Contributions of tutoring to the development of academic writing in graduate education*

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Abstract

Earning a master's or doctoral degree often requires writing scientific articles, a challenging task for graduate students. A review of existing literature on writing in higher education underscores the need to learn more about the strategies tutors use when teaching their tutees how to prepare their theses and academic articles. **Objective:** Explore the contribution of tutoring to the composition of academic articles as graduation requirements and thereby to the development of academic literacies among master's degree students. **Methodology:** Descriptive case study following the interpretive paradigm. This qualitative study was conducted in a master's degree program in education at a private university in Medellin, Colombia. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three tutors, two students, and one graduate student. The content was analyzed by utilizing open and axial coding. **Results:** The study revealed three pivotal functions performed by tutors in fostering academic literacies during their support for article writing: adept management of the tutor-tutee relationship concerning co-authorship, skillful guidance in navigating interactions with external agents who regulate publication, and proactive promotion of the tutees' relationship with writing and research, thereby fostering the configuration of their identity as authors and researchers.

Keywords: Tutoring, Graduate Education, Academic writing, Academic Literacies, New Literacy Studies

**Formación en escritura académica de estudiantes de posgrado
A través de la tutoría**

Resumen

Obtener una maestría o doctorado a menudo requiere escribir artículos científicos, una tarea desafiante para los estudiantes de posgrado. Una revisión de la literatura sobre escritura en educación superior señala la necesidad de aprender más sobre las estrategias que los tutores despliegan cuando enseñan a sus estudiantes cómo preparar sus tesis y artículos académicos. **Objetivo:** Explorar cómo la tutoría contribuye a la redacción de artículos académicos como requisitos de graduación y, por lo tanto, al desarrollo de literacidades académicas entre los estudiantes de maestría. **Metodología:** Estudio de caso descriptivo siguiendo el paradigma interpretativo. Este estudio cualitativo se realizó en un programa de maestría en educación en una universidad privada en Medellín, Colombia. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con tres tutores, dos estudiantes y un graduado. El contenido fue analizado utilizando codificación abierta y axial. **Resultados:** Los tutores realizan tres funciones esenciales asociadas al desarrollo de literacidades académicas durante el apoyo proporcionado para la redacción de artículos: gestión de la relación maestro-estudiante en torno a la coautoría; manejo de la interacción con los agentes externos que regulan la publicación; y promoción de la relación de los estudiantes con la escritura y la investigación, lo que aporta al desarrollo de su identidad como autores e investigadores.

Palabras claves: Tutoría, Educación de Posgrado, Escritura Académica, Alfabetización Académica, Nuevos Estudios de Literacidades

Introduction

Interest in literacy education at the university level has grown significantly over the last decade. Difficulties in developing academic literacy skills are directly tied to the dropout rates of university students (Olave-Arias et al., 2013; Patiño & Cardona, 2012; Villabona, 2018). In fact, the biggest challenge for students to graduate involves conducting research and writing the required thesis or the associated articles derived from it. Many graduate education students fail to earn their degree after completing all their coursework, a phenomenon known as *All but Dissertation* (ABD) (Hanson et al. 2022). The graduation bottleneck is often related to meeting the demands of academic writing (Villabona, 2018). Academic performance is a warning factor: students with literacy deficiencies are less likely to persist in completing their thesis and, hence, are more likely to abandon their studies (Patiño & Cardona, 2012).

Program administrators and faculty should pay attention to the development of students' reading and writing skills (Carlino, 2005; Vargas, 2020). After all, learning to read and write continues after completing elementary and secondary education (Carlino, 2013). To write research articles and theses, university students need sophisticated skills that include critical academic literacies (Zavala, 2009), digital literacies (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2023; Caverly et al., 2019), and research literacies (Abad & Uribe, 2023; Mendoza, 2014). However, these literacies are not learned in isolation (Cruz, 2014); tutoring plays a key role in their development. In fact, tutors are essential in helping students write academic texts as they do not learn to do so on their own. They need someone to guide them because their difficulties with academic writing are not resolved with generic or remedial courses (Carlino, 2003).

The study herein presented focuses on the role that tutors play in helping master's degree students complete their written graduation requirements and, therefore, in the development of their literacy skills. For this study, tutoring is the one-to-one guidance that students receive through their graduate studies from an experienced research educator to conduct research, write the thesis or articles derived from it, and join the academic community. Tutoring is essential for master's degree students due to their limited appropriation of the writing skills required to complete their research project and produce the articles associated with it (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Flores, 2016).

However, little attention has been paid to tutoring as a social practice through which graduate students learn to write academically. In fact, there is no consensus about the role of tutors in the development of literacy (Flores, 2016; Bejarano & Esteban, 2022), so it is essential to learn more about the strategies tutors deploy when they teach their tutees how to write their thesis and academic articles (Núñez, 2020; Núñez et al., 2021; Thompson, 2009). To help overcome this gap, this article reports on a case study that sought to explore how tutoring contributes to the writing of academic articles as a graduation requirement and, thus, to the development of academic literacies among master's degree students

Theoretical base

Over the last two decades, studies about academic literacies in higher education have been conducted under two different approaches. The first one responds to

a traditional notion of academic literacy that conceives reading and writing as cognitive skills (Trigos-Carrillo, 2019). The second one corresponds to the *New Literacy Studies* (Barton, 1994; Street, 1984), which advocates for the existence of multiple literacies and sees reading and writing as socially and culturally situated practices occurring at all levels of education (Lea & Street, 2006). These two models, which informed our data collection and analysis, are characterized in the paragraphs below; afterwards, we supply working definitions for two essential concepts; namely, tutoring and academic articles.

Traditional Literacy Education

The concept of literacy is related to both the teaching of reading and writing and the appropriation of the written culture (Moreno & Sito, 2019). Academic literacy refers to the discursive practices habitually learned in tertiary education (Sito & Moreno, 2021). From the academic socialization model (Trigos-Carrillo, 2019), these practices are conceived as being linguistic, cognitive and rhetorical; further, they include the acts of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking of a particular disciplinary community (Hernández-Zamora, 2016).

It is no secret that college students often show low levels of academic literacy development when they enter the university. This situation led the higher-education system across the United States of America to offer remedial courses to improve students' reading and writing skills (Carlino, 2003). Traditional remedial courses are intended to teach academic writing by having students develop mechanical skills such as grammar and spelling (Vargas, 2020).

The *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) and *Writing in the Disciplines* (WID) movements emerged from the socio-cognitive model of academic literacy that nurture such courses. These movements required experts in the fields of linguistics and discourse analysis to collaborate with teachers from disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and history to promote the development of students as readers and writers within a specific area (Carlino, 2013).

Studies based on these instructional models claim that the acquisition of academic literacy skills helps students obtain better grades and guarantees their permanence in higher education through effective reading comprehension and the adequate

command of expository and argumentative writing (Olave-Arias et al., 2013). Studies in Latin America about how students learn to read and write in academic settings have treated reading and writing as cognitive skills due to the influence of the studies under the academic socialization model (Trigos-Carrillo, 2019).

The New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies emerged from the discussions of scholars such as Gee (2000) and Street (1993), as literacy studies took a social turn (Moreno & Sito, 2019; Vargas 2020). The traditional approach, restricted by psycho-cognitive views, was not broad enough to include discussions that belonged to a sociocultural and critical approach. Consequently, proponents of the New Literacy Studies were influenced by disciplines such as history, sociology, and anthropology, as they argued that the written culture is more a sociocultural phenomenon than a mental one (Gee, 2015).

From this perspective, a literacy practice is anything that a person does with literacy (Barton et al., 2000) to learn, build, and communicate in life. Literacy practices are not static or isolated; they are social practices that vary according to context, culture, and genre (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984; 1995). All literacies are integrated, so they can be seen as a compendium. Consequently, the written culture is the result of these socially situated literacy practices (Vargas, 2020). From this approach, literacy practices depend on how people participate of the written culture within a given context (Moreno & Sito 2019; Vargas 2020). Therefore, literacy practices belonging to specific academic disciplines go beyond a simple deficit model that assesses students' writing according to fixed levels of competence (Moreno & Sito, 2019; Vargas, 2015; 2016; 2020).

Essential Concepts
Tutoring

Professors often assume that when students start their college training, they are prepared to meet the academic literacy demands of this educational level (Zavala, 2009). However, literacy scholars have warned that the university should continue to support the students' appropriation of reading and writing competencies (Carlino, 2003; 2013; Zavala, 2011). In this task, tutors are key in helping students develop research and academic writing skills through their guidance and support.

In graduate education, a tutor is a designated teacher who guides, supervises, and provides feedback to students as they complete their research projects (Bayona-Oré & Bazan, 2020; Bejarano & Esteban, 2021; De Kleijn et al., 2013). Tutors help students by originating processes of reflection and promoting their autonomy (Flores, 2016). Their actions are intended to help graduate students systematically access knowledge and develop skills, habits and attitudes concerning research and writing practices (Flores, 2016). In sum, tutoring is a multifaceted instructional endeavor aimed at preparing new researchers within specific disciplines.

Academic Articles and Theses

Academic articles are original material related to research, practice, and reflection from different disciplines or areas of knowledge. In order to be accepted by indexed journals, academic articles have to be written with academic excellence and advanced theoretical knowledge. In addition, they should address cutting-edge topics and contribute to current discussions in a particular field. Articles often derive from graduate research that students embark on to accomplish requirements for graduation such as review articles, research study articles and theses.

Review articles offer a critical perspective that points out to contradictions and gaps in the literature on a particular theme and gives suggestions to guide future research (Belcher, 2010). Research study articles, on the other hand, disclose the results of a study and include a review of the literature, description of the methodology, presentation of the results and their discussion (Belcher, 2010). A master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation are academic texts that often cover more than one hundred pages; they address a problem related to studies through which a student seeks to obtain a graduate education degree; and normally they have to be defended before a doctoral tribunal (Eco, 1983).

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Method
Research Design

Under the interpretative paradigm (Pham, 2018), we conducted a descriptive single case study with embedded units (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009) to analyze the contribution of tutoring to the learning of academic literacies. Data collection was carried out in the second semester of 2022 and the first semester of 2023, within the master's degree in education at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, which was the case and, therefore, the unit of analysis.

Luis Amigó is a private Catholic university based in Medellin, Colombia, with other four campuses across the country. The university has six schools in the areas of business administration and economy, social communication and media, law, education, engineering, and psychology. At the graduate education level, the institution offers 12 master's degrees, 19 specialization degrees, and three doctorate programs.

Since its inception in 2016, the master's degree in education established graduation requirements directly tied to the writing and publication of academic papers. Instead of submitting a thesis, candidates to the master's degree have to write four academic papers to graduate. In the first semester, students are expected to write a research proposal. In the second semester, they have to write a review article and submit it to an academic journal. In the third semester, students have to publish the proceedings derived from their participation in an academic event. Finally, in the fourth semester, students have to write a research report article and submit it to an academic journal.

Tutors are assigned to the master's degree students from the beginning of the program. They are expected to guide students through both the planning and implementation of their research study and the preparation and publication of the academic papers associated with it.

Three tutors and three students from the master's degree in education were selected as key informants (Marshall, 1996), and they were subsequently interviewed to help identify the difficulties that students have when writing academically, describe the writing process between tutors and students, and characterize the tutor's role throughout the writing of academic articles.

Before conducting the interviews, participants signed an informed consent, whereon they were informed that the data was going to be used for research and publication purposes. They were also informed that researchers had made provisions to ensure confidentiality and protection of their identity. In addition, participants authorized the recording of the interviews, which were carried out over the month of November 2022 and lasted about 35 minutes each. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of both tutors and tutees respectively.

Table 1.

Socio-Demographic Description of Tutors

Participant	Age	Gender	Academic level	Role	Years of experience
P1	38	Female	Ph. D.	Tutor (1)	4 ½
P2	58	Male	Master	Tutor (2)	5
P3	51	Female	Ph. D.	Tutor (3)	4

Source: data collected from interviews.

Table 2.

Socio-Demographic Description of Tutees

Participant	Age	Gender	Academic level	Role	Number of written articles
P4	26	Female	Professional	Student (1)	5
P5	27	Female	Professional	Student (2)	1
P6	22	Female	Master	Graduate (3)	7

Source: data collected from interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

The semi-structured interview (Bell, 2010) was framed around three categories that resulted from the literature review, which in turn was conducted in light of the research objectives. The three categories are the linguistic and sociocultural writing difficulties, the process of writing academic articles, and the role tutors play in guiding their tutees' academic writing. The narrative data emerged from the transcription of the interviews.

Following Savin-Baden and Major (2013) and Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), we completed the data analysis in four steps as follows. First, for open coding, the transcripts were assembled and color coded. A start-up list of categories based on the literature review was used to establish some pre-established categories. This step was done for each interview in a Word document. Second, for axial coding, the codes were organized into categories in an analysis matrix in Excel. New categories that emerged during the analysis led to data reduction and to the reconfiguration of the category scheme. Thirdly, we proceeded to identify themes and patterns through constant comparison and contrast between the codes and the data. This led to the writing of analytic and interpretive memos to describe what the

data showed and to establish connections within and between categories. Finally, the findings were consolidated and validated with the community in academic colloquia. They were organized and linked to the literature, to be shared through different written and oral media. Table 3 below shows the category scheme.

Table 3.
Category Tree

Difficulties with academic writing	Linguistic and discursive	Spelling, grammar and punctuation
		Textual structure
		Documentation*
	Sociocultural	Abilities to read and write in the university*
		Related to the tutoring program
Academic writing process	Steps	Planning and writing
		Pre-publishing and edition
	Academic texts	Research proposal*
		Literature review
		Research article
Tutors' role when writing articles	Managing relationship with the tutee	Writing together*
		Trusting each other*
	Managing relation with external agents of writing process	Choosing the journal to submit papers
		Helping in the process of publishing
		Giving students support to control emotions*
		Suggesting writers and coauthors
	Promoting students' relation to research and academic writing	Modeling writing*
		Giving feedback
		Sponsoring students' conceptual acquisition*
		Helping students' writing learning
		Encouraging students to become authors

Note: Categories are based on the research objectives and literature review
*Emerging categories

Findings
Students' Writing Difficulties

Students' difficulties with writing were divided into discursive-linguistic and sociocultural. Contrary to initial expectations, linguistic difficulties, such as spelling and punctuation, did not represent a serious difficulty for the master's degree

students when writing their academic articles. However, tutors encourage students to refine certain grammatical features.

Regarding the appropriation of disciplinary discourse, students often lack knowledge of textual structures and stylistic conventions required for each type of article. Therefore, tutors have to guide students in the recognition and appropriation of micro and macro textual structures depending on the type of article they are preparing. One of the tutors expressed the difficulties students face when they begin to write, and tutors have to correct the first drafts:

> Everything is corrected! From the writing tone, the way the student cites sources, to the way two and three authors are combined. In addition, the student's first draft is always very rigid, report-like, so what I do is that I correct wording (Tutor 1).

Documentation, citations, and references from external sources can also be problematic for most students. For this reason, tutors find it necessary to reinforce technical skills such as searching in databases, using documentary analysis matrices, and adequately citing and referencing sources. One tutor commented:

> As a tutor, I have to start suggesting and showing strategies to systematize the information they are reading (Tutor 2).

Besides acquiring these specialized technical skills, students need to overcome sociocultural difficulties such as the acquisition of reading habits. The three tutors stated that reading is essential for the writing process. For them, it is not possible to advance in writing without having done previous readings that serve as the basis for appropriating the theoretical and methodological knowledge that scientific writing demands. One of the students explained her difficulties with reading in the following terms:

> I think that the most difficult thing is to read. (…) Let's say, I didn't find a great motivation to develop a reading habit since I was little, so it has been quite an important internal job because of my personality traits (Student 2).

Furthermore, tutors agreed that academic writing, especially in graduate studies, requires mastery of specific skills that students have not yet acquired. According

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to one of the tutors, this has led some professors to complain about their students' writing. However, it is necessary that all program faculty get involved in the writing development of their students by providing elements that may help improve their literacy skills. It became clear that the level of sophistication and specialization of writing increases as students advance in their formal education. One tutor commented:

> Many professors believe that their job when a student enters the university is to teach them, but not to worry about their writing. A professor who believes that the student already knows how to write is a decontextualized one. (..) We finish a doctorate and start a postdoc, but we do not know how to write for a postdoc; each level requires a new learning process (Tutor 1).

Article Writing Process

Findings related to the writing process were divided into the phases of writing an academic article and the type of articles written within the program. The first phase is planning and writing the academic article. Two tutors said that they take into account journal requirements to guide their students' writing. In addition, tutors have to guide the documentation and analysis of the data obtained through the literature review. Although this is an essential task, they emphasized how hard it is for students to process such high volume of information as the one that must be read at this stage. According to tutors, students also find it difficult to start writing. For that reason, tutors have to model writing for their tutees and encourage them to keep at it. One participant commented:

> In the initial phases, well, it's quite tedious because there is also a lot of reading that must be done by the students to establish their own ideas based on the previous readings (Tutor 3).

The second phase is related to the actions taken before the publication of the article. According to the tutors, submission to the journal plays a fundamental role in getting the manuscript published. Although it has already been written, it does not mean that it is in its final version. In most cases, journal reviewers request changes to the manuscript to continue with the publication process. Editing the manuscript implies that the student has to adjust it to the requirements of the journal and to its

style. According to one of the tutors, at this stage it is necessary to cut, expand, or eliminate some sections or ideas from the manuscript.

> Authors have to be strategic in choosing the journal to which they will send the manuscript and make sure they publish the topic they are writing about. (…) That is kind of tedious, and it is a job of reviewing databases and journals (Tutor 2).

For the participants, each text that is written for the master's degree represents a certain degree of complexity. However, the more students write, the better they get. Tutees improve their level of literacy appropriation progressively every time they write an article, as it provides them with strategical knowledge that scaffolds the writing of the following ones.

Although the research proposal is not an academic article, the participants agree that it was a difficult text to write since, being the first, the tutees did not yet have the necessary skills. According to the tutors, the difficulty in writing this type of text lies in the complexity of materializing the initial ideas to prepare the proposal and justify it. Once again, by modeling writing and jump-starting initial drafts, tutors help tutees overcome their first writing challenges.

To write the review article, three tutors shared with their tutees a matrix of analysis to plan the text and analyze the selected bibliographic sources. According to the tutors, the greatest difficulty in preparing this manuscript was the lack of knowledge of the methodology of the review article. Tutors stated that tutees find it difficult to talk about the theoretical tensions between the authors, limit themselves to writing a summary of each research on the topic, and often fail to interpret and discuss the studies.

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After writing two previous articles, students show progress in reading and writing that leads them to face the research study article with a higher level of literacy. This progress is related to the conceptual appropriation of the tutees. Regarding the evolution of students in the appropriation of their academic literacy skills, one tutor commented:

> These changes that occur in students' writing are directly related to changes in their way of thinking; that is, in their cognitive maturation

process as a result of a lot of reading and a lot of discussion with the tutor. Their way of writing is reflecting their way of thinking and their way of thinking is changing (Tutor 2).

Roles of Tutors in the Development of Students' Writing and Literacy

The data showed that tutors engage in at least eleven different actions when guiding their tutees in the process of writing their academic articles. These actions were classified in three groups. In the first group are the actions that tutors carry out to manage their relationships with the tutees. Within the master's degree, tutors usually end up co-authoring the articles with their tutees. According to the participants, two aspects must be considered in this collaboration. The first one has to do with the way in which each of the parties undertakes the writing of the article. For tutors this is a part of their job, which is done during their working day. For tutees, writing the articles is a requirement to graduate from the master's program.

The second aspect has to do with the bonds that are built between both parties. When writing together, tutors and tutees have to be open to letting the other person review and discuss what they have written individually. As the relationship progresses, writing and publishing the articles becomes a common effort. Furthermore, not only do tutees learn from their tutors, but tutors also learn from their tutees.

> The articles (…) generate something between the student and the teacher. The article becomes something that belongs to both of them; it is research that both of them are conducting. So they both {end up} working on it and giving it their heart and soul (Tutor 1).

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Writing together becomes not only an end but also a means to strengthen the pedagogical relationship. One student commented:

> When you read the other and let them read you, that is when these different bonds between the tutor and the tutee begin to be built. It is no longer that I send a draft and the tutor review it and sends it back to me, but rather I ask myself: what does this, that I am reading, say about the other person? or what does this say about their story? In addition, what I wrote, what does it say about me? (Tutee 1).

This academic relationship is possible when the tutor generates an environment of trust. According to the participants, trusting each other helps reduce writing tensions, which can arise from the constant process of corrections and generates feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction due to the non-compliance with the quality demanded by the tutor. However, as trust is built between tutor and tutee, the latter learns that following the tutor's instructions and paying attention to their feedback will improve the text. Likewise, the tutor also has to trust in the abilities of the tutee and in the quality of the manuscript that they both are writing.

> When I question what tutees write, they get frustrated, and that kind of tension is interesting. They may think that nothing works for me. However, there is a kind of trust because they already know that I am going to return everything commented in red, but if they accept the feedback, the text will improve (Tutor 1).

The second group of tutors' roles has to do with managing the interactions with external agents that regulate the writing and publication of articles. Before being published, manuscripts are reviewed by two types of external agents. First, manuscripts are read and reviewed by peers, experts in the area or in writing who are chosen by the authors in order to improve it. Only then are the manuscripts submitted for journal editors and peer reviewers to assess them. Tutors often suggest who the most appropriate "friend reviewers" may be. Two tutors and two tutees mentioned having received such valuable contributions from external agents that, in some cases, became co-authors of the article.

Journal rejections and corrections of the manuscripts usually delay the publication and, in some cases, discourage the student from publishing the manuscript, a process that often extends beyond graduation. One tutor said that she continues the process of publishing the article even after the students have graduated from the master's degree and may be not interested in publishing at that time.

> For the first student I tutored, who has already graduated, was very, very difficult to find the journal. For that reason, students lose motivation after graduating, and I have to take charge of publishing (Tutor 1).

The writing of manuscripts involves great work and dedication from both tutors and tutees. Participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of the product they

submitted to journals. However, their manuscripts were not always accepted in the first submission, and journals have always asked for corrections in order to publish their articles. Tutors and two tutees expressed frustration and discomfort when this happened, as they thought their manuscripts had the quality required. On these occasions, tutors should call tutees to calm and motivate them not to give up until the manuscript is published. In addition, tutors helped tutees to find a solution to this situation.

> We wrote the review article, and we thought it was very well written [Laughs]. However, the first journal answered the article was too specific and for other two journals, without reading the manuscripts, the topic was not of their interest. We felt frustrated, but for the students it is worse because they do not have experience in the world of scientific publications. (Tutor 1)

The third role of tutors consists in promoting the student's relationship with both writing and research. To that aim, the tutor's modeling of writing is an important function carried out throughout the entire tutoring, from the writing of the proposal to the submission of the last research article. According to the participants, when the tutors write some fragments, they show the tutees how they can do it. As a result, tutees adopt features of the way in which their tutors write. One tutor described the modeling process in the following terms:

> Pedagogically, I take two things into account. We need to write with the students to be able to model for them. I show you how an idea is developed scientifically speaking and now you do it: I do it, and you see. Now you do it, and I see. (Tutor 2)

In addition, the tutor's feedback is key for the tutee to learn the necessary elements in each of the stages of academic writing. Feedback is present throughout the tutoring process and its importance lies in two main aspects. First, feedback helps students correct discursive and linguistic errors they make due to carelessness, inexperience, or ignorance. Second, feedback provides the necessary elements to write the text in its different stages. Despite progress made in the manuscript, it is always subject to improvement; hence, tutees learn that excellence in writing comes as a result of constant revision. One tutor commented:

> Tutors sometimes believe that the tutee is going to learn to write by giving them a lot of writing assignments. However, if there is no feedback (…) the matter does not materialize. (…) I do not think that you learn to write by writing alone, but you learn when you are corrected with feedback about the mistakes you make. (Tutor 3)

Tutoring promotes the tutees' formation of conceptual knowledge (Chen & Li, 2021), which results from the readings suggested by the tutor and the discussions during the tutoring sessions. It is important that tutees achieve the appropriation of dominant concepts within the field in which they carried out their research since knowing about the topic under research facilitates the writing of the academic articles. On this matter, tutors often become references and role models. One student who was researching about children's literature commented about her tutor:

> I would say that learning from her, as she knows about literature and enjoys it very much. I also like literature, but I never had a reference to learn from or someone to guide me. (Student 1)

Tutoring, nonetheless, goes beyond training students in specialized reading and writing skills: it also has an impact on the way they build their identities as researchers and authors. Among the goals of the master's in education is for candidates to learn how to both conduct a research study and write academically. For this reason, a central aspect of the tutor's role is to improve the tutees' writing competence level and their appropriation of academic literacy. This requirement has a deep pedagogical implication: the tutor has to take the tutee as a student and turn them into an academic peer. A reconfiguration of the pedagogical relationship and of the students' identities emerges from the improvement in writing as they are recognized as academic peers by their tutors.

> Tutees expect from me a text with many comments and a lot of editing in the margins. However, after a lot of tutoring sessions, the comments and editing in red are decreasing. It is a job that I like because it is a peer job in which the student's progress is seen. (Tutor 1)

Completion of a master's program does not guarantee that students will readily identify as researchers and writers. However, their academic literacy skills develop

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throughout the course of their studies, largely as a result of the way in which they are tutored. Furthermore, their own writing is inevitably influenced by their tutor's writing style and pedagogy. Consequently, tutoring becomes a key element for the development of the tutees' identity not only as researchers but also as writers, as it gives them the possibility of studying in detail a research object about which they can read and write extensively, and to do it under the guidance of an instructor who often becomes a mentor and a role model for both doing research and enacting academic literacy practices. In this regard, a tutor reflected:

> Behind the identity as writers, there is an identity as researchers. He who writes well, researches as well. (Tutor 1)

Discussion

Students at the master's in education experience difficulties in appropriating the academic literacy skills necessary to produce the academic articles required for graduation. These difficulties are not only linguistic and discursive but also sociocultural. Linguistic mistakes, nonetheless, are not preeminent at this level. The most salient difficulties of students regarding academic writing can be divided into three areas: knowledge of the text structures corresponding to the types of articles required; appropriation of discursive norms for the use of citations and references; and articulation of their own voice as authors, so as to put it in dialogue with the referenced studies (Rey & Gómez, 2021).

Sociocultural obstacles in academic writing relate to how students perceive reading and writing and how they integrate them into their academic routines. Students must reconceptualize reading and writing as epistemic practices that play an essential role in learning (Carlino, 2003) and developing conceptual knowledge (Chen & Li, 2021). Recognizing the interdependence of reading and writing is crucial. Therefore, improving writing habits requires the cultivation of new reading habits, both of which should be recognized as integral components of academic life beyond merely obtaining a degree. Additionally, academic writing in graduate studies requires the mastery of specific skills. It is important for faculty and administration to move beyond the deficit model, which assumes that students lack writing skills, and instead acknowledge that students are in the process of learning to write at their current academic level. Writing is an ongoing task that becomes increasingly complex as students progress through their academic life (Lillis, 2013).

Furthermore, writing scientific articles is a highly sophisticated literacy practice; to complete it successfully, graduate education students require guidance to overcome the difficulties described above and appropriate the academic discourse of the discipline (Hernández-Zamora, 2018; Yu & Lee, 2013).

While completing the master's program, students' successive writing of different academic papers under the tutor's supervision leads to the progressive improvement of their literacy skills. Moreover, collaborative writing serves a pedagogical function that unites tutors and tutees; for that reason they often become co-authors of the required articles. During the accompaniment of the writing and publication of scientific articles, tutors perform at least three macro functions that aid in the development of the tutee's academic literacy: managing the tutor-tutee relationship around collaborative writing; guiding the interaction with external agents who regulate publication; and promoting the relationship of the tutee with writing itself in light of the epistemic role it plays in research development.

Regarding the management of the tutor-tutee relationship, it depends on the degree of trust that can be established between both parties as a result of their communication quality, particularly during the long periods dedicated to reviewing the manuscripts and providing feedback (Nurie, 2018). Trust is crucial in achieving a co-authored publication as it implies a vote of confidence in the other author and the quality of the work they can produce together (Tan, 2016).

Concerning the management of the interaction with external agents, the work of the tutor begins with the suggestion of expert friends who can read the manuscript and continues with all the actions taken with the tutee to improve the manuscript after receiving the feedback from the journal's editors and reviewers. Scientific knowledge is not built in isolation: academic dialogue is necessary for researchers to receive contributions that help improve their writing and, consequently, their research (Belcher, 2010). Nevertheless, the support of the tutor in this final stage is essential since students are exposed to manuscript overcorrection and rejection, which could lead them to lose motivation and give up publishing. Hence, tutors play a key role in helping students navigate the stormy waters of the publishing world and manage the negative emotions resulting from writing and publication setbacks.

Finally, to promote the relationship of the tutee with writing and research, tutors perform at least five actions: modeling writing, providing feedback, scaffolding

conceptual appropriation, promoting literacy development, and fostering configuration of the tutees' identity as writers and researchers (Hajar & Mhamed, 2021). Effective feedback is essential towards ensuring the tutees' appropriation of conceptual knowledge, literacy development, and construction of their identity as a writers. In addition, the quality of written production at the graduate level increases through the tutor's modeling and explanation of the writing process, the systematic strategic training in academic genres, and a set of a consistent evaluation criteria established by the tutor (Bosio, 2018).

Reviewing the students' writing, providing responsive and informative feedback, modeling literacy practices, and discussing their significance for academic development are not merely technical actions done by the tutor; they are continuous functions that promote the conceptualization of what writing really is and the appropriation of writing as an academic and epistemic activity.

As a result, tutees create a different relationship with writing that goes beyond being reviewed by experts and complying with publication requirements. They understand that writing quality academic texts involves a constant negotiation of form and meaning. Therefore, manuscripts are continually revised and corrected, feedback is given and processed, and things do not always go as planned.

Effective tutoring in graduate education involves making solid contributions to the development of students' academic literacies. Tutors' functions in relation to this goal refer to the management of their relationship with their tutees around writing, of the relationship that they establish as co-authors with external agents, and of the relationship that tutees establish with research and writing. These functions help the tutee understand how research works and its relationship with writing. As a result of performing these functions, tutors help tutees change old conceptions about academic writing, which, as a social practice, is not done in isolation but through meaningful yet tense interactions with others that are necessary to produce new knowledge.

Conclusions

By examining the role of tutoring in promoting academic literacy, this study underscored the inherent complexity of academic writing, particularly for students embarking on graduate programs, and emphasized the importance of tutors in

guiding students through the challenges of producing and publishing academic articles.

The tutoring experiences explored in this study were regarded as successful. However, it is imperative to also investigate negative tutoring experiences and their impact on students' writing.

All the same, by recognizing that academic writing is a complex literacy practice whose mastery requires continuous improvement, tutors at the graduate level should provide ongoing support for their students literacy development throughout their academic journey. Along those lines, this study showed that tutors who proactively address writing difficulties, guide article writing through a collaborative stance, and foster a healthy relationship with both writing and research through effective modeling and feedback significantly contribute to the their students' literacy development and identity construction as researchers and writers.

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