



Social representation of academic writing in medical students**Representación social de la escritura académica en estudiantes de Medicina****Representação social da escrita acadêmica em estudantes de Medicina**Fidel Vázquez Garay^{1*} , Maria Elena Alvarez López¹ ¹ Universidad de Ciencias Médicas de Santiago de Cuba. Santiago de Cuba, Cuba.*Author for mailing: fidel.vazquez@infomed.sld.cu

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: writing is a complex construct from which multiple definitions have been derived that have been adjusted to the historical moment and is understood today from different perspectives; it is a process that, among other things, demonstrates good cognitive functioning in all activities in which the student interacts. **Objective:** to characterize the social representations that students of the Faculty of Medicine No. 2 of the Medical Sciences University of Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, construct about academic writing. **Method:** Mixed-methods, sequential explanatory research was carried out from January to October 2024. A questionnaire was applied to collect information on the dimensions (knowledge about academic writing, hierarchy and orientation in this regard) and a semi-structured interview to delve into the required aspects. **Results:** the main results showed that the figurative core was composed of the importance they attribute

to academic writing and the negative emotional states and states of nervousness generated by the consumption and use of the types of representational objects. The information students possessed came primarily from academic experiences and interactions with professors and teaching support staff. **Conclusions:** the attitude toward academic writing is not favorable, although it is active, given that there is no active, do-it-yourself behavior to enhance its consumption and use.

Keywords: social representation; academic writing; teaching-learning process; students; medical school



RESUMEN

Introducción: la escritura es un constructo complejo del que se derivan múltiples definiciones que han ido ajustándose al momento histórico y es comprendida hoy desde diferentes perspectivas; es un proceso que, entre otras cosas, pone de manifiesto el buen funcionamiento cognitivo en todas las actividades donde el estudiante interactúa.

Objetivo: caracterizar las representaciones sociales que sobre la escritura académica construyen los estudiantes de la Facultad de Medicina No. 2 de la Universidad de Ciencias Médicas de Santiago de Cuba, Cuba.

Método: se realizó una investigación de metodología mixta, de tipo explicativa secuencial, en el periodo enero a octubre de 2024. Fue aplicado un cuestionario para recoger información sobre las dimensiones (conocimientos sobre escritura académica, jerarquización y orientación al respecto) y una entrevista semiestructurada para profundizar en los aspectos requeridos. **Resultados:** los principales resultados mostraron que el núcleo figurativo estuvo compuesto por la importancia que le atribuyen a la escritura académica y por los estados emocionales negativos y estados de nerviosismo que son generados por el consumo y empleo de las tipologías del objeto de representación. La información que poseen los estudiantes provino fundamentalmente de experiencias académicas y de las interrelaciones con profesores y personal de apoyo a la docencia.

Conclusiones: la actitud hacia la escritura académica no es favorable, aunque sí activa, dado que no se asume un comportamiento activo y hacedor para potenciar su consumo y empleo.

Palabras clave: representación social; escritura académica; proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje; estudiantes; carrera de Medicina

RESUMO

Introdução: a escrita é uma construção complexa da qual derivam múltiplas definições que foram se adaptando ao momento histórico e é hoje entendida a partir de diferentes perspectivas; É um processo que, entre outras coisas, demonstra um bom funcionamento cognitivo em todas as atividades em que o aluno interage.

Objetivo: caracterizar as representações sociais que os estudantes da Faculdade de Medicina nº 2 da Universidade de Ciências Médicas de Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, constroem sobre a escrita académica.

Método: foi realizada uma pesquisa explicativa sequencial, de métodos mistos, de janeiro a outubro de 2024. Foi aplicado um questionário para coletar informações sobre as dimensões (conhecimento da escrita académica, hierarquia e orientação nesse sentido) e uma entrevista semiestruturada para aprofundar os aspectos necessários.

Resultados: os principais resultados mostraram que o núcleo figurativo foi composto pela importância que atribuem à escrita académica e pelos estados emocionais negativos e estados de nervosismo que são gerados pelo consumo e uso das tipologias do objeto de representação. As informações que os alunos possuem vêm principalmente de experiências académicas e interações com professores e equipe de apoio ao ensino. **Conclusões:** a atitude em relação à escrita académica não é favorável, embora seja ativa, visto que não assume um comportamento ativo e do tipo faça-você-mesmo para promover seu consumo e uso.

Palavras-chave: representação social; redação académica; processo ensino aprendizagem; estudantes; carreira médica

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INTRODUCTION

Written thinking as a process and psychosocial reality shows diverse personal and social contradictions that bring about inadequate behaviors in situations that interfere with the successful development of a university career. Writing is a complex construct from which multiple definitions are derived that have been adjusted to the historical moment and is understood today from different perspectives; it is a process that, among other things, shows the good cognitive functioning in all the activities where the student interacts.^(1,2,3,4,5)

Academic failure is a problem of the whole society, it is not reduced to an institution or a group of institutions, since the satisfaction of man in his work, family life, education, culture, material and spiritual conditions of life, are elements that are intertwined; especially with his state of psychological health.^(6,7,8)

In the context of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba, there is a scenario where a markedly differentiated situation can be appreciated. From the analysis of the available documentation, such as the minutes of yearly subject groups and academic council meetings, the problems faced by the teachers of this Alma Mater regarding the student's attention to what is expressed in the classroom, which is limited to the trace left by the oral discourse of the professor in the different forms of organization of teaching, especially the class, are noticeable. Thus, students assume PowerPoint presentations as summaries of lectures that replace lecture notes and detract from the value of both the oral discourse and the bibliographic search on the content.

In this sense, in the diagnoses carried out by the methodological department of the School of Medicine No. 2 that try to explain the behavior of the quality indicators in the promotion, weaknesses have been detected in the students' understanding of the evaluation instruments, as well as in the answers given especially to those questions with certain levels of writing. Thus, it is argued that the inadequacies of medical students to scripturally encode the teacher's discourse and then express these contents orally or in writing have a negative influence on the teaching-learning process and, in turn, determine academic success or failure.

Therefore, and at the proposal of the management of the Faculty of Medicine No. 2 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, we proceeded to conduct this study, which takes as subjects of study the students who are trained there as doctors of medicine; where there is a different situation with respect to the problems previously mentioned, expressed in a marked detriment of academic quality indicators, both in the basic cycle and in the clinical cycle.

These deficiencies result in an incomplete use of teaching time and a greater effort on the part of students in terms of time and use of material resources to meet academic demands. Consequently, the establishment of writing guidelines that not only allow the student to better understand the content, but also to understand it from a more comprehensive perspective, being able to integrate a greater number of theoretical and practical processes.



All the above, allows stating as a scientific problem: What are the characteristics of the social representations on academic writing constructed by students of the Faculty of Medicine 2 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba?

In order to answer the scientific problem, the following objective is stated: to characterize the social representations about academic writing constructed by the students of the Faculty of Medicine 2 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba.

METHOD

The methodology used in the present research responded to a sequential explanatory mixed methodology, which privileges the triangulation strategy of methods and data in a quantitative-qualitative sense, with the objective of characterizing the social representations on academic writing constructed by the students of the Faculty of Medicine 2 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba, during the period from January to June 2024.

We worked with 500 medical students of the Faculty of Medicine 2 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba, to whom a questionnaire was applied; their willingness to participate in the study was taken into account. From a sampling of typical cases, a sample of 50 students was selected to whom a semi-structured interview was applied.

Techniques and instruments:

Questionnaire: it sought to collect information about the dimensions of representation, in this case, to identify the knowledge that respondents have about academic writing; to rank their knowledge and determine the positive or negative orientation in this regard.

Semi-structured interview: guidelines were prepared to guide the questions, to which were added those that arose from the communication process established with the interviewee, in order to deepen the required aspects.

Fundamental categories of research:

- Social representation: particular modality of knowledge, whose function is the elaboration of behaviors and communication between individuals. Organized *Corpus* of knowledge and one of the psychic activities thanks to which men make physical and social reality intelligible, integrate themselves into a group or into a daily relationship of exchanges, release the powers of their imagination. Systems of values, notions and practices that provide individuals with the means to orient themselves in the social and material context.^(8,9)



- Academic writing: includes all oral and written productions generated in the academic environment, both by students and education professionals. These productions have basically two circulation spaces: that of the specialized sciences (in which specialists address other specialists) and that of the discourse between specialist/non-specialist (when the academic or specialist addresses a non-specialist audience; or when the student faces the challenge of constructing an academic text).^(10,11,12,13)

The research was carried out in two stages: a first quantitative stage where the questionnaire designed for the purpose of the research was applied in order to know the approximate scope of the problem, and another qualitative stage that allows deepening in the representational universe of the students studied, through a semi-structured interview.

Both stages were designed so that their complementarity would allow for a broader understanding of the characteristics of the social representations on academic writing.

RESULTS

The questionnaire conducted allowed us to identify how these young people define academic writing, which facilitated the establishment of the following definitional pattern indicators, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of definitional patterns identified according to basic and clinical cycles.

Indicators	Cycle				Total	
	Basic		Clinical		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
High form of expressing scientific knowledge	25	12	185	88	210	42
The way in which professors write their lectures and other writings	35	28	90	72	125	25
Language used in scientific literature	45	56	53	44	80	16
The notes taken by students in lectures	52	73	16	27	60	12
Everything that is written in the academic context	7	28	18	72	25	5

Source: questionnaire

As can be seen, the definitional pattern that most influenced with 42% was High form of expressing scientific knowledge. The behavior of this pattern is differential among the different groups defined; it was the strongest in the students of the clinical cycle of the course (185; 88 %), followed by How professors write their lectures and other writings (25 %). The patterns Language used in scientific literature and the notes students take in lectures were defined differently by students, with 16 % and 12 % of the total studied.

In Table 2 the data indicate that the knowledge possessed by these students about academic writing was obtained, in the first place, from their personal experiences in the university environment, followed by their participation in scientific events or conferences (39 %).



Table 2: Sources of knowledge on academic writing

Sources of knowledge	Cycle				Total	
	Basic		Clinical			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Experiences in the university environment	33	17	162	83	195	39
Events and scientific conferences	43	26	122	73	165	33
Professors	21	17	99	83	120	24
Other students	21	70	9	30	30	6

Source: questionnaire

Another way of acquiring information was through communication with the teaching staff and observation acquired from third parties in the social environment as the others. As it is observed, the information about academic writing obtained by the respondents from the teaching staff (24 %) (say the teachers of the basic cycle and those of the different areas of Primary Health Care, which located after the one obtained by their experiences in scientific events and conferences (33 %), may be indicative of the need to get more approach and advice on issues of academic writing typologies, through visit pass, exchanges, talks or other personalized actions.

It was observed that Academic writing is necessary to appropriate knowledge was the most selected by the subjects studied in the five academic groups, in terms of its importance (40 %), followed by the option It allows me to adequately interpret the contents, which evidences the practical significance that writing has for them (30 %). (Table 3)

Table 3: Importance of academic writing

Importance	Total	
	No.	%
It is necessary to appropriate knowledge.	200	40
It allows me to adequately interpret the contents	150	30
To facilitate the study	130	26
Others	20	4

Source: questionnaire

Other reasons for attributing importance to academic writing were found in the interviews, including: “without academic writing there is no point in college”, “it helps me understand what is not clear in the book” and “it allows me to feel more comfortable while studying” (4th year student).

The majority of respondents experienced exhaustion and nervousness when faced with some form of academic writing, at 28% and 27%, respectively. This was followed in order of frequency by those who feel insecurity when confronted with some form of writing in their study (25 %). In all cases, there was a tendency for these emotions to decrease proportionally to the increase in age.



Table 4: Feelings and emotions experienced in the face of academic writing.

Feelings and emotions	Academic Year										Total	
	1ro.		2do.		3ro.		4to.		5to.		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Exhaustion	11	7,8	27	19,3	41	29,3	46	32,8	15	10,7	140	28,0
Nervousness	34	25,2	43	31,8	37	27,4	12	8,9	9	6,6	135	27,0
Insecurity	51	41,0	32	25,6	17	13,6	11	8,8	14	11,2	125	25,0
Fear	19	21,8	23	26,4	28	32,2	17	19,5	-	-	87	17,0
Anger	6	46,2	2	15,4	5	38,5	-	-	-	-	13	3,0

Source: questionnaire

The interviews expressed criteria related to a feeling of displeasure experienced by these young people, when they face some type of academic writing, which is based on the following statements: *"I feel exhaustion or tiredness because I know that when I am studying some texts are incomprehensible or very difficult to interpret". "When I study I realize that what the professor said is in contradiction with what the literature says"*.

The minority of these students reported feeling fear when confronted with some form of writing (17%); in the interview applied, it was justified that: *"sometimes I feel fear when I am studying and I need to help myself with my class notes because I realize that I did not copy the most important things"* (1st year student).

Regarding the use or consumption of academic writing, most of the Medical students (45%) referred to mobilize their behavior towards research, the search for new knowledge and constant learning (Table 5), which, according to the interview, the type of writing they consume most is specialized literature such as theses, essays and textbooks. Another part of the respondents (30%) expressed discomfort and tension generating an attitude of rejection regarding the use or consumption of any type of academic writing. Of the total sample, 25% declared little or no interest in the use or consumption of academic writing.

Table 5: Attitude towards academic writing

Attitude	Total	
	No.	%
Research, knowledge and learning	227	45
Discomfort, stress and rejection	148	30
Little interest and/or total disinterest	125	25

Source: questionnaire

According to the criteria given in the interviews by the subjects studied, a small part of them expressed other attitudes towards academic writing, among which the compulsive use of dictionaries or other reference materials and religious ritual practices stood out. The number of students who expressed rejection and total disinterest in academic writing was alarming (54% of the total sample), and only make use of it when they have no other alternative.



DISCUSSION

Regarding the conceptions of academic writing in general, the students did not present a full awareness of epistemic type beliefs, as reproductive type beliefs still prevail. This implies that the vision about what academic writing is, as a conceptual and rhetorical tool also underlies the conception of reproducing through writing the information they know and/or provided by the professors with whom they interact.

Thus, these students assumed that academic writing is a formal knowledge kept and used only when needed for school demands. Thus, such beliefs need to be rectified, since academic writing should be understood as a continuous praxis within the formation process of every student at the higher level, where the conceptualization and representation of the task, the student's previous knowledge, the demands of the text and all the other preceding texts contained in his or her experience interact integrally.⁽⁸⁾

Although the subjects studied represented academic writing in terms of importance, reliability and security, these representations are not sufficient to assume an active attitude towards the object of representation. Therefore, it is much more complex to establish a link between regulated author-learning and some learning strategies, mainly in the university context, and it does not bring students closer to the search for solutions to a problem, whether cognitive, practical or empirical. This is why conceiving writing productions in terms of importance predisposes students to an integrative position, which conceives academic writing from a psychological and social perspective.⁽¹⁴⁾

This brings us face to face with the affective experiences of these subjects, which are tinged by the exhaustion and nervousness they experience when they relate to academic writing, motivated by a rejection of some of its types, which explains the demand for teacher consultations and other non-formal forms of individual study in which the teacher intervenes.⁽¹⁵⁾

The construction of an emotional trajectory makes evident the variability between positive and negative dispositions, presenting a notorious preeminence of the latter. Consequently, there is a shift from insecurity, fear, anger and frustration, in the early stages of academic writing, to interest, satisfaction and security, as students advance in their studies.⁽¹¹⁾

CONCLUSIONS

The social representation of academic writing is characterized by a figurative core constituted by the importance that university students attribute to this category and by emotional states such as psychological exhaustion and states of nervousness generated by the consumption and use of the typologies of the object of representation.



The information that students possess comes primarily from academic experiences and from interrelationships with professors and teaching support staff. Another way of acquiring information is acquired through social communication and observation from third parties in the social environment.

The attitude towards academic writing is not favorable, although it is active; the importance and necessity of this category is recognized, but an active and proactive behavior is not assumed to promote its consumption and use.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution:

Fidel Vázquez Garay: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, research, methodology, project management, supervision, visualization, original draft-writing, drafting-revising, and editing.

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Complementary file (Open Data):

[Cuestionario y guía de entrevista semiestructurada empleados en Representación social de la escritura académica en estudiantes de Medicina](#)

[Supplementary file \(Open Data\):](#)

[Questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide used in Social representation of academic writing in medical students.](#)

