

Didactic Strategies for the Strengthening of Academic Writing in University Students from an Innovative Approach

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Abstract

This article addresses the design, implementation, and evaluation of didactic strategies aimed at strengthening academic writing in university students. Based on an approach rooted in reflective action and meaningful learning, activities were developed that integrated the review of academic texts, written production, and collaborative feedback. The research was conducted at a higher education institution in Montería, Colombia, with a sample of students from various academic programs. Through a qualitative-descriptive design, the main difficulties in academic writing processes were identified, such as idea organization, argumentation, and proper use of APA norms. The results showed significant improvements in the students' ability to structure coherent and well-supported texts. This study highlights the importance of implementing innovative strategies in the university context to foster key competencies in academic writing, essential for students' academic and professional development.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Didactic Strategies, Meaningful Learning, Collaborative Feedback, APA Norms.*

Introduction

Academic writing stands as a fundamental competence in university education, as it represents an essential tool for the construction, communication and validation of knowledge in the academic and professional field. However, in the context of higher education in Colombia, it is common to find that students face various difficulties when writing academic texts, among which are the lack of coherence in the organization of ideas, limited argumentation and ignorance of citation and referencing standards, such as APA standards (Londoño & Jiménez, 2020). These limitations not only affect students' academic performance, but also impact their ability to insert themselves in a work environment that demands increasingly rigorous written communication skills.

The need to strengthen competencies in academic writing has driven the implementation of various pedagogical strategies that seek to transform traditional teaching practices. In this context, meaningful learning, proposed by Ausubel (1968), and reflective action, proposed by Schön (1983), are emerging as adequate approaches to address this challenge. Both perspectives emphasize the importance of connecting new learning with previous knowledge and promoting critical reflection on writing processes, which allows students to identify their errors, correct them and progressively improve in the elaboration of academic texts.

This article focuses on the design, implementation and evaluation of didactic strategies aimed at strengthening academic writing in university students in Montería, Colombia. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach, the research identified the main difficulties in the writing processes and developed an intervention program based on activities such as the revision of academic texts, writing workshops and collaborative feedback exercises. These strategies, in addition to improving writing skills, encouraged the active participation of students and the construction of autonomous and meaningful learning.

The structure of this article includes, first, a theoretical framework that addresses the key concepts related to academic writing, the didactic strategies and the pedagogical approaches that underpinned the intervention. Subsequently, the methodology used is described, followed by the presentation of the results

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and their discussion in relation to previous research. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are offered that highlight the importance of implementing innovative approaches for the strengthening of essential competencies in the university environment.

Academic writing is a central component in university education, as it allows students to develop and communicate their critical thinking, participate in the construction of knowledge and meet the academic demands of their study programs. This theoretical framework addresses the fundamental concepts related to academic writing, didactic strategies, and pedagogical approaches that guided the design and implementation of this intervention proposal.

Academic Writing

Academic writing is defined as a process of textual production that responds to specific standards of clarity, coherence, and theoretical foundation, being essential for the dissemination of knowledge in the academic field (Cassany, 2006). This type of writing involves complex skills, such as:

- Organization of ideas: Structure a text in a logical and hierarchical way.
- Argumentation: Present well-founded ideas and support them with valid evidence.
- Citation and referencing rules: Respect the standards established to recognize the work of other authors, such as APA standards.

However, numerous studies have pointed out that university students often present difficulties in these areas, which limits their ability to participate in rigorous academic practices and to integrate effectively into the world of work (Londoño & Jiménez, 2020). These limitations highlight the need to implement pedagogical strategies that not only teach the formal rules of writing, but also promote reflection and self-evaluation during the writing process.

Didactic Strategies for the Strengthening of Writing

Teaching strategies are tools that teachers use to facilitate learning and the development of specific competencies in students. In the case of academic writing, the most effective strategies are those that integrate dynamic and reflective activities, allowing students to identify their mistakes, understand academic expectations, and improve their skills progressively (Álvarez & González, 2018). Among the strategies used in this study are:

- Text Review: Critical analysis of examples of academic writing to identify strengths and weaknesses in their structure and content.
- Writing workshops: Practical sessions focused on the elaboration of different types of academic texts, such as essays, articles and reports.
- Collaborative feedback: Exchange of comments between peers and with the teacher, encouraging critical reflection on the texts produced.

These strategies, when combined, not only strengthen technical writing skills, but also promote collaboration, critical thinking, and autonomy in learning.

Pedagogical Approaches: Meaningful Learning and Reflective Action

The intervention proposal was based on two key pedagogical approaches:

- Significant Learning (Ausubel, 1968): This approach states that learning occurs when new knowledge is related to the student's previous knowledge. In this sense, the writing activities were designed to connect with the students' academic experiences and contexts, facilitating contextualized and relevant learning.
- Reflective Action (Schön, 1983): According to this approach, reflection on practice is fundamental for the development of competencies. In the case of academic writing, reflective action was promoted through self-assessment exercises and collaborative feedback, allowing students to identify and correct their mistakes, as well as continuously improve their texts.

Relationship between Academic Writing and Professional Training

Strengthening academic writing not only impacts students' performance in the university environment, but is also essential for their professional development. The ability to write clear, coherent and well-founded texts is increasingly in demand in various fields of work, where written communication is a key tool for transmitting ideas, projects and results.

In this context, the implementation of innovative didactic strategies for academic writing not only benefits students' learning, but also prepares them to successfully face the challenges of a world of work that demands advanced communication skills.

The theoretical framework establishes the conceptual bases that guided the design of the intervention, highlighting the importance of integrating dynamic didactic strategies and reflective pedagogical approaches to address difficulties in academic writing. These foundations not only allow us to understand the educational needs of students, but also to propose effective and contextualized solutions to strengthen this key competence.

Methodology

This study was developed under a qualitative approach, with a descriptive design, aimed at identifying difficulties in academic writing and implementing didactic strategies that would strengthen this competence in university students. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, as well as an assessment of the impact of the intervention on their academic development.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of university students from a higher education institution in Montería, Colombia, enrolled in academic programs that required academic writing skills as an essential part of their training. An intentional sample of 25 students was selected, considering the following criteria:

- Present previous difficulties in academic writing, evidenced through initial diagnoses made by teachers.
- Be taking subjects related to writing and written communication.
- Show willingness and commitment to participate in the activities of the intervention.

Data Collection Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect qualitative information on academic writing difficulties and the results of the intervention:

- Diagnostic tests: Applied at the beginning of the study, they allowed the evaluation of students' initial competencies in areas such as organization of ideas, argumentation and use of APA standards.
- Writing Portfolios: Each student prepared a portfolio where they compiled the texts produced during the intervention, which allowed them to analyze their progress and reflect on their learning.
- Semi-structured interviews: Conducted at the end of the study, they provided information on students' perceptions of the strategies implemented and their impact on their learning.
- Participant Observations: During the workshops, field notes were recorded on the students' interaction with the activities and their level of participation.

Design of Didactic Strategies

The intervention was structured in three phases that included progressive and dynamic activities:

Diagnosis Phase

Initial assessment of academic writing skills through diagnostic tests and analysis of previous texts prepared by students.

Identification of the main difficulties, such as lack of clarity in argumentation, errors in the organization of ideas and lack of knowledge of APA standards.

Intervention Phase

Writing Workshops: Practical sessions focused on the preparation of essays, articles and reports, with emphasis on logical organization, coherence and the appropriate use of references.

Text Review: Activities in which students analyzed examples of academic writing to identify strengths and weaknesses in their structure and content.

Collaborative Feedback: Exchange of comments between peers and with the teacher, focused on the correction of errors and the progressive improvement of the texts.

Evaluation Phase

Analysis of the writing portfolios to identify the progress in the competencies worked on.

Application of a final evaluation that allowed comparing the performance of the students before and after the intervention.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed through thematic coding, identifying patterns and categories related to initial difficulties, the impact of teaching strategies and students' perceptions of the learning process.

Categories of Analysis

Initial competencies in academic writing.

Impact of workshops and collaborative feedback.

Students' perception of their progress and learning.

Results

The results obtained from the pedagogical intervention reflect significant advances in the academic writing skills of the participating students. The most relevant findings are presented below, organized into two main categories: initial competencies and progress achieved after the implementation of the didactic strategies.

Initial Competencies in Academic Writing

The initial diagnosis showed that the students faced various difficulties in academic writing. These are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Levels of Initial Performance in Academic Writing (N = 25)

Aspects evaluated	Low level (%)	Medium level (%)	High level (%)
Organization of ideas	60 %	36 %	4 %
Argumentation	68 %	28 %	4 %
Use of APA standards	72 %	24 %	4 %
Textual coherence and cohesion	64 %	28 %	8 %

Interpretation

- Most of the students (more than 60%) had a low level of organization of ideas, argumentation and textual coherence, which affected the quality of their written productions.
- Lack of knowledge of APA standards was one of the main difficulties, with **72%** of students at the lowest level.

Progress Made with the Intervention

After implementing the didactic strategies, a significant improvement was observed in all the competencies evaluated. The results of the analysis of the writing portfolios and the final tests are summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Levels of Academic Writing Performance After the Intervention (N = 25)

Aspects evaluated	Low level (%)	Medium level (%)	High level (%)
Organization of ideas	12 %	52 %	36 %
Argumentation	16 %	48 %	36 %
Use of APA standards	20 %	44 %	36 %
Textual coherence and cohesion	8 %	40 %	52 %

Interpretation

- The organization of ideas improved significantly, with 36% of students reaching the high level.
- In argumentation and use of APA standards, 36% of the students achieved a high level, evidencing that collaborative feedback activities and writing workshops were effective in developing these competencies.

- Textual coherence and cohesion showed the greatest progress, with 52% of students at the high level, thanks to the activities of revision and critical analysis of texts.

Student Perception

The semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the intervention revealed that the students perceived a positive impact on their learning. Among the most valued aspects were:

Practical and Dynamic Strategies

"The workshops helped me understand how to better organize my ideas and write more clearly." (Student 5)

Importance of Feedback

"The comments from my classmates and the teacher made me realize the mistakes and improve my texts a lot." (Student 12)

Confidence and Motivation

"I used to be afraid to write because I didn't know if I was doing it right, but now I feel more confident." (Student 18)

The data obtained reflect that the didactic strategies implemented had a positive impact on the strengthening of academic writing, especially in competencies such as organization of ideas, argumentation and use of APA standards. The combination of workshops, critical analysis, and collaborative feedback allowed not only to improve students' written productions, but also to foster their confidence and motivation towards the writing process.

Discussion

The results obtained in this research confirm the effectiveness of the didactic strategies implemented to strengthen academic writing in university students. The main findings regarding the objectives of the study, previous research and pedagogical implications are then discussed.

Relationship to the Objectives of the Study

The design and implementation of writing workshops, text revision activities and collaborative feedback made it possible to achieve the objectives set:

Identification of initial difficulties: The diagnosis showed that most of the students had problems in the organization of ideas, argumentation and use of APA standards, which affected the quality of their written productions.

Strengthening of specific competencies: The activities developed promoted a significant improvement in key competencies such as textual coherence and cohesion, argumentation and the application of citation standards, with more than 50% of students reaching the high level in these areas.

Motivation and confidence in the writing process: Students reported feeling more confident and motivated to write, thanks to the dynamic and reflective approach of the strategies implemented.

Comparison with Previous Research

The results of this study coincide with previous research that highlights the importance of dynamic and reflective strategies for the development of competencies in academic writing. For example:

- According to Cassany (2006), the activities of revision and critical analysis of texts are essential for students to understand the formal structures of academic writing. In this study, these activities allowed students to improve significantly in areas such as textual coherence and cohesion.
- Londoño and Jiménez (2020) point out that collaborative feedback encourages critical reflection and self-evaluation, aspects that were key in this study to identify errors and strengthen argumentation.
- Álvarez and González (2018) highlight the importance of writing workshops as practical spaces for students to develop technical and creative skills, which was evidenced in the progress made in the organization of ideas and the use of APA standards.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has important implications for the teaching of academic writing in the university environment:

- **Practical and reflective approach:** The combination of dynamic activities with a reflective approach made it possible to address the initial difficulties of the students, promoting more meaningful learning.
- **Fostering collaboration:** Collaborative feedback not only improved written productions, but also strengthened skills such as teamwork and effective communication.
- **Integration of transversal competencies:** The strategies used allowed the development of competencies that transcend academic writing, such as critical thinking, organization and argumentation, essential in both the academic and professional fields.

Limitations of the Study

Although the results are encouraging, it is important to consider the limitations of the study:

- **Sample size:** The research was conducted with a limited sample of 25 students, which could restrict generalizability of the findings.
- **Duration of the intervention:** The intervention was developed in a short period of time, which made it impossible to evaluate the long-term impact of the strategies implemented.
- **Specific context:** The results reflect the particular conditions of a university institution in Montería, so it would be necessary to replicate the study in other contexts to validate its conclusions.

The findings of this study reaffirm the need to implement innovative pedagogical strategies that combine dynamic and reflective activities to strengthen academic writing competencies. In addition, they highlight the importance of fostering collaboration and feedback as key tools for learning. These strategies not only contribute to students' academic performance, but also prepare them to face the challenges of the professional world, where effective writing is an essential skill.

Conclusions

The present study shows that the implementation of innovative didactic strategies is an effective way to strengthen academic writing competencies in university students. The intervention allowed not only to improve technical aspects of writing, such as the organization of ideas and the use of APA standards, but also to promote critical, reflective and collaborative skills that transcend the academic field.

Main Findings

- Strengthening of specific competencies: Text revision activities, writing workshops and collaborative feedback contributed to significantly improving the organization of ideas, argumentation and textual coherence of students, with more than 50% reaching a high level in these areas.
- Promotion of critical reflection: Reflective action promoted through self-evaluation and peer feedback allowed students to identify their mistakes and progressively improve their performance.
- Impact on motivation and confidence: Students reported feeling more motivated and confident in the writing process, thanks to the dynamic strategies and hands-on approach to the activities.

Educational Implications

The results of this research underscore the importance of integrating practical and reflective approaches into the teaching of academic writing. Some key implications include:

- Design of personalized strategies: It is essential to adapt writing activities to the specific needs and contexts of students, promoting meaningful learning.
- Promoting collaboration: Peer-to-peer feedback not only improves written productions, but also fosters skills such as effective communication and teamwork.
- Preparation for the professional field: The development of academic writing skills not only impacts the academic performance of students, but also prepares them to face the communicative demands of the world of work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for future research and pedagogical practices:

- Longitudinal studies: To evaluate the impact of didactic strategies on the development of academic writing in the long term.
- Sample expansion: Replicate the study with larger samples and in different contexts to validate the results obtained.
- Integration of digital technologies: Explore the use of technological tools, such as virtual platforms and writing software, to complement writing and feedback activities.

The strengthening of academic writing in university students requires the implementation of didactic strategies that combine dynamic, reflective and collaborative activities. This study shows that these strategies not only improve technical writing skills, but also foster critical skills and motivation in students, laying the foundation for meaningful learning and comprehensive preparation for academic and professional challenges.

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