures compound these challenges, as students balance academic assignments with clinical placements and other responsibilities.

Conclusion: Language proficiency surfaced as a significant challenge, with students grappling with grammar, vocabulary, and academic style. Integrating evidence-based practices into writing posed difficulties, highlighting the need for enhanced research skills and critical thinking. Time management and workload pressures compounded these challenges, underscoring the importance of effective planning and prioritization.

Keywords: Students perception; Experienced challenges; Academic writing; Time management; Language proficiency; Grammar difficulties; Academic vocabulary; Critical thinking; Integration; Evidenced base practices.

1. Introduction

In modern nursing, good writing is crucial for recording patient care, explaining clinical decisions, and sharing research. With new technology and a focus on evidence-based practice, nursing students need strong writing skills to handle complex healthcare records and add to nursing knowledge (Crisp & Taylor, 2019). Writing also helps develop critical thinking and prepares students for their future jobs (Kramer & Schmalenberg, 2017). However, nursing students face many challenges in learning to write well, including language issues, teaching methods, and healthcare-specific contexts. Language barriers are significant, especially for those whose first language is not English, making it hard to express complex healthcare ideas and follow academic writing rules (Davies, 2017).

Integrating evidence-based practice into writing is also a challenge for nursing students (Schönfelder et al., 2018). The fast-changing nature of healthcare means students must keep up with the latest evidence and best practices, which makes writing harder. Time constraints and heavy workloads from balancing school and clinical placements can be overwhelming, leading to stress and fatigue (Waldrop et al., 2020). This can make it difficult for students to spend enough time on their writing, affecting its quality.

The pressure and fear of making mistakes in nursing can cause students to feel insecure and hesitant about writing assignments (Bandura, 1997). This may prevent them from seeking feedback or taking risks in their writing, hindering their development. Writing is a key skill for nursing students, important for communication and

evidence-based practice. Understanding their challenges with writing helps educators provide better support. This review looks at recent research on nursing students' views and experiences with writing.

Nursing students often struggle with grammar, composition, and vocabulary, which affect how clear their writing is (Smith & Johnson, 2023). Adapting their writing to academic standards and using the right terminology can also be tough, delaying effective communication of complex ideas (Clark et al., 2024).

Combining research findings and understanding research methods are additional challenges that impact writing quality (Taylor & Brown, 2023). Many students feel self-doubt and fear of failure when writing (Jones & Robinson, 2023). Overcoming writer's block and building confidence are essential for dealing with these challenges (Brown et al., 2020). Limited access to writing support services and resources is another major barrier (Adams & Garcia, 2023). Using writing technology and seeking more support from teachers and peers can help improve writing skills (Taylor et al., 2022).

1.1. Objectives of study

(i) To identify the primary challenges that students perceive in academic writing, including specific difficulties in areas such as clarity, coherence, grammar, and citation practice.

(ii) To explore the emotional and psychological experiences associated with academic writing challenges, including feelings of frustration, anxiety, or confidence levels.

(iii) To investigate the strategies and coping mechanisms employed by students to overcome academic writing challenges, including seeking help from peers, instructors, or online resources, as well as self-directed learning practices.

(iv) To provide recommendations based on findings that can inform educational practices and support systems aimed at enhancing students' academic writing skills and overall academic success.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study design

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore nursing students' perceptions and experiences with academic writing challenges.

2.2. Study setting and duration

The study took place at the College of Nursing, Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute in Rawalpindi, from January 2024 to April 2024.

2.3. Recruitment

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, focusing on those with different levels of academic writing experience and proficiency.

2.4. Sample population

Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) students.

2.5. Sample size

Five MSN students.

2.6. Inclusion criteria

Students enrolled in the Master's in Nursing program, due to their advanced level of education.

2.7. Exclusion criteria

Undergraduate nursing students were excluded to narrow the study focus, as they have less experience with academic writing.

2.8. Ethical consideration

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before participating, all students received detailed information about the study's purpose and procedures. Informed oral and written consent was obtained from each participant, allowing them to participate voluntarily. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Identities were kept confidential using pseudonyms and codes. The study aimed to improve nursing education by understanding the challenges students face, benefiting the nursing community. The research team conducted the study honestly and transparently, adhering to ethical principles throughout.

2.9. Data collection

Purpose

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deep insights into the challenges master's nursing student's face in academic writing. Using open-ended questions, the researchers explored the participants' perspectives. These interviews, lasting 15 to 20 minutes, were conducted in person by the researchers.

Procedure

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to include master's nursing students from various backgrounds and experiences. After obtaining informed consent, the interviews were conducted in person due to logistical reasons.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview guide was created to delve into the participants' academic writing challenges. The questions were open-ended to allow for detailed responses. Example questions included:

Describe your experiences with academic writing during your master's program.

What specific challenges have you faced in academic writing, and how have you dealt with them?

Can you share any strategies or resources that have helped you overcome these challenges?

2.10. Data analysis

Thematic Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the participants' challenges in academic writing. Two researchers independently coded the interview transcripts to ensure reliability. Initial codes were generated from the data, and thematic patterns were identified through analysis and comparison. Themes were reviewed and refined to accurately reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Rigor

To enhance the study's rigor, two researchers independently conducted the thematic analysis.

3. Results

Demographic

Participant	Sex, age	Marital status	Professional Education	Clinical + teaching Experience (years)
Nursing Student 1	Female, 57 years	Married	Post RN BSc	16 +1
Nursing Student 2	Female, 42 years	Married	Post RN BSc	20+ 2
Nursing Student 3	Female 27 years	Married	Generic BSN	3+0
Nursing Student 4	Female 27 years	Married	Generic BSN	4+ 2
Nursing Student 5	Female 26 years	Unmarried	Generic BSN	2+0

Following themes emerged from data

Language Proficiency

1. Grammar and Procedure

Issues with mastering grammar rules, punctuation, and sentence structure, affecting writing clarity and coherence.

“English isn’t my first language, and sometimes, it’s hard to find the right words to explain medical concepts in my writing.”

2. Vocabulary and Terminology

Challenges in choosing the correct medical terms and academic vocabulary, hindering effective communication of complex ideas.

3. Sentence Fluency

Struggles with constructing clear, concise, and varied sentences, impacting text flow and readability.

“I often struggle with grammar and sentence structure, which makes my writing sound disjointed and less professional.”

4. Academic Style

Difficulties in adapting writing style to academic standards, including maintaining a formal tone and avoiding informal language.

5. Language Proficiency Support

Need for extra support such as language courses or writing workshops to improve language skills and overcome barriers.

Integration of Evidence-based Practices into Research Writing

1. Finding and evaluating evidence

Challenges in locating, critically assessing, and integrating relevant evidence from scholarly sources to support arguments.

“Finding relevant research articles and incorporating them into my assignments is overwhelming, especially when there’s so much information out there.”

2. Synthesizing Research Findings

Difficulties in cohesively synthesizing and summarizing research findings from various sources to strengthen arguments and conclusions.

3. Understanding Research Methodology

Struggles with understanding research methodologies and statistical analyses, affecting the interpretation and application of research findings.

4. Access to Evidence-based Resources

Need for better access to databases, journals, and other resources to facilitate research and improve academic writing quality.

Time Management and Workload

1. Balancing Academic and Clinical Obligations

Challenges in managing writing tasks alongside clinical placements and other responsibilities, leading to time constraints and workload pressures.

“Between clinical rotations and studying for exams, I barely have time to complete my writing assignments. It’s exhausting trying to juggle everything.”

2. Setting Priorities and Goals

Difficulties in prioritizing writing assignments and setting realistic goals to meet deadlines effectively.

3. Procrastination and Time Wasting

Struggles with procrastination and time-wasting behaviors, causing last-minute rushes to complete assignments.

“I always feel rushed when writing papers because there’s so much else going on. It’s hard to produce my best work under those conditions.”

4. Seeking Support and Collaboration

Importance of seeking support from peers, instructors, and advisors to manage workload and improve time management strategies.

Confidence and Self-efficacy

1. Overcoming Self-doubt and Fear

Challenges in overcoming self-doubt and fear of failure when approaching academic writing tasks.

“I always second-guess myself when writing assignments. I worry that my ideas aren’t good enough or that I’ll make a mistake.”

2. Building Writing Confidence

Strategies for building confidence in writing abilities through practice, feedback, and positive reinforcement.

3. Embracing Mistakes and Learning

Viewing mistakes as learning opportunities, fostering resilience and perseverance in academic writing.

“Sometimes I feel like I don’t belong in this program.”

4. Celebrating Achievements

Recognizing and celebrating small milestones in the writing process to boost morale and motivation.

Access to Writing Resources

1. Availability of Writing Support

Challenges related to the availability and accessibility of writing resources like writing centers, workshops, and online tutorials.

“I wish there were more resources available to help us with our writing. It’s frustrating not knowing where to turn for help when I’m struggling.”

2. Utilizing Writing Technology

Strategies for effectively using writing technologies and software tools for drafting, editing, and formatting academic papers.

3. Access to Library and Online Resources

Importance of access to library resources, databases, and online journals to support research and enhance academic writing quality.

4. Discussion

The qualitative study on nursing students' experiences with academic writing challenges provides important insights into this multifaceted issue in nursing education. Several key themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview data, highlighting various obstacles faced by students.

Language Proficiency was a significant theme, with students, especially non-native English speakers, struggling to articulate complex healthcare concepts and follow academic writing standards. This finding aligns with prior research that underscores the impact of language barriers on writing proficiency (Ozturgut & Bakir, 2020).

Integration of Evidence-based Practice was another major challenge. Students had difficulty synthesizing research literature and applying evidence to clinical scenarios, illustrating the challenge of translating theoretical knowledge into practice. This aligns with Schönfelder et al. (2018), who emphasize the need for support in integrating evidence-based practices into nursing education.

Time Management and Workload were pervasive issues, with students finding it hard to balance academic writing with clinical placements, exams, and other responsibilities. This mirrors findings by Waldrop et al. (2020), highlighting the demanding nature of nursing education and the importance of effective time management.

Confidence and Self-efficacy were crucial factors affecting students' engagement with writing tasks. Many students reported self-doubt and imposter syndrome, which is partly consistent with Smith and Jones (2023), who noted varying levels of confidence among students.

Access to Writing Support Resources was also identified as critical. Students expressed a need for more resources and personalized support to improve their writing skills, highlighting the importance of investing in writing support within nursing programs (Davies, 2017).

5. Conclusion

This study explored the complex challenges nursing students face in academic writing through thematic analysis of their perceptions and experiences. Key themes included language proficiency issues, difficulties integrating evidence-based practices, time management struggles, and varying levels of confidence and self-efficacy. Access to writing resources was also a significant factor.

To address these challenges, educators and institutions should adopt a holistic approach. Recommendations include developing language proficiency programs, integrating writing assignments across the curriculum, offering training in evidence-based practice, providing time management workshops, building writing confidence, and expanding access to writing support resources. Fostering a collaborative culture with constructive feedback can further empower students. These strategies can help equip nursing students with the skills and confidence needed for academic and professional success, ultimately improving patient care and advancing the nursing profession.

6. Future suggestions

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can enhance academic writing support for nursing students:

Develop programs tailored to nursing students, including language proficiency assessments, language classes, and writing workshops.

Incorporate writing tasks throughout the nursing curriculum to provide consistent practice and skill development.

Offer workshops, online modules, and peer mentoring to help students evaluate research literature, integrate evidence, and apply it in clinical scenarios.

Provide workshops and tools to help students balance writing assignments with clinical and academic responsibilities.

Create opportunities for constructive feedback and support through peer review groups, writing mentors, and faculty sessions.

Increase access to writing centers, peer tutoring programs, and online resources, ensuring they are easily accessible and culturally sensitive.

Encourage reflective writing to help students integrate theoretical knowledge with clinical experience, enhancing critical thinking and self-awareness.

7. Limitations

This study has several limitations. The use of purposive sampling and a small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants' responses might have been influenced by social desirability bias despite efforts to ensure confidentiality. The reliance on semi-structured interviews, while providing rich data, could be complemented by other methods like observations or document analysis for a more comprehensive understanding. The study's limited time frame and specific institutional context may also affect the transferability of the findings.

Future research should address these limitations by employing diverse sampling methods, multiple data collection techniques, and exploring different educational settings to enhance the validity and applicability of the findings.

Declarations

Source of Funding

This study did not receive any grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare having no competing interest with any party concerned during this publication.

Consent for Publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

References

Adams, E., & Garcia, M. (2023). Challenges in academic writing among nursing students: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45(2): 112–125. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20230214-02>.

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W H Freeman/Times Books/Henry Holt & Co.
- Brown, S., & Johnson, L. (2023). Exploring the experiences of nursing students in academic writing: A qualitative study. *Nurse Education Today*, 43(4): 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.03.001>.
- Clark, R., et al. (2024). Perceptions of academic writing challenges among nursing students: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 38(3): 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14457>.
- Crisp, J., & Taylor, C. (2019). *Potter and Perry's fundamentals of nursing (6th Ed.)*. Elsevier.
- Davies, K.A. (2017). Writing for publication: A guide for new authors. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 26(23–24): 3477–3484. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.13818>.
- Garcia, A., & Wang, J. (2022). Academic writing challenges and strategies among nursing students: A qualitative study. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 34(1): 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.nep.0000000000000479>.
- Kramer, M., & Schmalenberg, C. (2017). Excellence through evidence: The use of nursing research evidence in the Magnet Journey. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 47(1): 41–45. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nna.0000000000000445>.
- Miller, K., et al. (2024). Time management challenges in nursing education: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 30(2): 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.13263>.
- Ozturgut, O., & Bakir, E. (2020). Nursing students' perceptions of academic writing: A qualitative study. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 59(6): 331–335. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20200515-04>.
- Schönfelder, W., O'Brien, M., & Blažun Vošner, H. (2018). A mixed methods systematic review of the effects of three models of education on the quality and safety of nursing care. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 88: 53–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2018.08.011>.
- Smith, T., & Johnson, E. (2023). Language proficiency barriers in nursing students' academic writing. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 62(3): 183–188. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20230214-03>.
- Waldrop, J., Lindeke, L., Murray, T.A., & Sullivan, S. (2020). Time management: Clinical faculty experiences. *Nurse Educator*, 45(5): 270–273. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nne.0000000000000068>.