



GENRE RECOGNITION TO WRITING CONTROL: DEVELOPING DISCIPLINARY WRITING IN ENGLISH NURSING DOCUMENTATION BY L2 UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS

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Article info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: Yoyok Febrijanto yoyokfeb@gmail.com STIKES RS Baptis Kediri	English nursing documentation requires students to coordinate language proficiency, genre knowledge, and disciplinary communication. Yet relatively limited research has examined how undergraduate L2 writers perform this professional genre in educational settings. This study investigates English nursing documentation produced by L2 undergraduate nursing students as developing disciplinary writing. Using a descriptive mixed-methods text analysis, the study screened 176 portfolio files and analyzed 110 documentation assignments from an undergraduate nursing program of Health Science College of Baptist Hospital, Kediri, East Java, Indonesia. The texts were examined across four dimensions: genre conformity, organization and coherence, language accuracy, and disciplinary terminology. The corpus showed an uneven developmental profile. Genre conformity ($M = 2.86$) and disciplinary terminology ($M = 2.79$) were stronger than organization/coherence ($M = 1.93$) and language accuracy ($M = 1.98$). Overall, 62 assignments were classified as adequate disciplinary writing, 44 as emerging disciplinary writing, and 4 as weak. Within-text imbalance was common: 60.9% of the assignments showed a gap of at least two points between their strongest and weakest dimensions, and more than half combined adequate genre and terminology performance with weak or emerging performance in coherence and/or language. Writing problems were also cumulative: all texts with zero or one coded problem were classified as adequate, whereas none of the texts with four or five coded problems reached the adequate level. Archive-level variation further suggested that pedagogical context shaped performance, especially in organization/coherence. The findings indicate that English nursing documentation should be understood not merely as a site of language error, but as developing disciplinary writing in which genre recognition often precedes fuller rhetorical and linguistic control. The study supports genre-based, discipline-sensitive, and context-aware writing pedagogy in undergraduate nursing education. Keywords: <i>disciplinary writing; nursing documentation; L2 writing; undergraduate nursing students; genre analysis; academic literacy</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Writing occupies a central place in nursing education because it functions not only as an academic skill but also as a professional competence (McCloskey et al., 2025). Throughout their training, nursing students are expected to engage in multiple forms of

written communication, including reflective journals, case reports, care plans, and clinical documentation (Wong, 2025). These writing tasks are not peripheral to professional preparation; rather, they help students organize clinical information, justify decisions, communicate observations, and demonstrate their developing understanding of patient care (Bjerkvik & Hilli, 2019). In this sense, writing in nursing education is both a means of learning and a means of participating in professional practice (Tsuruwaka & Asahara, 2018).

In higher education, writing is increasingly understood as a situated practice shaped by disciplinary purposes, expectations, and conventions (Ahmadpour et al., 2025). For nursing students, this means that writing cannot be treated simply as a general language skill detached from professional context (Mattsson, 2016). Instead, students must learn how to communicate in ways that are valued within nursing as a field, including precision, conciseness, factuality, and clarity (Chan, 2025). The ability to produce appropriate written texts is therefore closely tied to students' academic success and their readiness for future workplace communication (Blakeslee et al., 2018).

The role of writing becomes even more significant in health professions education because written communication often carries consequences beyond classroom assessment (Karlsholm et al., 2024). In nursing, documentation is directly associated with continuity of care, legal accountability, and patient safety (Johnson et al., 2025). Even when students are still working with simulated or classroom-based tasks, their writing is often designed to approximate real professional practice (Mitchell et al., 2021). As a result, writing instruction in nursing education needs to move beyond generic language correction and engage with the specific communicative demands of disciplinary genres (Parker et al., 2023).

At the same time, many nursing programs operate in contexts where students are expected to engage with English as part of academic and professional preparation (Mitchell et al., 2020). English is often the language of textbooks, journal articles, clinical terminology, and international communication in healthcare education (Tseng et al., 2025). This creates additional demands for students, who must learn not only the content of nursing but also how to express that content in academically and professionally appropriate English (Zhan et al., 2023).

Among the many writing tasks expected of nursing students, documentation is especially significant because it represents a highly specialized form of professional communication (Roets & Maritz, 2017). Nursing documentation is not merely a record of patient-related events; it is a structured, purposeful, and discipline-specific written practice (Trang et al., 2022). It requires writers to select relevant information, present it in an organized and concise manner, and use terminology that accurately reflects clinical observations and actions (Daly, 2017). In educational settings, documentation tasks may be simplified or simulated, but they still introduce students to the communicative norms of nursing practice (DeLeon et al., 2020).

From the perspective of disciplinary writing, nursing documentation can be understood as a genre shaped by the values and conventions of the nursing profession (Orfanò & Wingate, 2024). Like other disciplinary genres, it reflects expectations about what counts as relevant knowledge, how information should be ordered, what tone is appropriate, and what kinds of language are considered acceptable (Campbell, 2017). Students writing nursing documentation must therefore do more than produce grammatically correct sentences; they

must learn how to align their texts with disciplinary expectations regarding objectivity, brevity, clarity, and accuracy (Tilakaratna et al., 2020).

This perspective is important because it makes visible aspects of writing performance that may be overlooked by a narrow focus on grammar alone (Tilakaratna et al., 2021). A student text may appear understandable at the sentence level while still falling short of professional documentation expectations in terms of information management, rhetorical organization, or disciplinary precision (Gardner & Rolfe, 2013). Treating nursing documentation as disciplinary writing therefore provides a broader and more appropriate lens for understanding how students learn to write within a profession (Abedu et al., 2024).

These demands become even more complex when students write in English as a second language (Kim & Kim, 2019). L2 nursing students must manage not only grammar and vocabulary, but also rhetorical organization, concise reporting, and the use of professionally meaningful terminology (Higashitsuji & Otsuka, 2025). Weak performance in documentation may therefore reflect not only limited language proficiency, but also incomplete control of the genre and its disciplinary purposes (Yu et al., 2023).

In L2 contexts, students are often required to negotiate several layers of difficulty at once (P. et al., 2021). They must understand the case, select clinically relevant information, organize it according to documentation conventions, and express it in English that is both accurate and professionally appropriate (Salmi, 2021). This means that English nursing documentation is not simply a language exercise (Canova-Barrios et al., 2023). It is a literacy task in which language, genre, and discipline intersect (Kok & Chabeli, 2002).

Although writing in higher education and L2 writing have both been widely studied, English nursing documentation remains relatively underexplored as a professional genre produced by undergraduate student writers (Aldemir Atmaca et al., 2025). Existing work in nursing education often emphasizes communication, clinical competence, or general academic literacy, while L2 writing research has more often focused on conventional academic genres such as essays, summaries, and reports (Wolf & Wolf, 2023). Less attention has been given to how novice writers in professionally oriented programs begin to approximate disciplinary discourse through English documentation tasks (Salvador et al., 2022).

This gap is particularly relevant in L2 higher education, where students must learn to participate in a professional genre in a language that is not their first (Oktay & Shamsi, 2024). Understanding how undergraduate nursing students produce documentation in English can therefore contribute not only to nursing education, but also to research on disciplinary writing, genre pedagogy, and academic literacy (Alqaissi & Qtait, 2025). A closer analysis of student assignments may show where students are already approximating disciplinary conventions and where instructional intervention is still needed (Wang et al., 2024).

Against this background, the present study examines English nursing documentation written by L2 undergraduate nursing students as developing disciplinary writing (Lismayanti et al., 2025). Rather than treating student assignments merely as evidence of language deficiency or as isolated classroom products, this study approaches them as texts shaped by the intersecting demands of genre, discipline, and second-language writing (Khumalo & Reddy, 2021). Specifically, the study analyzes how students construct written documentation in English, what linguistic and rhetorical features characterize their texts, and what recurring

difficulties emerge in relation to genre conformity, organization/coherence, language accuracy, and disciplinary terminology (Shen & Feng, 2024).

By adopting this perspective, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of writing in nursing education (Morris et al., 2025). It aims to provide insight into how students perform a discipline-specific genre in English and to identify areas where pedagogy can better support their development as emerging professional writers (Arvidson et al., 2017). In doing so, the study also responds to broader calls for more context-sensitive research on disciplinary writing in L2 higher education (Toronto & Remington, 2020).

Research questions: 1) What linguistic and rhetorical features characterize English nursing documentation written by L2 undergraduate nursing students? 2) What recurrent difficulties do students encounter in terms of genre conformity, organization/coherence, language accuracy, and disciplinary terminology? and 3) How do these writing patterns reflect students' developing disciplinary writing competence in nursing education?.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods text analysis design to examine English nursing documentation written by L2 undergraduate nursing students (Ko et al., 2025). A mixed-methods approach was adopted because the study aimed not only to quantify recurring textual features and writing difficulties across a set of student assignments, but also to interpret those features qualitatively in relation to disciplinary writing expectations in nursing education (Zora & Zulkifli, 2025).

The design was descriptive rather than experimental, as the purpose of the study was not to test the effect of an intervention but to provide a systematic account of the characteristics of students' written documentation in its existing instructional context (Saifullah Amjad & Abdulaziz Alfalig, 2026). The study focused on naturally occurring classroom data in the form of student assignments and treated these texts as evidence of how undergraduate nursing students negotiated the demands of English-language nursing documentation (Gutiérrez Tirado et al., 2024). The mixed-methods orientation was considered appropriate because disciplinary writing cannot be adequately captured through frequency counts alone; it also requires close attention to how textual choices function within genre-specific communicative purposes (Okoye et al., 2021)

More specifically, the quantitative component of the study was used to identify the prevalence of recurrent issues in genre conformity, organization/coherence, language accuracy, and disciplinary terminology (Afika et al., 2022). The qualitative component, in turn, was used to examine representative textual excerpts in greater depth and to interpret how students' writing aligned with or diverged from expected conventions of nursing documentation (Pratama & Hastuti, 2024). Through this integrated approach, the study sought to generate a nuanced account of English nursing documentation as disciplinary writing in an L2 undergraduate context (Putri et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Overall corpus profile and dimension-level performance

A total of 110 English nursing documentation assignments were analyzed after an initial screening of 176 portfolio files. The included texts were drawn from four course archives

and represent classroom-based documentation tasks produced by L2 undergraduate nursing students. Across the corpus, 62 assignments (56.4%) were classified as adequate disciplinary writing, 44 (40.0%) as emerging disciplinary writing, and 4 (3.6%) as weak disciplinary writing. No text reached a fully strong overall profile.

At the dimension level, genre conformity produced the highest mean score ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.57$), followed by disciplinary terminology ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.59$), whereas organization/coherence ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.86$) and language accuracy ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 0.86$) remained substantially weaker. This broad profile indicates that many students already recognized the visible architecture of nursing documentation, but a large proportion still struggled to sustain coherent and linguistically controlled English across the full text.

Table 1. Summary of performance across the four analytic dimensions

Dimension	Mean (SD)	Score 1 n (%)	Score 2 n (%)	Score 3 n (%)	Score 4 n (%)	Score ≥ 3 n (%)
Genre conformity	2.86 (0.57)	1 (0.9)	23 (20.9)	76 (69.1)	10 (9.1)	86 (78.2)
Organization/coherence	1.93 (0.86)	39 (35.5)	46 (41.8)	19 (17.3)	6 (5.5)	25 (22.7)
Language accuracy	1.98 (0.86)	39 (35.5)	36 (32.7)	33 (30.0)	2 (1.8)	35 (31.8)
Disciplinary terminology	2.79 (0.59)	1 (0.9)	30 (27.3)	70 (63.6)	9 (8.2)	79 (71.8)

Note. Score 1 = weak, Score 2 = emerging, Score 3 = adequate, and Score 4 = strong.

Uneven development across dimensions

The aggregate means, however, conceal substantial within-text unevenness. In 67 of the 110 assignments (60.9%), the gap between the highest and lowest dimension score was at least two points. Genre conformity was the highest-scoring dimension in 80 texts (72.7%), and disciplinary terminology was among the highest in 73 texts (66.4%). By contrast, organization/coherence was the lowest-scoring dimension in 73 texts (66.4%), while language accuracy was lowest in 63 texts (57.3%). This recurring imbalance suggests that students' disciplinary writing competence was often internally split rather than uniformly weak.

A more specific split-profile pattern was also evident. Fifty-eight assignments (52.7%) received scores of at least 3 in both genre conformity and disciplinary terminology while remaining at 2 or below in either organization/coherence or language accuracy. In 27 texts (24.5%), the imbalance was more pronounced: students scored 3 or above in both genre and terminology but 2 or below in both organization/coherence and language accuracy. These figures indicate that many students could reproduce recognizable documentation structure and mobilize some relevant nursing vocabulary before they could reliably organize information and express it through stable professional English.

Table 2. Indicators of within-text imbalance and split-profile development

Indicator	n (%)
Texts with a highest–lowest score gap of ≥ 2 points	67 (60.9)
Genre conformity as highest-scoring dimension	80 (72.7)

Indicator	n (%)
Disciplinary terminology as highest-scoring dimension	73 (66.4)
Organization/coherence as lowest-scoring dimension	73 (66.4)
Language accuracy as lowest-scoring dimension	63 (57.3)
Genre ≥ 3 and terminology ≥ 3 , but organization ≤ 2 or language ≤ 2	58 (52.7)
Genre ≥ 3 and terminology ≥ 3 , but organization ≤ 2 and language ≤ 2	27 (24.5)

Recurring problem patterns and cumulative burden

The coding notes further showed that writing problems in the corpus were both frequent and cumulative. Weak coherence was the most prevalent coded issue, appearing in 85 texts (77.3%), followed by language issues in 75 texts (68.2%). Imprecise terminology was noted in 27 texts (24.5%), partial genre realization in 24 texts (21.8%), and incomplete template use in 22 texts (20.0%). These problems often overlap. The most common co-occurrence involved language issues and weak coherence, which appeared together in 58 texts (52.7%). Partial genre realization also strongly overlapped with other weaknesses: 18 of the 24 texts marked for partial genre were also coded as template incomplete, and 21 of the 24 were also flagged for language issues.

The cumulative burden of these problems was closely associated with the overall quality profile. All 39 texts with only zero or one coded problem were classified as adequate disciplinary writing. By contrast, none of the 19 texts with four or five coded problems reached the adequate level, and all four weak texts fell into this highest-burden group. This pattern suggests that weak documentation quality in the corpus was not typically produced by a single isolated deficit, but by the accumulation of multiple difficulties involving coherence, language control, partial genre realization, and, in some cases, incomplete completion of the documentation template.

Table 3. Prevalence and overlap of coded problem patterns

Problem pattern	n (%)
Weak coherence	85 (77.3)
Language issue	75 (68.2)
Imprecise term	27 (24.5)
Partial genre realization	24 (21.8)
Template incomplete	22 (20.0)
Language issue + weak coherence	58 (52.7)
Partial genre + template incomplete	18 (16.4)
Partial genre + language issue	21 (19.1)

Table 4. Cumulative problem burden by overall disciplinary writing profile

Flag-count group	Adequate	Emerging	Weak
0–1 flags	39	0	0
2–3 flags	23	29	0
4–5 flags	0	15	4

Archive-level variation and exploratory associations

Variation across the four archive sources indicates that performance was also shaped by task context. The English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2A archive showed the highest composite mean ($M = 2.69$), whereas the other three archives clustered lower, with composite means ranging from 2.22 to 2.27. The sharpest difference appeared in organization/coherence: the S1 Tk 2A archive reached a mean of 2.79, compared with 1.66 in English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2B, 1.53 in English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2C, and 1.40 in English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2D. Adequate overall profiles were also much more common in the S1 Tk 2A archive (84.8%) than in the other sources.

These archive-level contrasts should be interpreted cautiously because the study was not designed as an experimental comparison across courses or tasks. Even so, exploratory Kruskal–Wallis tests suggested statistically meaningful differences across archives for genre conformity ($H = 10.90$, $p = .012$), organization/coherence ($H = 45.65$, $p < .001$), and composite score ($H = 25.11$, $p < .001$), but not for language accuracy or disciplinary terminology. The pattern suggests that students' writing performance likely reflected not only individual language ability but also the structuring effects of assignment type, pedagogical scaffolding, and template use across learning contexts.

Several auxiliary indicators aligned with the rubric-based findings. Technical term types correlated strongly with disciplinary terminology scores (Spearman's $\rho = .81$, $p < .001$), detected sections correlated with genre conformity ($\rho = .38$, $p < .001$), and spelling-noise proxies correlated negatively with language accuracy ($\rho = -.69$, $p < .001$) and with the composite score ($\rho = -.72$, $p < .001$). By contrast, disciplinary terminology showed little association with organization/coherence ($\rho = -.07$, $p = .495$) or language accuracy ($\rho = .08$, $p = .387$), suggesting that access to technical vocabulary did not automatically entail broader rhetorical or linguistic control. These associations should be treated as exploratory rather than causal, but they reinforce the interpretation that English nursing documentation in this corpus involved multiple partially independent dimensions of development.

Table 5. Variation in mean scores and adequate profiles across archive sources

Archive source	n	Genre	Org./co h.	Language	Terminology	Composite	Adequate profile n (%)
English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2B	29	2.72	1.66	1.97	2.72	2.27	14 (48.3)
English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2C	38	2.76	1.53	1.89	2.89	2.27	15 (39.5)
English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2D	10	2.80	1.40	1.90	2.80	2.23	5 (50.0)

Archive source	n	Genre	Org./co h.	Langu age	Termin ology	Comp osite	Adequate profile n (%)
English nursing documentation S1 Tk 2A	33	3.12	2.79	2.12	2.73	2.69	28 (84.8)

Note. Composite = mean of the four rubric dimensions. Archive-level significance tests were exploratory.

Representative excerpts

Representative excerpts further clarify how the dimensions interacted within individual texts. The weak and emerging excerpts show documentation intent but unstable coordination of sectioning, sequence, and language; the adequate excerpts show readable clinical logic despite lingering phrasing or template limitations; and the strong excerpts represent locally strong performance within otherwise adequate texts. Notably, because no full text received an overall strong profile, the label strong in Table 6 refers to excerpt-level realization rather than to whole-text classification.

Table 6. Illustrative excerpts and analytic interpretation

Code / profile	Excerpt	Main issue(s) / strength(s)	Interpretation
D60 / Weak	"MAIN COMPLAINTS - HISTORY OF PRESENT ILLNESS The baby's mother said that the baby was fussy and could not sleep comfortably ..."	Partial genre control; weak coherence; language accuracy; template incomplete	Section labels are collapsed into one unit and the clinical information is only loosely organized. The entry signals documentation intent, but weak sequencing and unstable professional phrasing keep it in the weak range.
D83 / Weak	"MAIN COMPLAINT The patient said he had pain in his lower left abdomen ... pain decreases when resting and increases when doing activities. HISTORY OF CURRENT ILLNES ..."	Partial genre control; weak coherence; language accuracy; imprecise terminology	A complaint is identifiable, but misspelled headings and incomplete development weaken genre realization. The movement from symptom description to fuller history remains underdeveloped.
D01 / Emerging	"The patient says body weakness and shivering with temperature 39.0°C ..."	Partial genre control; language accuracy	The clinical complaint is recoverable and genre intent is visible, yet the syntax remains non-idiomatic. This is emerging performance because disciplinary meaning is present but not stably expressed.
D35 / Emerging	"The patient said that his body felt weak, his appetite was reduced, accompanied by nausea and vomiting ..."	Weak coherence; language accuracy	Relevant clinical content is present, but too much information is compressed into one chain. The excerpt shows emerging control because the complaint is meaningful but poorly packaged.

Code / profile	Excerpt	Main issue(s) / strength(s)	Interpretation
D57 / Emerging	"The patient said his stomach felt tight ... clear fluid had been coming out of the birth canal ..."	Weak coherence; language accuracy; imprecise terminology	The text points toward a clinically interpretable event, but wording and information flow remain unstable. Terminology is only partly controlled, keeping the excerpt between recognition and full execution.
D63 / Emerging	"Patients say that it is difficult to sleep ... difficulty sleeping."	Partial genre control; weak coherence; template incomplete	Documentation intent is recognizable, but repetition and incomplete template use reduce rhetorical efficiency. The excerpt illustrates transitional competence rather than absence of disciplinary writing.
D03 / Adequate	"The patient's family said the patient looked weak and complained of dizziness ... History of Present Illness ..."	Generally clear organization; minor template incompleteness	The excerpt presents complaint and history in a mostly orderly way, allowing the reader to reconstruct the clinical situation with little effort. It remains adequate despite some incompleteness at the template level.
D53 / Adequate	"Patients complain of difficulty sleeping, dizziness, frequently waking up ... HISTORY OF PRESENT DISEASE Since 2 days ago ..."	Adequate organization; minor imprecise terminology	Complaint and history are linked with sufficient clarity, and the entry functions as readable documentation. Terminology is not fully precise, but the overall communicative purpose is achieved.
D27 / Adequate	"The patient said the pain was like being crushed by a heavy object on the left side of the chest radiating to the arm ..."	Strong symptom sequencing; partial genre control	The symptom description is relatively specific and the progression into history is coherent. Even with partial template realization, the excerpt sustains adequate disciplinary control.
D02 / Strong	"CHIEF COMPLAINT ... HISTORY OF PRESENT DISEASE ... the patient said his body felt weak, he looked pale ..."	Clear sectioning; coherent sequencing; stable language	This excerpt approaches professional documentation most closely in the corpus, with explicit sectioning and controlled progression from complaint to history. Here, genre and coherence are realized strongly at the excerpt level.

Code / profile	Excerpt	Main issue(s) / strength(s)	Interpretation
D94 / Strong	"Mrs. Y was admitted ... referral ... complaints of post-traumatic headache since 1 hour ..."	Strong genre framing; strong language control; minor term imprecision	The entry shows compact but well-managed clinical framing, with time, referral, and presenting complaint integrated clearly. It represents strong local realization even though the full text was coded only as adequate overall.

Note. Strong in this table refers to strong excerpt-level realization in one or more dimensions; no full text in the corpus received an overall strong profile.

Discussion

From genre recognition to partial writing control

The revised results sharpen the study's central claim: English nursing documentation produced by L2 undergraduate nursing students is best understood as developing disciplinary writing rather than simply as a collection of language errors (Hyland, 2007). The corpus did not show flat weakness across all dimensions. Instead, it showed a recurring split between relatively strong control of visible genre features and more fragile control of coherence and language (Tardy, 2006). This is important because it moves the interpretation beyond a deficit model (Wingate, 2012). Many students were not failing to write altogether; rather, they were partially succeeding in entering a professional genre while still lacking the resources to realize it consistently (Hyland, 2007).

This distinction is especially clear in the split-profile patterns. More than half of the texts scored at least adequate in both genre conformity and disciplinary terminology while remaining weak or emerging in either organization/coherence or language accuracy, and nearly one quarter did so while remaining weak or emerging in both. In other words, the students often appeared to know what nursing documentation should look like, and they could mobilize some of the field's lexical resources, before they could sustain the clinical logic and linguistic stability required for fully functional documentation (Jefferies et al., 2010). This pattern extends the argument of the original manuscript by showing that developmental progress in disciplinary writing may first become visible at the level of format recognition and terminology uptake before it is consolidated at the level of rhetorical control (Tardy, 2006).

Uneven disciplinary development in L2 nursing documentation

These findings suggest that disciplinary writing development in this genre is uneven by nature (Tardy, 2006). Genre conformity and disciplinary terminology did not simply rise in tandem with organization/coherence and language accuracy. Most notably, disciplinary terminology showed almost no association with organization/coherence or language accuracy, indicating that students' access to technical vocabulary was not sufficient to guarantee coherent or professionally polished documentation (Jefferies et al., 2018). The genre is therefore better understood as multidimensional: students must coordinate structural expectations, sequencing, sentence-level control, and disciplinary lexis at the same time (Hyland, 2007).

At the same time, the corpus does not support a purely independent-dimensions interpretation. Some aspects of performance clustered more consistently than others, especially where stronger genre uptake coincided with clearer archive-level outcomes and more interpretable documentation structure. The overall pattern is therefore one of partial coupling: some aspects of disciplinary performance develop together, while others remain disjointed (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). For L2 writers in professionally oriented programs, this means that progress may be real and pedagogically meaningful even when it remains incomplete and uneven (Wingate, 2012).

Accumulated difficulties rather than single deficits

The findings also show that students' difficulties were cumulative rather than singular. Weak texts were not defined by one isolated feature such as grammar alone. Instead, the weakest documents tended to combine multiple problems at once, especially weak coherence, language instability, and partial or incomplete realization of the documentation template. The fact that all texts with zero or one coded problem were adequate, whereas none of the texts with four or five coded problems reached the adequate level, gives strong descriptive support to this cumulative interpretation (Hyland, 2007).

This matters for how L2 writing difficulties are understood in nursing education (Wingate, 2012). In a genre such as documentation, small linguistic inaccuracies can have effects beyond sentence-level correctness because they interact with sequencing, brevity, and professional readability (Blair & Smith, 2012). Likewise, a text may contain relevant clinical information yet remain functionally weak if the links between complaint, assessment, and intervention are unclear (Jefferies et al., 2010). The present findings therefore support the view that documentation quality emerges from the interaction of multiple textual demands rather than from any single skill deficit (Hyland, 2007). This interpretation is compatible with work in disciplinary literacy and genre studies that treats writing as the coordinated enactment of rhetorical, linguistic, and professional knowledge (Hyland, 2007; Tardy, 2006; Wingate, 2012).

The role of task context and pedagogical ecology

The archive-level variation adds another layer to the interpretation. The stronger profile of the S1 Tk 2A archive, especially in organization/coherence, suggests that students' performance was influenced not only by their individual writing ability but also by the pedagogical ecology in which the task was embedded (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Differences in prompt design, degree of modeling, feedback history, template rigidity, or the extent to which tasks approximated authentic clinical reasoning may all have shaped the observed outcomes (Wingate, 2012). Although the present study cannot isolate these factors causally, the descriptive contrast is strong enough to suggest that disciplinary writing development is also context-sensitive (Hyland, 2007).

This point is important for nursing education because it implies that weak writing should not be attributed exclusively to student deficiency (Wingate, 2012). Some learning environments may offer better scaffolding for the transition from format recognition to fuller documentation control (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). As a result, pedagogical design becomes part of the explanation, not merely the response (Hyland, 2007). This strengthens the article's contribution by showing that developing disciplinary writing is jointly produced by learner resources and instructional conditions (Jefferies et al., 2018).

Pedagogical implications for nursing education

Several pedagogical implications follow from these findings. First, writing instruction in undergraduate nursing programs should explicitly address the difference between recognizing documentation format and controlling documentation as a communicative act (Hyland, 2007). Students need support not only in filling sections correctly but also in linking symptoms, assessment, and intervention through clear clinical logic (Jefferies et al., 2010). Model-text analysis, guided reconstruction, and genre-focused comparison of stronger and weaker samples may help make this logic visible (Wingate, 2012).

Second, language support should be integrated with genre instruction rather than treated as a separate remedial layer (Hyland, 2007). Because language issues in the corpus frequently co-occurred with coherence problems, sentence-level correction alone is unlikely to produce large improvements if students are still uncertain about how information should be ordered and condensed in nursing documentation (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Feedback practices may therefore be more effective when they use analytic rubrics that distinguish among genre conformity, organization/coherence, language accuracy, and disciplinary terminology while also showing how those dimensions interact in real texts (Wingate, 2012).

Third, vocabulary teaching should focus on contextual deployment rather than terminology memorization alone (Jefferies et al., 2018). The data show that students often had some access to technical terms, but not always the ability to use them in concise, idiomatic, and professionally interpretable English. Embedding terminology work within documentation tasks, case-based scenarios, and revision activities is therefore likely to be more productive than isolated word-list instruction (Moldskred et al., 2021). More broadly, the results support treating English writing in nursing education as part of professional preparation rather than as an ancillary language component (Hyland, 2007; Jefferies et al., 2018).

Contribution to L2 writing and disciplinary writing research

The study contributes to L2 writing research by focusing on a professional genre that remains underrepresented in comparison with more conventional academic texts such as essays, summaries, and reports (Tardy, 2006). By showing that visible genre uptake and disciplinary vocabulary may develop earlier than coherence and language control, the study expands current understandings of how novice writers enter specialized discourse in a second language (Hyland, 2007). The findings also contribute to disciplinary writing research by foregrounding an educational transition point: the stage at which undergraduate students begin to approximate a professional genre before achieving stable expert-like control (Wingate, 2012).

Methodologically, the study shows the value of combining rubric-based description, coded problem analysis, and selected textual indicators in order to examine student writing as both patterned and situated (Fetters et al., 2013). A purely frequency-based account would have described the prevalence of problems but not the internal imbalance within texts or the cumulative burden of overlapping issues. Conversely, a purely qualitative account would have illuminated rhetorical difficulty without showing how consistently these patterns recurred across the corpus. The present design therefore offers a useful model for investigating developing disciplinary writing in multilingual higher education (O'Cathain et al., 2010).

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data came from a single undergraduate nursing program and therefore represents one institutional context. The findings should not be generalized mechanically to other nursing programs, other regions, or other forms of healthcare writing. Second, the corpus consisted of classroom assignments designed to approximate professional documentation rather than authentic documentation produced in live clinical settings. The texts therefore reflect developing documentation competence in an educational context, not workplace performance under real clinical conditions.

Third, the explanatory power of the study remains limited by the available data sources. The corpus reveals what students wrote, but not fully why they made particular choices. Interviews, observations, teacher feedback records, or process-based data could help clarify how students understood the tasks and where they experienced the greatest difficulty. Fourth, some of the auxiliary indicators used in exploration analysis were closely related to the coding process itself, so those associations should not be overinterpreted as independent validation or as causal effects. They are best read as supporting patterns that align with the broader rubric-based interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined English nursing documentation written by L2 undergraduate nursing students as a form of developing disciplinary writing. Based on a screened corpus of 176 portfolio files from four course archives, 110 documentation assignments were included for analysis. The findings show that genre conformity was the strongest dimension, followed by disciplinary terminology, whereas organization/coherence and language accuracy remained substantially weaker. More importantly, the revised analysis demonstrates that this pattern was not simply a difference in average scores: within-text imbalance was common, split profiles were recurrent, and weak performance was associated with the cumulative burden of overlapping problems rather than with single isolated errors.

The study therefore suggests that novice writers may acquire the visible architecture of a professional genre before they achieve stable control over its rhetorical coherence and linguistic realization. In this corpus, students often recognized what nursing documentation should look like and could mobilize some relevant vocabulary, but they were less successful in sustaining clear clinical logic and professionally controlled English across extended texts. English nursing documentation should thus be understood not simply as a site of language error, but as a demanding literacy practice in which language, genre, and disciplinary communication must be coordinated simultaneously.

Pedagogically, the results point to the need for more explicit and integrated writing instruction in undergraduate nursing programs. Genre-based teaching, model-text analysis, terminology-in-context work, and multidimensional feedback may be particularly useful in helping students move from format recognition toward fuller documentation control. Conceptually, the manuscript contributes to L2 disciplinary writing research by showing how developing participation in a professional genre can remain uneven yet meaningful, especially in multilingual higher education.

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