

An Investigation of the Relationship Between Nursing Students' Academic Writing Competence and Academic Literacy

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ABSTRACT

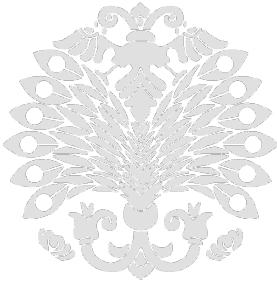
Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between academic writing competency and academic literacy levels among nursing students.

Methods: Data were collected between January 15 and March 15, 2023. The study population consisted of 505 undergraduate, master's, and doctoral nursing students enrolled at the Faculty of Nursing of a state Atatürk University. Data were gathered using a demographic information form, the Academic Writing Competency Scale, and the Academic Literacy Scale. Descriptive analyses and correlation tests were conducted with SPSS version 26.0.

Results: Among the participants, 74.4% were aged 18–24 years, 66.6% were female, 92.5% had not received prior academic writing training, 55% had no formal English education, and 76.2% reported reading books once per month. The mean score for the Academic Writing Competency Scale was 3.24 (SD=0.786), while the mean score for the Academic Literacy Scale was 3.60 (SD=0.433). A moderate positive correlation was identified between academic writing competency and academic literacy ($r=0.617$, $p<.001$).

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate a statistically significant moderate positive association between academic writing competency and academic literacy among nursing students. It is recommended that nursing curricula incorporate targeted interventions to enhance students' academic writing and literacy skills, which are critical for evidence-based practice

Keywords: Academic writing, academic literacy, nursing students, nursing education.



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Introduction

In higher education, students are expected to adapt to different ways of comprehending, analyzing, and organizing information while developing their academic skills. The capacity to read, interpret, and critically assess texts serves as a basis for understanding academic content and expressing this understanding effectively in spoken or written form. Therefore, academic writing and academic literacy are highly significant for students (Klarare et al., 2022). In particular, discipline-specific writing is associated with students' ability to fully engage in academic discourse. To communicate successfully within their own disciplines, students must learn to write fluently in that field (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012). Student writing is considered a crucial component of academic activity, and the ability to communicate both verbally and coherently is often emphasized as a key learning outcome of undergraduate education (Stewart et al., 2015). However, many students enter nursing programs without being aware of the academic rigor required for success (Sprenger, 2013). Moreover, some students believe that nursing, being a practice-based profession, leaves little room for writing, thereby underestimating the relevance of academic writing in nursing education (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Academic literacy can be considered within the scope of various literacies (Elkiran, 2021) and serves as a powerful tool for producing knowledge, transforming it, and contextualizing learning (Yang & Duan, 2023). This is because academic literacy emphasizes a pluralistic understanding rather than a single type (UNESCO, 2016). Academic literacy is the teaching process that can (or cannot) be applied to encourage students' access to the written cultures of different disciplines. Moreover, academic literacy is closely linked with competencies to evaluate digital content for knowledge production (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2023). At its core, academic literacy is based on science and reality (TDK, 2021) and is considered one of the fundamental competencies. It accelerates the learning process by enhancing students' abilities to understand and write texts in their respective fields (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2023). The concept of academic literacy has evolved through broad literacy research and has undergone definitional changes influenced by new linguistic approaches, studies, and perspectives. Today, with the increase in research, academic literacy mainly encompasses linguistics studies (Nizonkiza & Dyk, 2015). Academic literacy consists of components such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, technology use, and thinking habits, which support and enhance academic success. These are expected competencies for students entering or before

entering university, essentially constituting skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and technology use (ICAS, 2002).

Academic writing is defined in various ways, but generally refers to texts written for university courses. Academic texts include assignments such as research papers, presentations, term papers, analysis reports, informational texts, and discussion essays, all sharing similar purposes and principles (Kozener & Yenigül, 2020). Academic writing is a specialized writing style used at certain educational levels and beyond (Azizoğlu et al., 2019). One study found that various features of academic writing indicate students' writing quality (Plakans & Gebril, 2017). Academic writing is an area that requires examination regarding how it is acquired and developed (Deniz & Karagöl, 2017). In higher education, communication skills development is increasingly regarded as the responsibility of academic programs, and attention is focused on the most effective ways to achieve these goals.

Nurse written communication is as important as verbal communication. Miscommunication among nurses during documentation and clinical handovers is known to compromise patient safety (Hillege et al., 2014). As a result, inadequate writing and communication skills in nurses may put patient care at risk (Jefferies et al., 2012). Strong communication skills are therefore an essential component of professional nursing practice, helping to minimize errors in clinical environments and safeguard patient safety (Hillege et al., 2014). For these reasons, nursing students are expected to possess a certain level of academic writing competence and academic literacy throughout their education. It is thought that academic writing competence may be related to academic literacy, and this relationship requires interpretation. This research sought to explore the association between nursing students' levels of academic writing proficiency and their academic literacy.

Research Questions:

- What are the academic writing competence levels of nursing students?
- What is the level of academic literacy among nursing students?
- Is there a relationship between nursing students' academic writing competence levels and their academic literacy levels?

Methods

Type of the Study

This study employed a quantitative relational screening model to determine the relationship between nursing students' academic writing competence levels and academic literacy.

Place and Time of the Study

The study was conducted at the nursing faculty of a state Atatürk University between January 15 and March 15, 2023. Both undergraduate and graduate (master's and doctoral) nursing students were included.

Participants

The study population consisted of a total of 1,894 students, including 1,338 undergraduate nursing students, 405 master's students, and 151 doctoral students. A power analysis was conducted to determine the statistical adequacy of the sample size. Initially, the sample size was calculated based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Considering the possibility of data loss, incomplete responses, and the need to maintain parametric power in multivariate analyses, a larger sample was targeted. Ultimately, valid data were obtained from 505 participants. This number exceeded the calculated minimum sample size and was considered to enhance the statistical power of the study as well as the reliability of subgroup comparisons.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

Being enrolled in undergraduate or graduate (master's, doctoral) nursing education at the nursing faculty between January 15 and March 15, 2023,

Actively participating in the data collection process,

Being aged 18 years or older.

Exclusion criteria

Students who did not participate or withdrew during the study process,

Students who incompletely filled out data collection forms,

Students unable to participate in the data collection process due to health issues or other reasons.

Measures

Personal Information Form: Developed based on the literature (Demir & Deniz, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2021; Yalçın, 2016). The form consists of 10 questions designed to determine descriptive characteristics such as age, gender, education level, current academic year, previous academic writing training, duration of such training if applicable, and similar information.

Situated Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (SAWSES): Originally developed by Mitchell et al. (2021), this scale assesses students' confidence in their academic writing abilities. Its Turkish adaptation and validation were carried out by Tüfekçibaşı and Şahin (2022). The SAWSES consists of 16 items categorized into three subscales: fundamentals of writing (3 items), relational reflective writing (8 items), and creative identity (5 items). Responses are recorded on a 5-

point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Designed for use across various disciplines, the original scale demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values of 0.91 (total scale), 0.85 (fundamentals of writing), 0.88 (relational reflective writing), and 0.88 (creative identity) (Mitchell et al., 2021). In the present study, reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.927 for the total scale, 0.852 for fundamentals of writing, 0.876 for relational reflective writing, and 0.846 for creative identity.

Academic Literacy Scale: Created by Demir and Deniz (2020), this instrument consists of 23 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. It is structured around three dimensions: academic inclination, use of information, and academic processes. Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87 for the full scale, 0.84 for the first factor, 0.78 for the second, and 0.76 for the third. In this research, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be 0.893 overall, with 0.888 for Factor 1, 0.847 for Factor 2, and 0.75 for Factor 3. Total scores range between 23 and 115, where higher scores reflect greater academic literacy levels.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey method. The purpose of the study was explained to participants, and written informed consent was obtained electronically from nursing students who agreed to participate. The data collection tool was shared via the Google Forms platform, and students completed the survey at their convenience. To ensure data accuracy and prevent duplicate entries, the "limit to 1 response" option in Google Forms was activated, allowing each participant to submit the form only once. The survey took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) version 26.0. Descriptive statistics including frequency, mean, percentage distributions, and standard deviation were used. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the scales, and Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships between the scales. The interpretation of correlation coefficients followed the classification proposed by Dancey and Reidy (2004): very weak (0.00–0.25), weak (0.26–0.49), moderate (0.50–0.69), strong (0.70–0.89), and very strong (0.90–1.00).

Ethical Approval

Necessary written permissions were obtained from the Atatürk University Nursing Faculty Ethics Committee (Date: April 11, 2023, No: 2023-4/1 and the faculty where the research was conducted. Nursing students participating in the study were informed online about the purpose of the research and how the results would be used. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written consent was obtained

electronically. The principle of "Respect for Autonomy" was observed throughout this process. Additionally, participants' confidentiality was ensured in accordance with the principle of "Privacy and Confidentiality Protection." The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki on Human Rights.

Results

According to the age distribution of the participants, 74.4% were between 18-24 years old, 19% were between 25-30 years old, and 6.9% were 31 years or older. Regarding

Age	Number	%
18-24	374	74.1
25-30	96	19
31 and above	35	6.9
Gender		
Male	170	33.7
Female	335	66.3
Education Level		
Undergraduate 1st Year	100	19.8
Undergraduate 2nd Year	100	19.8
Undergraduate 3rd Year	73	14.5
Undergraduate 4th Year	100	19.8
Master's 1st Year	45	8.9
Master's 2nd Year	35	6.9
Doctorate 1st Year	25	5.0
Doctorate 2nd Year and above	27	5.3
Academic Writing Training Status		
Yes	38	7.5
No	467	92.5
Duration of Academic Writing Training		
0-1 month	14	2.8
2-3 month	8	1.6
3 months and above	18	3.6
English Language Training Status		
Yes	227	45
No	278	55
English Proficiency Level		
0-1 year	184	36.4
2-6 years	27	5.3
6 years and above	14	2.8
English Level		
A1 and A2	214	42.4
B1 and B2	114	22.6
C1 and C2	44	8.7
No proficiency	133	26.3
Book Reading Frequency		
Once a month	385	76.2
Once every six months	59	11.7
Once a year	30	5.9
Never	31	6.2

gender distribution, 66.3% were female and 33.7% were male. When examining the educational level of nursing students, it was determined that 73.9% of the participants were undergraduate students, 15.8% were graduate (master's) students, and 10.3% were doctoral students. Among undergraduates, 1st, 2nd, and 4th-year students each accounted for 19.8%, while 3rd-year students accounted for 14.5%.

The highest proportion in the graduate group belonged to first-year master's students at 8.9%. In terms of academic writing education, 92.5% of participants reported not having received any academic writing training before, while only 7.5% had received training. Students who received this training indicated that it was provided as part of their formal curriculum. Among those trained, 2.8% had received training for 0-1 month, 1.6% for 1-3 months, and 3.6% for 3 months or longer. Regarding English language education, 45% of participants had received English education, while 55% had not. When looking at the duration of English education, 36.4% had 0-1 year, 5.3% had 2-6 years, and 2.8% had 6 years or more of English education. English proficiency levels were 42.4% at A1 and A2, 22.6% at B1 and B2, 8.7% at C1 and C2, and 26.3% had no proficiency level. When evaluating participants' book reading habits, 76.2% reported reading books monthly, 11.7% every six months, 5.9% annually, and 6.1% stated they never read books (Table 1).

The mean score of the participants on the Academic Writing Competency Scale was found to be 3.24 ± 0.786 , and the mean score on the Academic Literacy Scale was 3.60 ± 0.433 (Table 2).

Scales and Subdimensions	$\bar{x} \pm SD$	Min	Max
Academic Writing Competence Scale	$3.24 \pm .78$	1	4.92
Fundamentals of Writing	$3.45 \pm .86$	1	4.75
Relational Reflective Writing	$3.07 \pm .91$	1	5
Creative Identity	$3.21 \pm .87$	1	5
Academic Literacy Scale	$3.60 \pm .43$	1.75	4.88
Academic Attitude	$4.01 \pm .52$	1	5
Research Process	$3.54 \pm .59$	1	5
Information Usage	$3.26 \pm .52$	1.75	4.75

$\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum.

A positive, moderate, and significant relationship was found between nursing students' Academic Writing Competency scores and their Academic Literacy scores ($p < .001$) (Table 3).

Discussion

This study examined whether there is a significant relationship between nursing students' academic literacy and academic writing competencies. The findings revealed a moderate and significant relationship between nursing students' academic writing competency and their academic literacy levels.

Accordingly, it can be stated that as nursing students' academic literacy levels increase, their academic writing competencies also improve.

Table 3.
Relationship Between Nursing Students' Academic Writing Competence Scores and Academic Literacy Score Averages

Scales	Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale		Academic Literacy Scale
Academic Writing Self-Efficacy Scale	r	1	.617**
	p		.000
Academic Literacy Scale	r	.617**	1
	p	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

A review of the literature found no prior research specifically investigating the relationship between academic writing competency and academic literacy among nursing students. In this context, the findings of the current study are considered important.

The study found that nursing students have high levels of academic literacy competency. In a study conducted with undergraduate students, similarly high academic literacy competencies were reported (Tunagör, 2021). In line with this, Elkiran (2021) also found high academic literacy levels among undergraduate students. It is generally expected that some undergraduate programs may foster higher academic literacy compared to others. However, the finding that nursing students have academic literacy levels comparable to those of other undergraduate students and at a high level suggests that nursing students possess a fairly good level of academic literacy.

In the study, when examining the academic literacy scale and its subdimensions, the highest level was observed in the 'academic inclination' subdimension, while the lowest level was found in the 'information of use' subdimension. In contrast, Türkben and Satılmış (2022), in a study conducted with undergraduate students, found that the subdimension with the highest average academic literacy score was 'information of use.' The lower level of information use among nursing students may be attributed to the gap between theory and practice in nursing and the diversity of its practice areas. Furthermore, the higher level of information use observed in the study with undergraduate

students compared to nursing students is thought to be due to the fact that teaching practices are more theoretical and reading-based than nursing practice. The finding that nursing students have a high level of academic literacy is particularly valuable. Moreover, increasing engagement with the academic field is expected to further professionalize the discipline and facilitate more significant advancements in academic literacy and academic writing competencies.

In this study, a moderate, positive relationship was found between nursing students' academic writing competence and their academic literacy skills. Today, university life is an important period for individual development. Compared to other fields, academic literacy is considered more significant for nursing students in terms of self-development. This is because academic literacy enables individuals to recognize and effectively use knowledge, thereby allowing them to approach problems with a scientific thinking perspective and to make informed decisions (Elkiran, 2021; Tunagör, 2021). Particularly in applied disciplines where critical thinking is actively practiced, the importance of academic literacy becomes even greater (Bayat, 2014). Moreover, academic literacy is not only the ability to understand and use scientific methods but also the capacity to systematically organize and present life knowledge. This situation necessitates the development of individuals' capacity to comprehend and manage knowledge (Türkben & Satılmış, 2022). Academic writing is a process that involves topic selection, reflection, research, planning, writing, and necessary revisions. Since this process is not mechanical but requires the use of critical thinking and metacognitive skills, it may be challenging for students and may affect their confidence in academic writing (Stewart et al., 2015). Therefore, the positive contribution of academic literacy to this process highlights the importance of motivating students in this regard. Elkiran (2021) found a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between academic literacy levels and technology proficiency in a study conducted with undergraduate students. Bayat (2014) identified a significant relationship between academic writing success and critical thinking levels in a study conducted with undergraduate students. The current study similarly found a positive relationship between academic writing competence and academic literacy skills. It is believed that academic writing competence supports academic literacy in nursing students, and that considering both academic writing and academic literacy dimensions together will provide more comprehensive data.

Limitations and generalizability of the study

This research was conducted exclusively with

undergraduate and graduate nursing students enrolled in the nursing faculty and health sciences institute of a single public university in Türkiye. This limits the findings to this specific university and student group, restricting the generalizability of the results to nursing students at other universities or different educational institutions. Since data were collected via an online survey, participants' responses may sometimes be positively biased due to social desirability or may contain omissions/errors due to inattention. Although the study includes undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students, the higher proportion of undergraduates may limit the generalizability of findings to graduate and doctoral students. Future studies should be conducted with larger and more diverse samples from different universities, using longitudinal study designs. This approach would enhance the generalizability of findings and allow for a more detailed examination of the dynamics between academic writing competence and academic literacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A significant relationship was found between nursing students' academic writing competencies and their academic literacy levels. It was observed that as academic writing competencies increased, literacy skills also improved. The study determined a moderate positive relationship between academic writing competencies and academic literacy, suggesting that examining nursing students' academic writing skills and academic literacy together as an integrated whole is important. It is recommended to enhance academic writing and academic literacy education within nursing programs. Additionally, requiring nursing students to complete a project at the end of their undergraduate program is believed to increase awareness of both academic writing and academic literacy. This research can be applied to different sample groups or explored with various independent variables affecting academic writing competencies and academic literacy levels. Nursing students may also be offered courses such as scientific research methods and educational research methods, and encouraged to participate in academic environments like journal platforms and conferences.

Ethics Committee Approval: Atatürk University Nursing Faculty ethics committee approval Date: April 11, 2023, No: 2023-4/1 was received.

Informed Consent: Written and verbal consent was obtained from the participants.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Research design: CO, GA; Data collection: CO ;Literature search: CO, GA; Article writing: CO, GA

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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