

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

An Interdisciplinary Collaboration of the Writing Centre Support and the Nursing Department on the Development of Academic Research Writing

Nonhlanhla Patience Khumalo¹, Denver Naidoo² and Thandeka Jacqueline Bhengu³

Received: 22 January 2024 | Revised: 22 July 2024 | Published: 06 August 2024

Reviewing Editor: Dr. Nereshnee Govender, Durban University of Technology

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the interdisciplinary collaboration between the Writing Centre (WrC) and the nursing department at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in developing undergraduate (UG) nursing students' academic research writing skills. Guided by the Social Learning Theory, the study aims to evaluate the role of the WrC support in enhancing nursing students' research writing proficiency. Semi-structured interviews in a focus group discussion with WrC tutors were conducted, and thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns related to the WrC's role in supporting academic research writing. The findings reveal the WrC's best practices in assisting UG nursing students, including creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment that addresses individual students' unique learning styles and research writing needs. The study also provides insights into the challenges faced by WrC tutors and the strategies they employ to overcome them. Furthermore, the benefits of WrC support for students' academic success are highlighted. The study underscores the importance of academic writing in higher education and the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration in developing students' research writing skills, particularly in the nursing discipline. The findings contribute to the understanding of effective interventions for improving academic writing and supporting student success in higher education.

Keywords: academic research writing; academic support; nursing students; undergraduates; writing centre

Introduction

Globally, academic writing is an essential aspect of higher education, as it is a means of communication, knowledge sharing, and evaluation of students' learning (Maisarah, *et al.*, 2022; Akkaya and Aydin, 2018). Undergraduate (UG) students are required to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter by presenting well-written and well-researched academic work that meets the academic standards. Even in South Africa, academic writing remains crucial in higher education, where students are expected to demonstrate proficient academic writing skills. Notably, intellectual access and student success are viewed as complicated processes addressed by most South African universities through programs, such as writing centres (WrCs). As such, WrCs are envisioned as university-based places whose primary function is to facilitate academic writing and provide support for programs that employ various pedagogies and theoretical underpinnings (Zuma *et al.*, 2016; Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam, 2023). The quality of academic writing is a concern because many students struggle with writing skills and may not be adequately prepared for academic writing (Mitchell *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, efforts have been made to improve academic writing skills through various interventions such as WrCs, workshops, and writing courses. Additionally, there is a need to consider the influence of students' social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds on their academic writing. Hence, there is a need for a better understanding of the challenges faced by students in academic writing in South Africa to develop appropriate interventions to address them (Khumalo and Reddy, 2021).

¹Durban University of Technology, Nonhlanhlaz2@dut.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5169-3765>

²University of KwaZulu-Natal, naidook12@ukzn.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5320-0538>

³Durban University of Technology, Thandekab@dut.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1278-4167>

As WrC supports the nursing department, it is evident that academic research writing among nursing students is essential to their studies. At the Durban University of Technology (DUT), nursing students are required to have strong writing skills to effectively communicate in their profession. This includes the ability to write clear, concise, and well-organized reports, case studies, and research projects that are necessary for degree completion. Furthermore, nursing students' academic writing skills are critical to ensuring that they can communicate effectively with colleagues, healthcare clients, and providers professionally and efficiently (Archer, 2010; Bidwell and Wilkes, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2018; Archer and Nortje, 2019). In supporting nursing students in the development of their academic writing skills, the DUT provides resources such as WrCs, writing workshops, and writing support services (DUT, 2023). These resources within DUT aim to help students improve their writing skills, meet academic writing standards, and succeed in their nursing studies. However, the extent to which these initiatives have been successful in improving students' research writing skills has not yet been fully investigated. Despite the problems observed by researchers, despite such initiatives, UG nursing students face great challenges when writing their research projects because of the less practised nature of academic research writing. Consequently, an interdisciplinary collaboration was initiated.

Against this backdrop, this qualitative empirical study aimed to evaluate the collaboration between WrC support and the nursing department in the development of academic research writing for UG nursing students. Notably, to help students succeed in their research projects, WrC tutors create a supportive and collaborative learning environment that addresses the unique learning styles, research writing support, and the needs of individual students. Hence, this study further provides insights into the challenges faced by WrC tutors and the strategies they use to overcome them, as well as the benefits of WrC support for student's academic success.

Literature Perspectives

Writing makes human thoughts visible, allows them to grow, be constrained and changed, stimulates the generation of new ideas, and further establishes thought processes (Akkaya and Aydin, 2018). Academic writing is one of the most crucial skills in education and learning, and an essential component of discipline-specific education at the higher education level (Deane and O'Neill, 2011; Rohmah and Muslim, 2021; Maisarah, *et al.*, 2022; Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam, 2023). Once admitted to a university, students must demonstrate a minimal level of competency in academic writing as well as the ability to build on good academic discourse. Consequently, academic writing is critical to students' academic access, performance, and success. The reality is that writing at a higher education level is specialized, considering that writing at this level has norms and conventions that students must abide by (Wilson, 2022; Aydin and Baysan, 2018). This makes it challenging for students at higher education institutions to succeed in their studies and graduate, as writing assignments, essays, and research papers has become a central aspect of formative assessments at most higher education institutions (Defazio *et al.*, 2010; Wang, 2022; Gabdullina, 2023). Academic writing is grounded in three facts: writing as thinking, writing as a process, and writing as conversation (Wilson 2022). Thus, academic writing is fundamentally analytical and involves the search for truth. Akkaya and Aydin (2018) agree that academic writing involves the dissemination of original studies correctly following certain documented and acceptable standards within the scientific community. From this definition, it can be deduced that academic writing is linked to research production and dissemination. It then becomes important to assess the extent to which academic writing interventions at the higher education level assist students in succeeding in their academic research-writing demands.

In the South African context, the experience of students with academic writing at universities varies widely depending on various factors, such as their background, language proficiency, and the support offered by their institutions (Smit, 2012; Sulaiman, 2022; Ghanbari and Salari, 2022; Zungu, 2022). For some students, academic writing can be a daunting task, especially if they are not used to an academic language or are unfamiliar with the expectations of higher education writing. This can result in feelings of frustration and anxiety, as well as difficulties in producing high-quality academic work, especially for those with poor computer skills. Hence, students who enter higher education institutions in South Africa do not need certain interventions in the form of being taught how to write academically at both the UG and postgraduate (PG) levels. South African universities have implemented interventions to assist students with academic writing difficulties. Such interventions include WrCs, writing workshops, and WrC tutor support, which provide students with the necessary skills to improve, especially in academic research writing (Archer, 2010; Archer and Nortje, 2019; Govender and Alcock, 2020). Other institutions of learning have implemented initiatives to promote multilingualism and inclusivity in academic writing, acknowledging the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students (Madiba, 2010; Nudelman, 2015;

Sulaiman, 2022). This was specifically intended to enhance university students' academic writing experience. Through the integrated writing process of WrCs, students complete their academic journeys (Mhlongo *et al.*, 2023; Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam, 2023). It is based on this that Manjeya (2020) agrees that WrCs have helped to expand access to scientific and technological sectors for a greater number of students, as well as to less advantaged students at higher education institutions by providing one-on-one support to develop and enhance their academic literacy skills. Notably, proficiency in academic literacy skills is important for student progress at these institutions but also envisages that the academic literacy skills gained through WrC interventions should assist students who move on to the postgraduate level and succeed in this central academic endeavor at the postgraduate level. It is important to further investigate how WrCs, as presently constituted in South African higher education institutions, assist in the development of academic research-writing skills among students.

The central issue in linking the following writing rules concerns the inability of students to successfully realize academic research writing because they grapple with English. Notably, within the academic community, English is increasingly being acknowledged as a vital communication tool. Consequently, because most students do not speak English as their first language, this appears to have become more challenging over time (Singh, 2019; Manjeya 2020). However, this is why most South African universities have initiated WrCs to address English language academic literacy, which would help improve student success and outcomes. Such anticipated academic improvements are notable in both the quantity and quality of behaviour, including better information, skills, attitudes, habits, comprehension, and ability to think (Manik, *et al.*, 2022). The effort would be to understand how existing approaches at WrCs assist tutors in inculcating proper academic research-writing skills in tutees. Understandably, this should be based on the relationship and operating environment between tutors and students seeking help at WrCs. It also considers a pedagogy/framework, for example, critical pedagogy grounded in social learning, which provides a basis for effective learning between WrC tutors and students seeking academic writing interventions (Giroux, 2020).

Writing in higher education is conducted for specific purposes across disciplines. Thus, discipline-specific writing is a skill that students must acquire when negotiating a particular community of practice (Drennah and Keyser, 2022; Hamilton and Stolle, 2016). Therefore, the function of discipline-specific literacy is to socialize and enculturate students into discourse communities, because university students need to develop academic and discipline-specific skills for access and success (Wilson-Lopez and Bean, 2017). However, a study by Coxhead (2016) and Drennah and Keyser (2022) on developing discipline-specific writing asserts that academic writing within a discipline serves the purpose of equipping and exposing students to discipline-specific discourse. The author further affirms that student writing development tends to be responsive to and influenced by the language to which they are exposed (Coxhead, 2016). In South Africa, nursing education is regulated by the South African Nursing Council (SANC), which supervises nursing education across institutions (SANC, 2005). In addition, SANC regulates the nursing profession, even though the nursing department at DUT is under the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Prihandoko (2021) notes that although there has been a proliferation of research in academic writing, "the specific writing experiences, needs, and difficulties of UG nursing and midwifery students have remained largely under-researched." Thus, research is needed on how nursing students cope with the academic writing required in their discipline. Writing in health disciplines is influenced by language, beliefs, and health practices (Meloncon and Frost, 2015). The authors further argue that developing academic writing skills is more successful when students are introduced to writing specifically tailored to what they are studying. This dovetails with one of the assumptions in the current research: WrC would be a more effective initiative if tutors offered discipline-specific writing instructions. The most effective and required discipline-specific academic writing for student nurses in higher education institutions advocates for critical thinking and analysis; hence, academic writing involves critical thinking (Shoulders, Follett and Eason, 2014; Susilo *et al.*, 2021). There is no doubt that academic writing is important to all university students. However, academic writing is even more important for students in the health sciences because there is a demand for a language specific to nursing content to be used for communication in clinical settings (Coxhead, 2016).

A study conducted by Mitchell *et al.* (2017) concluded that nursing students' academic writing experiences revealed struggles with the demands of their academic writing styles, and such conclusions show that the development of academic writing practices impacts students' educational experiences. The realization of the importance of good writing abilities for UG nursing students in health sciences faculties has embedded academic literacy into their

curricula through programs such as writing-to-learn initiatives. The findings of the above-mentioned authors demonstrate that embedding academic literacy curricula into nursing programs greatly improves the written communication of students, which is transferred onto other non-core or non-streamlined subjects. Furthermore, enhanced academic writing demonstrates the development of ease of engagement with disciplinary material, which might increase the critical abilities of UG students to own and interact with disciplinary discourse (Wingate and Tribble, 2012; Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam, 2023). Academic writing is undoubtedly a constitutive aspect of academic life as it is an essential part of academic performance and success. In many cases, it remains the main form of university assessment and overall academic achievement (Mitchell *et al.*, 2017). These authors concluded that challenges in academic writing often led to academic failure, especially in assessing the centrality of writing in academics. In addition, creative thinking and intellectual development may be extended by underdeveloped academic writing.

Research literacy is defined as the capacity to pinpoint, understand, and discuss the utilization and evaluation of several types of research to use findings for academic and professional purposes (Beaudry and Miller 2016). These authors further attest that research literacy allows most UG students to understand the research language, yet nursing students still face difficulties in writing research to achieve academic success for their UG qualifications. Hines, Ramsbotham, and Coyer (2015) confirmed that there is a substantial amount of research revealing that most nurses lack research-based practice due to a lack of knowledge about research and discomfort with research understanding. Although research education is offered in UG nursing programs to nursing students before engaging with research projects, this does not guarantee a solid understanding of research to apply when conducting research projects or even after graduation (Beaudry and Miller 2016). In contrast, Malhotra (2017) found that nursing students have become more research-literate after undertaking a graduate degree, although even at that point they remain unsure how this would be of use to them as professional nurses. Additionally, nursing students' ability to understand research literacy poses difficulties in applying academic research during practice for assessment and success. UG nursing students were not confident in their ability to use research literacy to achieve their degrees. Student nurses themselves have identified weak abilities and poor experience in trying to understand and use research as factors leading to poor utilization of research (Giroux, 2020). This led researchers to conclude that student nurses only research to complete their UG degrees with little understanding of research and appreciation of its use during their professional practice.

The Centrality of Social Learning Theory in the Context of WrCs

Social Learning Theory (SLT) is an educational theory that highlights the significance of social interactions and connections in the learning process. SLT is informed by the psychologist Albert Bandura's desire to answer the following questions towards addressing human behaviour: How do people acquire competencies, values, and styles of behaviour and how do people motivate and regulate their behaviour?' (Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022: 316). Since its development in the 1960s and 1970s, the theory has grown to rank among the most significant learning theories in psychology and education. Manik *et al.* (2022) agree that SLT is increasingly acknowledged as a central aspect of any effort to promote desirable behavioural changes. SLT is grounded in the understanding that people learn through interactions with others in a social setting. Learning is achieved through the observation of others' behaviour and the development of similar behaviours (Bandura, 1999; 2006; Manik, *et al.*, 2022; Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022). Hence, according to this theory, learning is influenced not only by individual characteristics and experiences but also by the interactions and relationships that individuals have with others. In summary, SLT matches people's ability to learn from each other through observation, imitation, and modelling (Manik, *et al.*, 2022; Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022). SLT entails important components that are central to the tutor-learning approach used in the WrC context, including collaborative learning, peer review, and one-on-one tutoring and coaching. Hence, in the context of WrC tutors, SLT was used to inform the approach, design, and delivery of support for academic research writing in several ways:

- **Collaborative learning:** WrC tutors use SLT to design and facilitate collaborative learning experiences for students. This involved providing opportunities for students to work together on writing tasks such as brainstorming ideas, drafting and revising, and providing feedback. Collaborative learning helps students learn from and with each other, fostering a sense of community and connections among students.
- **Peer review and feedback:** WrC tutors employed SLT to facilitate peer review and feedback processes in which students provided feedback and support to each other in their writing. This helped students learn

from their peers and develop their own critical thinking and communication skills, which were needed for their nursing practice.

- **One-on-one tutoring:** WrC tutors used SLT to inform their approach to one-on-one tutoring, build relationships with students, and provide support and guidance tailored to the individual needs and learning styles of each nursing student. Therefore, the researchers were able to examine how WrC provided support to UG nursing students using one-on-one tutoring, since WrC tutors understood the role of social interactions and relations well. Overall, SLT assisted WrC tutors in understanding the role of social interactions and relationships in the learning process when designing and delivering support that was effective and engaging for students.

Methodology

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the collaboration between WrC support and nursing departments in enhancing the academic research-writing skills of UG nursing students. This study seeks to understand the effectiveness of this partnership and its impact on students writing development. This study employed a case-study design. A case study approach is particularly suited for this type of investigation as it allows for an in-depth exploration of specific instances of collaboration between the WrC and the nursing department. This design provides rich contextual insights into the dynamics and outcomes of a partnership, making it possible to capture the complexities and unique characteristics of collaborative efforts (Yin, 2018). A qualitative research method was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and impact of collaboration on academic research and writing development. Qualitative methods are advantageous for exploring complex phenomena and understanding the participants' perspectives in detail. This approach enables researchers to gather rich, detailed data that could provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of collaboration (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich, relevant data regarding collaboration between the WrC and the nursing department. This technique ensures that the sample includes individuals with direct experience and insight into the collaborative process, thereby enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The target population comprised 11 WrC tutors employed at DUT and pursuing postgraduate studies from the master's to PhD levels. This group was selected because advanced academic training and experience in tutoring would provide valuable perspectives on the effectiveness and challenges of collaboration. Data were collected through focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were chosen because they facilitated interactive dialogue, allowing participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions in a dynamic and engaging environment. This method also encourages the emergence of diverse viewpoints and deeper insights (Kruger and Casey, 2015). The discussions provided a platform for participants to reflect on their experiences and collaboratively explore the impact of the partnership between WrC and the nursing department on students' academic writing skills.

Data analysis was conducted using theme and content analysis techniques with NVivo software. The thematic analysis allows for the identification and examination of key themes and patterns in the data, whereas content analysis provides a systematic and objective means of quantifying and analysing the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts (Kruger and Casey, 2016). NVivo software facilitated the organization, coding, and retrieval of data, enhancing the rigour and transparency of the analysis process. This combination of methods ensured a comprehensive and detailed examination of the collected data (QSR International, 2020). Ethical clearance of this study was granted by the relevant institutional review board. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and addressing potential risks or discomfort associated with participation in the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences. These measures were taken to uphold the ethical standards of the research and to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

Research Findings

To maintain a qualitative approach, data was collected from 11 WrC tutors. Their ages ranged from 25 to 36 years old. Regarding home languages, the majority spoke isiZulu, which caters to the language needs of students at DUT, most of whom are first-language isiZulu speakers. The sample was appropriate as it included representatives from the major PG educational levels, and the DUT Midlands WrC primarily employed PG students, for detailed demographic characteristics refer to Table 1 below:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Citizenship	Language	Current Studies	Years of WrC tutoring	Discipline
P1	M	SA	isiXhosa	PhD	4	Humanities
P2	F	SA	isiXhosa	PhD	2	Law and Management
P3	F	Nigerian	Other	Masters	2	Health Science
P4	M	SA	Sesotho	PhD	2	Health Science
P5	M	Zimbabwe	Shona	PhD	2	Health Sciences
P6	F	Zimbabwe	Ndebele	PhD	1	Law and Management
P7	M	SA	IsiZulu	Masters	2	Engineering
P8	F	SA	IsiZulu	Masters	2	Health Science
P9	M	SA	IsiZulu	PhD	2	Health Sciences
P10	M	SA	IsiZulu	PhD	1	Humanities
P11	M	SA	IsiZulu	Masters	2	Health Sciences

The coding and analysis of the generated data were organized by initially classifying the data using the themes of the reflection reports. Additional organizational categories derived from participant replies (e.g., 'degree of proficiency') were employed. The inductive analytic technique allowed for the classification of emerging themes from the data to capture relevant and contextualized descriptions of human experiences and perceptions within the phenomena under study (Malhotra, 2017; Vears and Gillam, 2022). Theme names emerged based on the number of times they were mentioned and the number of participants. Therefore, table 2 reflects on the three themes, three sub-themes, and a summary of themes that emerged from the focus group discussions.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the focus group discussions

Themes	Sub-themes	Summary of themes
Collaborative Learning	WrC Support Differing learning styles and needs Empowerment	The responses emphasize the importance of adapting to diverse learning styles and the need to support students effectively. Tutors need to be patient, creative, and flexible in their teaching methods to accommodate individual differences, such as disabilities and language barriers. Addressing these unique needs ensures that all students receive the necessary support to achieve their academic goals. The collective effort of tutors in empowering students and contributing significantly to their success, particularly in academic research writing for UG nursing students, is highlighted and valued.
Research Writing Challenges	Limited time and resources Lack of experience in research writing Communication difficulties	The responses highlight several challenges UG nursing students face in research writing, primarily due to limited time and resources. Students frequently express concerns about insufficient time allocated for projects, necessitating flexibility and practical feedback from tutors. Effective strategies identified include focusing on key areas for improvement, providing guidance on time and resource management, and offering personalized support tailored to each student group's unique needs. Despite prior teaching and WrC support, many students still have limited experience in research writing, underscoring the need for additional guidance. Creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment is essential to encourage experimentation and constructive feedback.
Shared Understanding of WrC Support	Different levels of expertise Different expectations Different roles and responsibilities	The responses emphasize the importance of a shared understanding of WrC support among tutors, research supervisors, and students. They highlight potential conflicts arising from differing expectations and approaches between WrC tutors and research supervisors. However, clear communication and defined roles can mitigate these issues. One positive example is provided where effective collaboration and predefined roles led to smooth communication and minimized misunderstandings. All parties agree that effective communication, open collaboration, and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities are crucial to helping UG students develop strong writing skills and meet their research supervisors' expectations.

Discussion

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning has become an essential approach in academic environments, particularly in the context of WrC support and tutorship in academic research writing for UG nursing students. This educational strategy emphasizes the importance of teamwork, shared knowledge, and mutual support in enhancing learning outcomes. In the setting of WrC and tutorship, collaborative learning takes on added significance, as it addresses the unique challenges faced by nursing students in their research writing endeavours. Key subthemes within this broader context include the provision of targeted WrC support, adapting to differing learning needs, and empowering students to achieve academic success. By exploring these subthemes, we can better understand how collaborative learning fosters a supportive and effective educational environment for nursing students engaged in research writing.

WrC tutors play a crucial role in supporting UG nursing students in their academic research. Their contribution to research writing is not only limited to giving feedback to UG students' projects but also provides marked development of their writing skills. In addition, WrC assisted UG nursing students in understanding the expectations and requirements of academic research writing, including the use of appropriate citation styles, structure of research papers, and language and tone expected in academic writing. Zuma *et al.* (2016) agree that a student's success and achievement of goals is very much linked to making use of support provided by universities especially the WrC support structure available in most universities. In addition, assessment goals were achieved by utilising the WrC support. However, Mhlongo *et al.* (2023) attest that the WrC spaces provided, and their practices set the tone to welcome students to get the individualized they require for their academic success. Overall, WrC tutors made significant contributions to the academic research writing of UG nursing students by providing guidance, feedback, and support at key stages of their research projects.

The WrC tutors had to adapt to the different learning styles and accommodate the needs of each group of UG nursing students. This provided individualized and consistent feedback from one WrC tutor, who viewed their work as compared to different ones. This finding was supported by Coxhead (2016) and Manjeya (2021), who found that students learn differently and have different needs. In addition, students should be treated differently to develop their academic research-writing skills. Therefore, researchers that include nurses expect to defend the idea that students' needs are coupled with individual needs as well as discipline-specific learning styles. The findings of this study revealed that working with UG nursing students on their research projects was a rewarding and challenging experience for WrC tutors. It requires patience, flexibility, and willingness to adapt to different student needs and challenges of individual groups during this group mentorship and WrC collaboration.

P1 emphasized, "As WrC tutors, we needed to adapt to differing learning styles and needs of students. Because students had diverse needs that required additional accommodations, such as disabilities or language barriers. Therefore, we needed to adapt to these differences requires patience, creativity, and a willingness to adjust teaching methods on a case-by-case basis."

P3 reiterated, "Because students had diverse needs that require additional accommodations, such as disabilities or language barriers. Therefore, we needed to adapt to these differences requires patience, creativity, and a willingness to adjust teaching methods on a case-by-case basis to empower students."

P5 stated, "We recognized that in addressing individual needs, tutors ensure all students receive the support they need to achieve academic goals."

P2 agreed, "I totally agree that we recognized that in addressing students' individual needs, as tutors we should ensure that all students receive the support they need to achieve academic goals."

WrC tutors empowered UG nursing students in academic writing for research by providing individualized group support and guidance tailored to their specific needs. WrC Tutors worked with students to identify areas for improvement in their writing skills, such as organization, clarity, and argumentation, and provide targeted feedback and strategies for improvement. Paraphrasing found in different resources became a key strategy that UG nursing was challenged to learn. In the process, UG students assisted in developing effective research skills, such as

identifying relevant sources, evaluating the quality of evidence, and synthesizing information into a coherent argument. Nursing students are trained to incorporate research into their clinical practice to ensure evidence-based practice (EBP). The findings of the study conducted by Horntvedt *et al.* (2018) indicate the need for nursing students to be able to apply EBP, especially in clinical practice, which could easily be achieved by incorporating their research skills. WrC tutors and supervisors assisted UG nursing students in applying research methods and skills during research projects. The findings of this study support the aforementioned authors regarding the provision of academic writing support to achieve better academic and research outcomes.

P4 and P2 reflected, "Overall, we feel that our contribution to supporting UG nursing students in their academic research writing has been significant, and we are proud to have played a role in helping these students succeed in their studies"

Research writing challenges

Research writing presents a unique set of challenges for UG nursing students, often requiring additional support from WrCs and dedicated tutors. These challenges are compounded by limited time and resources, a common issue that hampers students' ability to engage fully with their research projects. Additionally, many nursing students lack experience in research writing, requiring tailored guidance to develop the necessary skills. Effective communication between students, WrC tutors, and research supervisors is also critical; however, misunderstandings and differing expectations can create barriers. By examining these sub-themes, limited time and resources, lack of experience in research writing, and communication difficulties, we gained insight into the complexities of research writing in nursing education and the vital role of WrC support in overcoming these obstacles.

As WrC tutors, we recognized that UG nursing students often had limited time and resources to devote to their research projects, which could make it challenging for the tutors to provide the level of support and individualized guidance they needed. To address this, we worked to be flexible in our approach and provided targeted and practical feedback that would help students make the most of the time and resources available.

P6 and P7 expressed concerns about students' complaints regarding the time allocated for project completion. P7 emphasized the need for flexibility and targeted feedback to help students maximize their resources, especially with designated WrC tutors.

This involved identifying key areas for improvement in their writing and research as well as providing guidance on strategies for managing their time and resources more effectively. Furthermore, WrC was adapted to use native languages to facilitate the understanding of the feedback provided and the application of research concepts to their research projects. This is in line with the conclusions of the study done by Singh (2019), who found that English for academic purposes poses challenges for higher learning students in South Africa. Hence, the WrC adopted the use of their native language to ensure clear and concise feedback regarding their research projects. This exercise combined the limited time and resources, as necessary feedback was understood by students and research project suggestions would be implemented sooner. WrC tutors recognized that many nursing students had limited experience in research writing, despite having been previously taught about it. Thus, they often require extra support and guidance to develop their skills and confidence in this area.

P8 noted that despite previous teaching and support from the WrC, most students still lacked experience in research writing. Therefore, additional support and guidance were necessary.

To address this, tutors created a supportive and collaborative learning environment that encouraged students to ask questions, seek feedback, and conduct experiments using different approaches to their writing and research.

P8, P2, and P10 highlighted the importance of tailored guidance and feedback to help students overcome obstacles and achieve their academic goals.

Mitchell *et al.* (2017) found that the quality of academic writing in most UG students is a concern because many students struggle with writing skills and may not be adequately prepared for academic writing. However, Mhlongo *et al.* (2023) argued that WrC spaces and practices enhance and develop the academic writing skills of UG students. The current study also advocates the provision of safe and non-judgmental space for students to develop

and enhance their academic research writing skills provided by WrCs. The findings of this study revealed that effective communication is essential to ensure that all stakeholders (supervisors and WrC tutors) are on the same page, by nurturing open communication and working collaboratively for the benefit of the group they are working with. In this way, UG nursing students can develop strong writing skills that meet the expectations of their research supervisors and have the positive outcomes of completing their research projects and passing their UG degree.

P2 and P11 discussed difficulties in communication between WrC tutors and research supervisors, which led to misunderstandings and delays in the research process. To address this issue, participants emphasized the need for open communication and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders.

SLT is underpinned by the fact that individuals learn through social interactions with others, where learning is achieved through the observation of others' behaviour and the development of similar behaviours (Bandura, 1999; 2006; Manik, *et al.*, 2022; Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022). Most social interactions are embedded in communication, as a key strategy. The current study reveals that communication between WrC tutors, supervisors, and students is key to successful trio collaboration.

A shared understanding of WrC support

A shared understanding of WrC support is crucial in the context of tutorship in academic research writing among UG nursing students. This shared understanding hinges on recognizing and integrating different levels of expertise, expectations, and roles and responsibilities among WrC tutors, research supervisors, and students. Discrepancies in these areas can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, undermining the collaborative learning environment essential for academic success. By exploring the subthemes of varying expertise, divergent expectations, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, we can better appreciate the complexities and importance of fostering a cohesive and effective support system for nursing students navigating the challenges of research writing.

The WrC tutors' perspective recognized that WrC tutors and research supervisors might have had different levels of expertise and knowledge in the subject area. This created challenges in the research process, as students might have received conflicting guidance or feedback from the two stakeholders involved in this collaboration, which became essential for WrC tutors to collaboratively work with research to support and supervise the UG nursing students efficiently.

P10 expressed "We think that WrC tutors and research supervisors may have different expectations and approaches to working with students, which leads to misunderstandings and conflicts". Conversely, P2 alluded "We had a very good understanding with the supervisor of my group she laid most rules on how this trio-collaboration would work and to be honest this solved most communication difficulties as everyone knew his/her role. You can tell that she has been involved in UG research supervision and has well adapted to working with WrC tutors". This perspective was supported by P4, "WrC tutors and research supervisors may have different priorities and approaches when working with students and such may lead to tensions and misunderstandings between WrC tutors and research supervisors."

The WrC tutors provided academic writing skills, while the supervisors provided discipline-specific research supervisory skills, and through this open communication between the two parties played a role. The studies conducted by Archer (2010) and DUT (2023) agree that communication between supervised students, supervisors, and any other form of support available to students in higher learning institutions is important. Therefore, the recommendations for this study were to prioritize open communication among UG nursing students, WrC tutors, and supervisors.

There were differences in the expectations and approaches of WrC tutors and research supervisors working with students. This was evident in the current study. While research supervisors may have prioritized the content and methodology of a student's research, WrC tutors focused on the writing process to develop academic research writing skills. Notably, this approach agrees with SLT, which proposes using different relevant learning styles to address learners' needs (Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022; Manik, *et al.*, 2022). The two stakeholders, the WrC tutors and supervisors, needed to adhere to this approach for the benefit of students and to combat different expectations that might create tensions or misunderstandings between the two parties. Govender and Alcock (2020) acknowledged that WrC practices are social human engagements with students or lecturers that refer to them and should be kept positive to avoid mixing roles.

The WrC tutors appreciated the importance of their clearly defined roles and responsibilities with their research supervisors and nursing students. The main role of the WrC tutor was to provide feedback, mentor, and develop students' academic research-writing skills. The supervisor's role was to supervise the students by providing feedback on the concepts, methodologies, and flow of research projects. Khumalo and Reddy (2021) showed that WrC tutors' roles and responsibilities are measured by positive student success and improved academic outcomes. In addition, it indicates the best practices for the development of students' academic research writing skills. Therefore, as many as the two stakeholders have different roles and responsibilities, they need to be outlined to ensure smooth academic support for students. This study revealed WrC's best practices for supporting UG nursing students in academic research writing. This was mainly because WrC tutors maintained their roles and responsibilities and only did what was expected of them. This ensured a good collaborative journey from their side, as it was fruitful for students and their academic outcomes.

Conclusion

Fostering a positive and supportive environment, the WrC tutors created a positive and supportive space for UG nursing students, encouraging open communication with supervisors and building trust and rapport among students, which helped UG nursing students feel more comfortable seeking help and support from their tutors. Academic research writing skills have also developed. Through the lens of WrC tutors, this collaborative journey enhances students' research skills and the ability to seek help and support, leading to positive research outcomes among nursing students. Future research should examine the role of nursing department supervisors in the development of academic research writing skills in UG nursing students, and further determine UG nursing students' perceptions of WrC support in the development of academic research writing.

References

- Akkaya, A. and Aydın, G. 2018. Academics' Views on the Characteristics of Academic Writing. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 13(2): 128-160.
- Archer, A. and Nortje, E. 2019. An Exploration of the Writing Challenges Faced by Nursing Students at a South African University. *Curationis*, 42(1): 1-9.
- Archer, A. 2010. Challenges and Potentials for Writing Centres in South African Tertiary Institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24: 495-510.
- Aydın, G. and Baysan, S. 2018. Perceptions of Postgraduate Students on Academic Writing Skills: A Metaphor Analysis Study. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 14(2): 212-239.
- Bandura, A. 1999. A Social Cognitive Theory of Personality. In: Pervin, L. and John, O. eds. *Handbook of Personality*. New York: Guildford Publications, 154-196.
- Bandura, A. 2006. Toward a Psychology of Human Agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2): 164-180.
- Bidwell, J. and Wilkes, J. 2016. An Investigation into the Writing Challenges of Nursing Students in a Tertiary Institution in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Health SA Gesondheid*, 21: 234-241.
- Coxhead, A. 2016. Approaches and Perspectives on Teaching Vocabulary for Discipline-Specific Academic Writing. In: Flowerdew, J. and Costley, T. eds. *Discipline-Specific Writing*. London: Routledge, 76-90.
- Creswell, J. and Poth, C. 2018. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. 4th edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Deane, M. and O'Neill, P. 2011. Writing in the Disciplines: Beyond Remediality. In: Deane, M. and O'Neill, P. eds. *Writing in the Discipline*. London: Palgrave, 3-11.
- Defazio, J., Jones, J., Tennant, F. and Hook S. A. 2010. Academic Literacy: The Importance and Impact of Writing across the Curriculum – A Case Study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(2): 34- 47.
- Durban University of Technology (DUT). 2023. Writing Centre. Available: https://www.dut.ac.za/academic/writing_centre/ (Accessed 10 July 2023).

- Gabdullina, S. 2023. The Potential of the Essay in Formative Assessment: Literature Review. *Education Innovation Diversity*, 1(6): 48-53.
- Ghanbari, N. and Salari, M. 2022. Problematizing Argumentative Writing in an Iranian EFL Undergraduate Context. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13: 1-11.
- Giroux, H. A. 2020. *On Critical Pedagogy*. New Zealand: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Govender, N. and Alcock, A. 2020. Humanising Writing Centre Practice: Peer Tutor Reflections at a University of Technology. *Africa Education Review*, 17(1): 18-34.
- Hamilton, E. R. and Stolle, E. 2016. The Importance of Disciplinary Literacy. *Colleagues*, 13(1): 1-4.
- Hines, S., Ramsbotham, J. and Coyer, F. 2015. The Effectiveness of Interventions for Improving the Research Literacy of Nurses: A Systematic Review. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, 12(5): 265-272.
- Hornqvist, M. T., Nordsteien, A., Fermann, T. and Severinsson, E. 2018. Strategies for Teaching Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing Education: A Thematic Literature Review. *Bio Med Central Medical Education*, 18(1): 1-11
- Khumalo, N. P. and Onwuegbuchulam, S. P. C. 2023. Beyond Barriers and Resistance: Peer Tutor Reflections on Writing Centre Practice During and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic. In: Makua, M., Akinlolu, M., Sithole, M., Gumede, P. and Nyondo, C. eds. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. Amsterdam: Atlantis Press, 27-39.
- Khumalo, N. P. and Reddy, S. 2021. Cross-Disciplinary Synergy: First-Year Students' Experiences of Learning Academic Writing through Integrated Writing Support at a University of Technology. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 17(1): 1-10.
- Koutroubas, V. and Galanakis, M. 2022. Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Its Importance in the Organizational Psychology Context. *Psychology Research*, 12(6): 315-322.
- Kruger, R. A. and Casey, M. A. 2015. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Washington, DC: Sage Publications.
- Madiba, M. 2010. Towards Multilingual Higher Education in South Africa: The University of Cape Town's Experience. *Language Learning Journal*, 38: 327-346.
- Maisarah, I., Sufiyandi, S., Fadhli, M. and Rinaldi, R. 2022. Writing a Research Report in Higher Education: Problems and Solutions for English and Non-English Students. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 680: 80-88.
- Malhotra, G. 2017. Strategies in Research. *International Journal of Advance Research and Development*, 2(5): 172-180.
- Manik, S., Sembiring, M., Padang, I. and Manurung, L. 2022. Theory of Bandura's Social Learning in the Process of Teaching at SMA Methodist Berastagi. *Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 3(2): 85-96.
- Manjeya, N. C. 2021. The Role of a Writing Centre in a South African University of Technology (UoT). *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 16(2): 148-162.
- Meloncon, L. and Frost, E. A. 2015. Special Issue Introduction: Charting an Emerging Field: The Rhetoric of Health and Medicine and Its Importance in Communication Design. *Communication Design Quarterly Review*, 3(4): 7-14.
- Mhlongo, N., Khumalo, N.P., Naidoo, D. and Tamako, N. 2023. Practices and Spaces (Location): Reflecting on the Contribution of Writing Centres for Decolonisation in Higher Education. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5(1): 1-12.
- Mitchell, K. M., Harrigan, T. and McMillan, D. E. 2017. Writing Self-Efficacy in Nursing Students: The Influence of a Discipline-Specific Writing Environment. *Nursing Open*, 4(4): 240-250.
- Nudelman, C. 2015. Language in South Africa's Higher Education Transformation: A Study of Language Policies at Four Universities. Master's Dissertation, University of Cape Town.

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N. and Hoagwood, K. 2015. Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42: 533-544.

Prihandoko, L. A. 2021. Students' Writing Self-Efficacy, Writers' Block, and Academic Writing Performance: An Empirical Study in Eastern Indonesian Students. *AL-ISHLAH: Journal Pendidikan*, 13(3): 2029-2037.

QSR International. 2020. Run a Coding Comparison Query. Available: http://help-nv11.qsrinternational.com/desktop/procedures/run_a_coding_comparison_query.htm (Accessed 15 May 2023).

Rohmah, N. and Muslim, A. 2021. Writing Anxiety in Academic Writing Practice. Available: <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210427.053> (Accessed on 06 July 2024).

Shoulders, B., Follett, C. and Eason, J. 2014. Enhancing Critical Thinking in Clinical Practice: Implications for Critical and Acute Care Nurses. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 33(4): 207-214.

Singh, P. 2019. English for Academic Purposes in South African Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects. *Language Matters*, 50(1): 57-81.

Smit, R. 2012. Towards a Clearer Understanding of Student Disadvantage in Higher Education: Problematising Deficit Thinking. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 31(3): 369-380.

South African Nursing Council. 2005. Act No 33 of 2005. Available: <https://www.sanc.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nursing-Act-2005.pdf> (Accessed 18 March 2023).

Sulaiman, S. 2022. Students' Ways of Understanding Academic Writing. *Journal of General Education and Humanities*, 1(4): 163-174.

Susilo, A., Mufanti, R. and Fitriani, A. 2021. Promoting EFL Students' Critical Thinking and Self-Voicing through CIRC Technique in Academic Writing Courses. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(3): 917-934.

Vears, D. F. and Gillam, L. 2022. Inductive Content Analysis: A Guide for Beginning Qualitative Researchers. *Focus on Health Professional Education*, 23(1): 111-127.

Wang, D. 2022. The Mechanism of Teacher Influence on the Learning Engagement of Students. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 17(21): 135-149.

Wang, Y., Wan, Q., Lin, F., Zhou, W. and Shang, S. 2018. Interventions to Improve Communication between Nurses and Physicians in the Intensive Care Unit: An Integrative Literature Review. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, 5(1): 81-88.

Wilson, J. R. 2022. *Academic Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wingate, U. and Tribble, C. 2012. The Best of both Worlds? Towards an English for Academic Purposes/Academic Literacies Writing Pedagogy. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(4): 481-495.

Yin, R. K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zuma, N., Popoola, T. and Makondo, L. 2016. Accessing Success through the Writing Centres at a University of Technology. *Journal of Communication*, 7(1): 103-110.

Zungu, B. P. 2022. Socio-Economic and Academic Challenges Faced by Black Undergraduate Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds at the Wits School of Education. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Witwatersrand.