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“I didn’t realise how important that (workshop) was”: The significance of a transition pedagogy in connecting high school and university academic literacy skills.

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**Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi.**

**As an old net is cast aside, another is remade.**

This whakatauki reflects the idea of transition and the coming of time for new generations (rangatahi) to take on new challenges. I think it can relate to an institution, educators and researchers. It can be interpreted in many ways; the message I take from it is that however experienced we are, we need to embrace change and prepare for the future.

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Ethics Application: 24/181 Academic literacy from high school to university

## Abstract

This study investigates the academic transition from high school to university. Findings reveal that students often enter university with misconceptions about the expectations of learning, teaching and the academic environment. Institutions expect active, often expert participation from students. However, due to diverse schooling experiences and a wide range of backgrounds, first-year students at 'universities of opportunity' present with varying competencies and skills in academic literacies. Incoming students and lecturers must adjust their expectations and consolidate the interim literacies that are brought across from high school. This adaptation requires time, support and development of attributes.

The findings from this small qualitative study, which focused on the academic transition experiences of five first-year students enrolled in the same faculty, highlight the varying levels of preparedness for university. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, providing insight into students' perceptions and challenges. Participants reported that they were surprised at the level of reading required, implying a significant need to develop associated reading, research and referencing skills. Modifying writing to adhere to institutional and disciplinary academic conventions and style is another challenge outlined by participants. Early preparation and support in self-regulated learning strategies, such as understanding and responding to formative feedback and access to examples of quality work are essential in helping novice students navigate study in a new learning culture. To ensure students acquire the relevant skills and knowledge, literacy development could be more effective if it is discipline-specific rather than generic with a focus on 'becoming' a student.

The findings also emphasize the need to address literacy development in the context of the increasing digitalisation of education and emergence of generative artificial intelligence. The formulation of an institutional transition pedagogy inclusive of multiple transitions and dynamic academic literacies students encounter may be of benefit to new university students. A more coordinated, consistent approach to academic transitions by institutions could ensure wider outreach, improved retention and better prepared students who can better navigate their educational journeys.

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Recently there have been calls in the New Zealand media to make university admission stricter due to lowered literacy rates and underprepared students (Radio New Zealand, 2024). This highlights that literacy in education continues to be a much-contested political issue. Literacy, often related to concepts of individual transformation and emancipation (Freire, 1985), enables active participation in communities and society. The construct of literacy is complex and dynamic. Since the early 2000s interpretations have expanded from a focus on traditional reading and writing skills to include new dimensions such as 'New Literacies' which include information, media, and digital literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) and multimodal literacy, acknowledging multiple modes used in the process of meaning-making (Mills & Unsworth, 2017).

Thus, it is debatable whether we can ever 'be' literate or whether we are always in a state of 'becoming' literate (Unsworth, 2002). Toffler (1975) predicted that "the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn" (p.414). Given the constantly evolving concept of literacy, particularly in the context of higher education, this research focusses specifically on 'academic literacy' as a transformative factor in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. It examines how students encounter new ways of becoming and being in the academic transition from high school to university.

Becoming and being a university student have become more complex in the digital era. The distinction between humans and machine learning is becoming increasingly blurred. Barnett (2010) proposed that education should develop a person's whole self and cultivate a critical being. "Being" as defined more recently is "engaging the whole person to progress motivation, openness, engagement, identity formation, resilience, agency, transformation, imagination, and courage to act" (Ako Aotearoa, 2022). This requires an understanding of the knowledge and experiences that both teachers and students bring to the learning environment. This reciprocity of learning from each other is reflected in the Māori concept of Ako which emphasizes the mutual teaching and learning process. By embracing Ako within research, both students and educators can seek to foster a more inclusive educational environment.

## Background and context -Academic literacy in New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand and globally, changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment have impacted the concepts and construct of academic literacies today. There is also a global trend of diversifying student cohorts. As a result, the academic performance and preparedness of students can be affected by many contextual factors such as socioeconomic disparities and differences in schooling, teaching, and learning. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic also brought unprecedented challenges regarding access to and experience within education systems. For example, Wood (2024) suggests that emergency online teaching was especially detrimental to the skills of writing. In the current academic environment, these impacts can all be seen to influence the shaping of students' academic literacy from high school to university level. These effects are significant because academic literacy underpins both learning and engagement across all academic fields (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007, Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wingate, 2006).

### What is academic literacy?

Academic literacy is difficult to define since as highlighted in the 2000s, it is dynamic and evolves (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Wingate, 2006). Traditionally academic literacy has encompassed a broad range of skills essential for success in higher education. These skills are often treated as discrete areas of focus, including reading and writing, disciplinary skills (skills related to specific areas of study), and academic skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). However, definitions centred on these skills are evolving, with scholars asserting that academic literacy extends beyond them (Gee, 2003; Richards & Pilcher, 2018), encompassing not just linguistic skills but also cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions and more recently technological skills. Recent research broadens definitions to include "critical thinking, database searching, familiarity with academic conventions such as referencing, use of formal register and the ability to manipulate a range of academic genres" as undergraduates' academic literacies (McWilliams & Allen, 2014). This evolving understanding recognises the emergence of new literacies such as information, digital and critical literacy. Contemporary educational contexts with evolving assessment practices, also necessitate the development of forms of assessment and feedback literacies.

Thus, as educational practices shift, there is a growing emphasis on multiple literacies and multidimensional academic communication skills (Cumming, 2013; Huang & Archer, 2017). The ability to participate in knowledge creation can be impacted by a student's levels of critical engagement with academic writing and their own underlying assumptions (Lillus, 2019). Therefore, to more fully understand academic literacy, and to be able to 'communicate competently in an academic discourse community' (Maldoni, 2017, p.104) it is necessary to understand the learning environment, its culture, and the social relationships inherent in the academic discipline and disciplinary culture. For example, at a local level, disciplinary culture can vary between institutions and faculties depending on teaching approaches and research priorities. However, there are also global elements of disciplinary culture that supersede locations, which include shared practices and standards. For the purposes of this research, academic literacy will be viewed as a situated social practice (Lillis & Scott, 2007), meaning that it is shaped by specific contexts and interactions.

With new ways of thinking and understanding there is also a distinction between literacy practices that enact the reproduction of existing knowledge and prevalent social orders and values, others question and challenge the status quo (Unsworth, 2002). As an example, in recent years in New Zealand the cultural context of Tauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and wisdom) and the rapid evolution of technology are increasingly contributing to diverse forms of knowledge and communication, further highlighting the dynamic nature of academic literacy. Edwards (2010), along with others, critiques traditional functional academic literacy and advocates for a more holistic and culturally affirming approach in developing literacies. Those institutions adopting a multiliteracies approach align with a Mātauranga Māori lens on literacy. Multiliteracies call for practices that include diverse literacy practices such as oral and cultural literacy.

As well as broadening notions of literacies, it is also important to acknowledge that students commencing the first year of university come with existing literacies, what Paxton (2007) calls 'interim literacies'. These literacies involve making meaning through the adaptation of past and new discourses.

This suggests that, instead of an often-perceived gap in academic literacies between high school and university, there are actually transitional literacies that can be built on. More specifically, Faragher (2021) conceptualises students arriving with a virtual uni bag containing existing skills of higher order thinking academic writing, and discourse.

Additionally, in applying the concept of 'threshold practices' Gourlay claims academic literacy can be 'characterized as troublesome points of struggle which may also lead the individual to a fuller sense of being a student and belonging at university' (2009, p.181). What this means is that academic literacies in a sense are dynamic and connected to identity development and access to knowledge. Recognising these anticipatory 'struggles' from a student's perspective is essential as it allows educators to identify specific challenges or barriers to participation and academic success.

## Research problem

Although it is difficult to fully anticipate or prepare entirely for entering university (Holschuh, 2019) it is widely reported that both domestic and international first-year university students across the globe often appear underprepared to approach and complete first-year coursework and assessments (Emerson et al., 2014; Wollscheid et al., 2021). A cause often cited is the lack of appropriate academic literacy skills. Some researchers point to problems within the structure or systems of high school assessments such as A levels and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (Baker, 2018; Emerson et al., 2014). However, it is possible that levels of preparedness may also stem from differing educational experiences or a mismatch between high school skills and those expected by a university and its educators. To avoid the highly controversial, complicated, and financial route of making university stricter as mentioned previously, this phenomenon is an area to explore.

## Educational experiences-High school academic literacy

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the predominant qualification for secondary students in New Zealand. NCEA covers foundational literacy primarily dealing with the practices of reading and writing across the curriculum. As levels progress, so do literacy demands and differences amongst disciplines; each learning area has specialised language and vocabulary.

Academic literacy development at high school is identified in 'literacy rich' subjects and more recently the 'Common Assessment Activities' that contribute to the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement literacy and numeracy co-requisite credits. Students need to achieve credits in these or the Māori literacy and numeracy Te Reo Matatini and Pāngarau standards (NZQA).

This is a recent shift in assessing students' literacy and numeracy skills and competencies through mandatory assessment due to increasing concern about nationally declining literacy and numeracy. In part declining PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results of school-age children highlight fundamental skills areas, such as Reading and Maths in need of improvement (OECD, 2023).

Current discussions in New Zealand have also raised concerns about the adequacy of the NCEA qualification in preparing students for university. Critics argue that despite achieving university entrance, many students are not adequately prepared for the academic challenges they will face.

### Educational experiences -University-level academic literacy

Students in New Zealand graduating from high school and entering university must gain university entrance, which requires them to have a certain level of qualification. NCEA is the national qualification in most high schools (Cambridge and International Baccalaureate are alternatives). Based on a three-tiered structure (Level 1-3) the NCEA aims at assessing ability and achievement in several subjects. NCEA is a standard-based system, with two assessment types: achievement and unit. Standards assess different knowledge and skill areas and are assessed internally by teachers or externally through end-of-year exams (NZQA). Each standard is worth several credits; achievement standards grading is categorized as Not achieved, Achieved, Merit, and Excellence.

To enter a university in New Zealand with NCEA, students must meet the required credits at NCEA level 3 (80 credits). There are no compulsory subjects but there may be particular subject standards required for some tertiary courses.

Depending on the number of applications for some courses, academic results may be converted into rank scores and level of achievement may be taken into consideration. Literacy credits are a requirement from NZQA English language-rich subjects, with new standards in reading, writing, and numeracy under review.

### Potential mismatch

The changes in demands academically between high school and university can pose unique challenges and adversely affect students. It is an unwritten expectation of tertiary institutions that first-year students will have had exposure to a range of academic literacies associated with the subjects in which they have gained NCEA standards. However, there are variations in communication and collaboration between high school and university educators (Emerson et al., 2014). As a result, lecturers can often lack detailed knowledge of the secondary education system curriculum. This gap can affect their understanding of students' prior learning experiences and the transition needs from secondary to tertiary education.

For example, students graduating with NCEA may leave school with varying levels of literacy due to the opportunities they have had to interact with knowledge and texts during their subjects and course of study and assessment types (internal or external) available in their schools. The evaluation of skills and knowledge varies. For example, subjects like English and History have a combination of internal and external assessments and typically involve more writing, whereas some subjects are assessed entirely through internal assessments such as Media Studies and Technology (NZQA).

Similarly, the nature of the discipline or faculty that a student enters can impact readiness for study. For example, a study by Wollscheid et al. (2021) suggests that the experience of transition differs for students enrolling in different faculties. They distinguished between selective and non-selective programmes and identified some learning approaches or curricula which are more familiar to high school work. For example, Law, which has higher entry criteria and subsequently higher achieving students, appears to be structured in a way that is similar to secondary school.

This is consistent with data from an AUT student readiness survey that showed that students entering Law Undergraduate, Humanities and Clinical Sciences self-assessed their readiness as significantly higher than the average in other faculties (AUT Student Matters report, 2021).

## Transition

Half of school leavers in Aotearoa New Zealand graduate from secondary school having achieved university entrance, meaning they can apply for non-selective university-level courses (Ministry of Education, 2018). A key factor for these students in the journey from high school and university is the adjustment, in other words, 'transition' defined by Tinto as academic and social integration (1975). Transition experiences are recognised as a crucial adjustment process that can impact students' experiences and academic progress beyond their first year. A smooth transition between high school to university can ensure students continue and complete their studies (Loader & Dalgety, 2008).

It is important to note that the concept of transition is multidimensional. It is not only related to the intertwined personal, social, and academic processes but also often physical relocation (McKinley & Madjar, 2014). For others, transition can be defined as tertiary readiness, 'at its heart it is about growth, learning, and self-transformation (Madjar et al., 2010, p.31). Briggs et al. (2012) conceived three stages of transition, namely pre, initial, and ongoing. Within each of these stages, learners require academic guidance and support.

If students are not prepared or supported academically at the outset of their university studies, they can face major challenges. This is even more significant for Māori and Pacific students, who experience disparities in outcomes across educational sectors in New Zealand (McKinley & Madjar, 2014). For this reason, transition programmes are often specifically designed to support marginalized groups. With this research being conducted at an organisation that seeks to support non-traditional university students, there are multiple initiatives, programmes, and pedagogies aimed at specific cohorts of students.

While transition programmes and pedagogies differ across institutions, the central role of academic literacy is often noted. For example, Emerson et al. (2014, 2015) argue that academic literacy lies at the heart of transition for all students.

No matter the mode, face-to-face or online academic literacies needs to be emphasised since they are critical for learning at university (Faragher, 2021). Access to courses and programmes that support the development of academic literacies can help provide equal opportunities to all students.

As they commence their studies at university, students face more complex and specialized literacy demands. There is a sense that at university students must find and construct their own knowledge in contrast to high school where the teacher is often seen as the knowledge giver (Baker, 2018). However, a student's readiness can depend on personal attributes and characteristics such as confidence and motivation (Robbins et al., 2004) along with prior education and socioeconomic circumstances (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016).

From an equity perspective, it can be argued that all levels of study students need some form of academic literacy support during transition since academic language and culture are not common sense. To successfully navigate the demands of university-level studies, explicit academic literacy instruction and interventions can meet specific learning needs, in areas such as academic writing (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

### Transition support

Schools and transition pedagogies can contribute to tertiary readiness (Madjar et al., 2010). Transition pedagogies can be defined as an approach to support student success and well-being as students transition educational journeys, for example from high school to university. As an example, Kift's 2009 framework outlines six principles for best practice in first-year curriculum design, the first of which is supporting academic and social transition. However, there appear to be differing understandings of academic literacy for transition to university across and within institutions. Without a shared understanding of and approach to academic literacies, there are implications for learning and teaching, in particular accountability, and responsibility for academic transition to university. Wingate and Tribble (2012) suggest that this issue leads to a lack of a firm pedagogical approach to academic literacies learning and teaching.

The provision and type of academic literacy offered to students can depend on where the teaching and learning of academic literacy is situated. For example, in Australia, the responsibility for academic literacy is often located within centralised units associated with learning support and, referred to as ALL or Academic literacy and Learning whereas in New Zealand it is often merged within library and learning services or student support services.

Internationally, the strategic position of academic literacy provision at universities differs across institutions. Some institutions offer one-on-one support from dedicated staff, while others implement more systematic and collaborative interventions at the school or faculty level. A whole top-down institutional approach, of integrating academic skills and practice at places such as Western Sydney (Western Sydney University, n.d) does not appear as common. This is a comprehensive strategy where the university's leadership develops policies and strategies prioritising students' academic skills which are implemented throughout the institution.

In many universities instead of coordinated efforts to integrate skills and practice across faculties and departments by academic and professional staff, offerings are fragmented or less systematically implemented. Types and levels of interventions and support mechanisms depend on funding budgets and the underlying values and strategies of the individual institutions. This could range from ad hoc/ adjunct offerings, integrated to fully embedded within the curriculum (Jones et al., 2001). Common examples across New Zealand and Australia are bridging, preparation, or enabling programmes completed prior to or parallel to mainstream study. Criticisms of these models include extra load or burden on students for extracurricular, and additional interventions. There is also often stigma attached to remedial or deficit models where provision is situated outside the curriculum. An alternative central model is to integrate or embed discipline-specific academic literacy into the curriculum taught by lecturers who are discipline specialists.

### Transition support-people

Transitions often involve key individuals and groups who support students entering tertiary education.

At high schools in New Zealand as well as teachers there are often Gateway programmes and career counsellors who assist students with academic planning, university applications, and career advice.

Gateway programmes support aims to provide broader educational options and strengthen pathways for students to further education, training, or employment. Blair (2016) suggests that high schools with Gateway and careers support can include teaching how to be independent learners and digitally literate. While Wollscheid et al. (2021) question whether it is high schools or universities that should take the lead in teaching academic literacies. However, when students arrive at university it is difficult to ascertain whether they have experienced strong transitions - education.

At the tertiary level, academic literacy development is often siloed, with multiple groups offering similar resources/support. Within tertiary institutions academic literacy often sits with 'third space' practitioners (Picton et al., 2024) including academics and professionals, such as peer mentors and learning advisors who work across traditional boundaries. Wingate (2019) and Faragher (2021) suggest the idea of collaborations between lecturers and learning advisors as being an effective practice.

Students are not just expected to become more independent and academically literate. It is also a time of personal development. Therefore, emotional and moral support from family and peers can significantly impact students' confidence and academic performance (Reid & Davidson, 2022).

## Expectations

Despite some similarities, literacy demands in university often differ from those at high school (Yancey, 2009). High school students have often had limited opportunities for engagement and familiarity with literacy practices expected in university across and between disciplines. Furthermore, new students must acculturate to the expectations/requirements of both teaching and learning within a new learning environment (Gravett & Kinchin 2020; van der Meer et al., 2018).

In theory, expectations are often articulated in transition information but do not always translate into reality. An observation from a high school careers advisor suggests that “universities want motivated, self-directed, self-regulated learners who will take responsibility for their own learning.” (Morris, 2016). Yet a University of Canterbury report states that “entrance through NCEA does not sufficiently prepare students to be independent learners” (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017). Another Canterbury professor contends that some first-year students are entering university “functionally illiterate” and receive inadequate preparation (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

From a student perspective, students starting university often expect their performance to be similar to or better than at school. However, this differs dramatically from institutional expectations. Institutions anticipate that only about 25% of students will meet these high expectations (Morris, 2016). It would seem that there is some form of disconnect between high school and university. “The unfortunate reality for about one-third of students is that the first year is when they drift in an anxious journey from the known and familiar to unknown and indecipherable” (Kift, 2014).

In contrast, Green et al. (2017) remind us that “first-year students are not expected to be fully fledged practitioners of all the disciplinary conventions and epistemological approaches of a discipline” (p.272). As senior members of discipline-specific discourse communities, teachers and lecturers have a role in sharing their expertise and “apprenticing new members (i.e. their students) into those discourse communities” (Bassett & McNaught, 2024, p.2). First-year students are novices or regarded as ‘freshers’ (UK) / ‘freshmen’ (USA), essentially new to the educational environment. In summary, students and teachers should not expect student mastery or full preparedness from the outset set of the university.

It is clear that for some first-year students' academic transitions are more challenging and troublesome. Kift (2014) urges an exploration of the causes rather than allowing students to take the blame for perceived inadequacies. Thus, the research questions associated with this small study explore students' perspectives and experiences of transition.

## Research Questions

How do students experience navigating academic transition from high school to university?

What do students perceive as important academic literacies in the first year of study?

## Objectives of the study

The objectives of this research were firstly, to explore and understand students' perceptions and experiences of the academic transition from high school to university. The focus was on students who had completed NCEA standards-based assessment as a basis for their entry to university since they constitute a large proportion of the first-year student body and have an arguably comparable shared prior experience in schooling. Secondly, by analysing the perspective of students in terms of academic literacies required for success in their first year we can increase our understanding of learning success. The study was conducted in a School of Business at a medium-sized University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand.

## Significance of the study

This issue of under-preparedness can impact an individual's academic success which can transfer to reduced retention rates in the first- year of study (Tinto, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, according to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), there is a 20% withdrawal rate within the first year of study in New Zealand, higher than the OECD figures of a 10% withdrawal rate within the first year of study and additional 8% after completing the first year (OECD 2019). Similarly, in the UK, studies show that students who begin their studies with low literacy and numeracy skills, along with low tertiary admission scores, tend to have higher dropout rates compared to their peers (The Productivity Commission, 2019).

Enhanced understanding from a student perspective can help inform the development of timely and relevant academic literacy support at the university level. In uncovering the student experience and identifying the 'interim' literacies from high school to university, universities can seek to develop more effective support systems and interventions, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience and outcomes for students.

## Institutional context

The institution where this research took place is a University of Technology. It is a small to medium-sized metro university with three campuses. As a 'university of opportunity,' the student body is diverse including non-traditional university students. The university provides various transition initiatives that incorporate academic literacy development. In its strategy it articulates the types of learners it hopes to cultivate. 'Our distinct approach to teaching and learning creates practitioners equipped to evaluate, analyse, critique, and communicate knowledge and insights. Our built and virtual environment reflects our approach. (AUT, n.d).

During the initial phases of the semester, like many universities, there is an Orientation week where students receive faculty and institutional information. There are also university preparation courses offered designed to give students opportunities to be immersed in a university environment and develop academic skills. Throughout the semester generic and embedded learning support is offered through the library in various forms, online and face-to-face workshops and resources.

## Understanding academic literacy needs

The university in which this study took place has a wide and diverse student population, more than a third are the first in the family to attend university.

The range of NCEA scores and equity index (Table 1) indicates that learners with certain levels of qualifications may need additional academic support.

Table 1: Domestic funded school leavers by NCEA age range (AUT Strategy and planning document)

NCEA Score >140	18%
NCEA Score <240	2%
Equity index- more support	12%
First in family	38%

## Understanding Business undergraduate students

The faculty of Business Economics and Law has large cohorts of new students who are the first in their families to attend university, nearly half of the Business undergraduates are. Two-thirds of undergraduate business students had NCEA level 3 with Statistics as the most common NCEA subject. Ethnicities in the 2023 cohort consisted of Asian, Pasifika, Europeans, Māori, and others. (BEL Student Success Statistics). As mentioned previously in a student survey, Law students were more 'ready' than their business undergraduate counterparts (AUT Student Success Survey). Feedback from the student readiness survey suggested that students perceived the gap between school and university as wide. According to the data, there were requests for support services.

Like many university courses in Business, there are large cohorts of students, divided into several groups run by lecturers or teaching assistants. In these courses, the assessment of academic literacies is often included in individual assignments' marking criteria, for example, academic writing and APA referencing conventions often feature. Anecdotally, the extent to which students are exposed to these literacies within assessments or how they are integrated into the curriculum varies. Despite being graded, academic literacies are not widely taught. Rather than a faculty or programmatic approach academic literacy development seems course dependent or individually led.

The faculty of Business has its own Student Success team which includes a peer mentoring system and sometimes it is expected that literacies will be covered by this team. Areas of academic literacy can also be inferred from the Bachelor of Business graduate profile. For example:

*"F. Effectively communicate, negotiate, and influence using modes and mediums of communication appropriate to the context. (Communication)"*

## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and methods employed in this study, providing a rationale for the chosen approach. It also presents the positioning and overview of the research, and an outline of the methodological approach with considerations of the rationale, ethics, and approach to the recruitment of participants. A description of the data collection and analysis procedures is provided.

### Positioning myself

My orientation to this research is informed by my varying identities, roles, and experiences. I grew up in the United Kingdom and experienced a different education system and assessment regime system of GCSEs and A levels. I was the first in my family to graduate from university. We wrote assignments by hand or word processor and spent a great deal of time in a physical library. My learning experience at university was self-directed and there was an expectation that students would be fully independent.

For many years I worked with international students in ESL and EAP and have extensive knowledge of English language development and standards of academic English language exams required in addition to university entrance. More recently as a parent, I have seen the introduction of the new compulsory NCEA literacy and numeracy credits for Year 10 students and heard teenagers question the point and the relevance of this type of discrete testing. In my Learning Advisor role, I see underprepared first-year students, and institutional 'expert blind spots' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) a kind of disconnect from recognising novice students' struggles. Students suggest that it is difficult to grasp concepts or complex ideas because lecturers often expect them to already understand foundational knowledge which means some basics can be overlooked.

My philosophy of learning is that it should be transformational, empowering, and inclusive. With educators and advisors from different (usually older) generations and an era of university to their students, it is necessary to seek to further understand the modern learner and their needs.

Conditions for learning have changed, so when colleagues say 'In my day we didn't get this type of help' they do not consider the changes that have occurred in higher education. For example, students today are facing increased socio-economic challenges, so are balancing studies with other commitments. There are much greater cognitive loads with finding information and higher expectations for proficiency in digital literacy. The new avenues for seeking and accessing information bring with them ethical issues and decisions.

Although it is difficult to relate to current challenges as past educational experiences were different, we can develop empathy for students, and we can inform ourselves via engaging in studies like this one. I believe all learners should be seen, heard, and supported to belong and thrive in their academic community. As academics, I believe we often make assumptions about the student experience based on our own experiences and there is a need to reflect on assumptions by exploring and informing ourselves about actual student experiences, therefore the research questions guiding this study were.

How do students experience navigating academic transition from high school to university?

What do students perceive as important academic literacies in the first year of study?

Given the focus on individual student's experiences and perspectives, this study adopts an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist researchers are interested in exploring and understanding human experience (Hammersley & Campbell, 2012) and can do this 'from the inside' by investigating the lived experiences of participants. Interpretivist interpretations must also include context as meaning is contextual within this paradigm (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The aim of this type of research is sense-making rather than evaluation. Interactions between researchers and participants (Guber & Lincoln, 1994) and consequently the detailed results potentially lead to 'new layers of understanding' (Scotland, 2012, p 12.).

My aim was to undertake an in-depth study of the high school to university transition phenomena of a small group of students with special reference to academic literacy/ies experiences. Qualitative researchers are interested in how experiences are interpreted, how worlds are constructed, and what meanings are attached to individual experiences (Merriam & Tisdall, 2012).

Currently, in Education and other fields, research is quite often undertaken with no guiding methodological viewpoint. This approach is often termed generic qualitative enquiry research or pragmatic qualitative research. The objective of generic qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), is to 'simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved' (p.11). Despite sometimes being perceived as basic or having negative connotations, generic qualitative research is actually complex and unique.

With no clear methodological viewpoint, Caelli et al. (2003) suggest that generic qualitative research should include:

1. the theoretical positioning of the researcher.
2. the congruence between methodology and methods.
3. the strategies to establish rigor; and
4. the analytic lens through which the data are examined. (p.9)

I will endeavor to articulate these four components. In choosing an interpretivist paradigm, my theoretical position of reality is that there are multiple meanings constructed by individuals. With realities socially constructed through interactions, the underlying meaning will be interpreted and explored within the context of these experiences.

### Methods: Data collection approach

To find answers to my research question, the qualitative method of collecting data was through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews are often used in the field of Education in the collection of data for research. The reason for this is that interviews often provide significant insight into the lives and experiences of the respondents. (Charmaz, 2008, p. 29). Qualitative research questions typically focus on why an event, experience, or phenomenon occurred, how it unfolded, what it was like, and/or what it meant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), in other words, describing an experience in context. The process involves a combination of recalling, reconstructing, and reflecting.

Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured Interviews allow for flexible exploration of beliefs, assumptions, and values, in a dialogue. This is an interactive method with the researcher and participant co-constructing a version of reality. Another strength of semi-structured interviews is that they are informant-centred (person-centered) steering away from anticipated answers, rather allowing things to unfold (Roberts, 2020). Open-ended questions enable fluidity and flexibility in responses and personalisation of responses.

Limitations of semi-structured interviews relate to the challenge and complexity of analysis. More themes are generated in the initial analysis phase of analysis and the analysis itself is more time-consuming. Furthermore, the received comprehension and meaning may not be what was communicated or conveyed. To mitigate these potential challenges, I ensured I followed the same interview protocol and procedure. Recording the interviews meant I was also able to revisit the recordings and transcripts. I made sure participants were comfortable and safe before the interview and I followed a relational approach. The use of open-ended and probing questions provided prompts and starting points for participants to engage and develop their responses. I also gave opportunities for participants to add or remove comments from transcriptions after the interview.

### Recruitment process

Initially, promotional advertising was emailed by a third party and advertised to Bachelor of Business students, including the researcher's contact information. Expressions of interest were invited from potential participants. When a participant made contact, they were then sent a participant information sheet with further details regarding the study. This information sheet informed the participants of the goal of the research, the criteria for participation, the study demands, and ethical considerations.

Participants were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criterion, as defined by purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011) meaning, participants were chosen intentionally. For the purpose of the study, participants were chosen if they had entered AUT directly with NCEA University Entrance (UE) completed a semester, and were studying Business in the Business, Economics, and Law faculty.

The rationale for this was that those students entering the first-year courses would perhaps have had different university entrance, NCEA subjects, and learning careers and they would be able to recall the transition as it was relatively recent. When it allowed, consideration was also given to representing the genders and schooling backgrounds of the participants.

Participants were excluded if there were potential conflicts of interest. If the participant was known to the researcher or if the researcher had interacted with the participant in their daily work of consultations and workshops. By following the purposive sampling inclusion criteria potential bias could be avoided.

## Interviews

The interview schedule was carefully designed, and questions were based on common themes from the literature. Interview questions were piloted, and feedback was incorporated prior to the first actual interview. Data were analysed and referenced back to the research question to ensure alignment and relevance.

The interviews took place from May to June 2024. Indicative research questions for the interviews are in Appendix A. There were three stages to the interview: overview, content, and follow-up. To support the goals of validity and reliability each interview followed the same format and used the same pool of questions (Appendix B). I regulated my behaviour and composure to be neutral so as not to influence the participants' responses. Interviews were recorded in MS Teams to allow for full concentration during the conversation. Another benefit to recording the interview was that the transcription tool could be used to record. Subsequently, generated transcripts were checked and verified by the researcher.

For a greater understanding of university entrance and prior education, I referred to the NZQA standards (NZQA, 2024) the literacy pedagogy guides (NCEA education, 2024), and also the Business, Economics, and Law graduate profiles (AUT, n.d).

## Data analysis - Thematic analysis

To start making meaning from the data, the analysis commenced during the data collection and transcription of interviews. Annotations and notes from transcripts were categorized and coded into themes. By using an inductive approach to engage with and analyse the data, I attempted to identify themes and interconnections (Savin -Baden & Howell Major, 2013) rather than having predetermined themes.

I completed an initial coding and analysis of the data and then refined, developed, and reviewed the output into themes (Braun & Clark, 2022) consequently, my interpretation and discussion were fronted with defined themes that emerged. Codes tended to reflect common ideas emerging in the interviews along with similarities and differences across the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

## Coding

My coding method was reading through the interview transcripts carefully and identifying similarities, differences, patterns, and commonalities in stories (Braun & Clark, 2022). After highlighting and annotating I was able to categorize data. Coding was both the process and a form of analysis in the generation of the codes (Braun & Clark, 2022). There was a complexity in understanding emerging themes and there were several iterations to reach the final themes.

## Ethics

This research required ethical approval since it involved participant contributions. I obtained ethical approval from AUTEK. There is an ethical expectation of protecting individuals from risk and harm. This was enacted by ensuring those involved were informed of the research, the purpose of the research, and what the data was going to be used for. Researchers have a duty to consider confidentiality and privacy in the research process. (Litchman, 2013). All those involved in this study were adults over 18 and the information was anonymized. Participants have the opportunity to withdraw up to a certain stage or could request a summary of findings once data analysis had been completed.

## Positioning

As a researcher, I must be sensitive to conflicts of interest and student risks. Due to my position in the institution, the recruitment process was initiated by advertising through an announcement through the organisational learning management system. The advertisement contained a summary of the research, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and requirements. As the researcher, I provided an alternative non-work-related email address so students could submit their expressions of interest. A participant information sheet (Appendix B) was sent to the desired sample, and they had two weeks in which to reply.

Since the students were currently studying, it was important to ensure students knew that participating in this research would not impact their grades or course participation. Following on from this the timing of data collection was a consideration as I aimed to collect data from students who had already studied for a semester. In my planning, I took into account the workload and timings of assessment so I could offer flexible interview times and modes. It was surprising that several of the students preferred to meet face-to-face over the online option.

In terms of positions of power (Mutch, 2005), as a learner advisor I have little knowledge of individual students and do not teach students regularly. There is a low chance that I have seen them in a group or individual capacity. However, students were excluded if the students and researcher were known to each other.

For the purposes of confidentiality, the identities and names of participants were removed and are not included in the write-up. Regarding the data I collected, the consents, texts, and transcripts are digitized and kept in a private, secure AUT cloud file for the project and subsequently with my supervisor. As per ethics requirements, the data will be kept securely for six years and then destroyed.

## Conclusion

This methodology presents the process and rationale for sampling. It has described semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection and data analysis which took the form of a thematic analysis.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature related to literacy and the ways in which literacy is defined and positioned. Definitions of literacy and academic literacy will be explored specifically in formal secondary schooling environments and at university. This is followed by a discussion and the comparison of literacy-based assessments at high school and the competencies highlighted for students transitioning into the first year of university. There is a discussion of literature associated with institutional expectations of literacy skills in first-year students and literature related to student experiences of the literacy demands at first-year study. The chapter concludes with a discussion about how these skills and competencies are currently supported or not supported within the teaching and curriculum at university level within Aotearoa, New Zealand.

### Literacy overview

Literacy as a construct encompasses a range of skills that vary across different contexts and cultures. A common view of literacy is that it is empowering and enables individuals to participate and communicate between and within communities and society. According to the OECD (2021), literacy is considered foundational at all stages of life; it is multi-dimensional and situated. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy demands have increased due to unprecedented technological developments. Definitions and descriptions of what constitutes literacy are changing in light of artificial intelligence, however, it is agreed that at university higher-order thinking skills such as the capacity to reflect, evaluate, and make judgements are part of the literacy-based requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Literacy not only includes skills or competencies but also ways of thinking, knowing, and being. UNESCO (unesco.org, 2025) gives the following definition,

Literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and fast-changing world. Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing, and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills

In summary, literacy is fundamental to education, and it enables inclusion and equality.

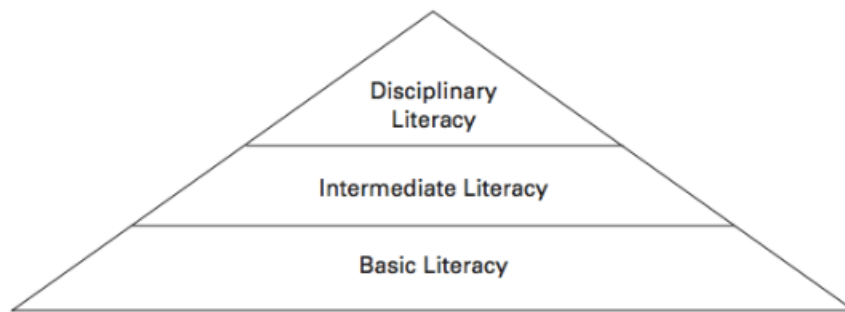
### Academic literacy

As discussed, in the introduction there is no one definition of academic literacy. In general terms, if literacy allows participation in communities and society, academic literacy facilitates participation in academic communities. Wingate and Tribble (2012) define academic literacy as the development of communication skills or competencies that are common within an academic community, which includes the embodiment of higher-order language and thinking skills (Li, 2021). While Gee (2015) claims that literacy practices are embedded in social contexts and are crucial for identity formation within academic communities. These definitions suggest that academic literacy refers to not only a set of cognitive and metacognitive skills or skills in higher-order thinking but is also a situated social and cultural practice (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). This multifaceted view highlights the complexity of academic literacy, emphasizing the need to consider both cognitive competencies and the social contexts in which to develop and apply them.

As a skill set, academic literacy traditionally referred to skills of reading and writing, and communication with writing often prioritized. For example, Yancey (2009) categorizes academic literacy into adept writing abilities, in-depth interactions with information, critical thinking, reflection, and the creation or production of novel texts and knowledge. More recently Wingate (2018) further elaborated on the importance of “reading, evaluating information, as well as presenting, debating and creating knowledge through both speaking and writing” (p. 350).

Academic literacy is often perceived as ‘academic language problems and generic transferable skills common to all disciplines (Butler, 2013). However, some academics emphasize the importance of disciplinary literacies alongside generic literacy.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) emphasize the need for discipline-specific literacy practices (Figure.1).



*Figure 1 Literacy Development (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)*

Rather than generic or neutral skills, disciplinary literacy provides a means of conceptualizing the development and application of literacy learning within the specific learning areas (Hitchcock, 2021). Different academic fields require distinct literacy practices tailored to specific conventions and expectations. This means that students may need to learn new ways or modify their academic literacy competencies relevant to their chosen disciplines, The problem with disciplinary-based literacies is that they become more complex and specialised, this will be discussed in more depth later.

Academic literacy, as a form of meaning making (Lea & Street, 1998), can affect access and equity within academic communities. In other words, academic literacy practices can shape students' experiences and opportunities within tertiary education. Hyland and Hamps-Lyon (2002) draw on critical theory to suggest that academic literacy is influenced by power dynamics and cultural practices within educational institutions. According to the academic literacy model proposed by Lea and Street (1998), academically literate students not only join but also actively participate in and critique academic communities. From this, there is a sense that the definitions of academic literacies are dynamic in that they evolve through students' deeper engagement within disciplines as they progress through levels. They are also interconnected with developments in academic communities, education, and society.

## Broadening definitions of academic literacies

Current discussions in literature associated with academic literacies, elaborate on the definitions and extend to include new interrelated dimensions such as multimodal literacy (Mills & Unsworth, 2017), the understanding and production of multiple modes of communication such as visual, digital, and auditory information (Jewitt & Kress, 2014). Along with, feedback literacy, “the understandings, capacities, and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies.” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p.1316).

Advances in technology have also led to the broadening of the concept of academic literacy. For example, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has also seen the emergence of ‘New Literacies’, these include information, media, and digital literacies (Buckingham, 1993). Lankshear and Knobel (2007) discuss the transformation of academic literacy through digital technologies. This suggests that students require not only digital literacy but also competency in critical thinking and evaluation skills due to the access to and amount of information available in today’s society, a kind of critical literacy.

With the growth of technology and an understanding of the diverse ways in which people know and learn, there is the emergence of a multiliteracies approach. There has been a shift toward multiple literacies (Cummings, 2013) or updated terms such as academic communication skills (Botha, 2022) to broaden and consider diversifying practice, pedagogies, and learners.

## Literacy perspectives in New Zealand education

With the growth of linguistic and cultural diversity in the New Zealand population so literacy approaches have evolved to respond to this diversity. As mentioned previously the application of multiliteracies calls for practices that are inclusive of the diverse literacy needs of learners, for example understanding and valuing alternative knowledge systems and social contexts.

This is especially applicable in the bicultural context of New Zealand, where there are both Western and Māori perspectives on academic literacy. Furness et al. (2023) suggest a Mātauranga Māori approach to literacy views it as embodied practices focused on reading the world culturally, spatially, and socially. Both these perspectives recognize literacy as a multifaceted construct that extends beyond basic reading and writing skills.

The New Zealand Curriculum emphasizes the importance of critical literacy, which involves the ability to analyze and evaluate texts within various contexts (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Likewise, this perspective aligns with the notion that literacy is not merely a set of skills but a means of engaging with and understanding the world. Furthermore, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) framework aims to foster students' literacy skills through its diverse assessment methods (Emerson et al., 2014).

At tertiary level, the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) Learner Success Framework emphasizes the importance of academic literacy as a key component of student success. It indicates a commitment to strengthening the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that all learners are well-prepared for higher education. The student-centered holistic model interconnects a number of elements reflecting the complexities of learning success (TEC, 2023).

### Literacy landscape at educational levels

In the New Zealand educational context, reading, writing, and speaking are identified as at the heart of literacy. According to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), Literacy or te reo Matatini is "the ability to read, write and speak" (2024) and is a foundational skill along with numeracy from which other learning stems. In other words, in all disciplines reading and writing are central to the process of learning (Paxton & Frith, 2013). Similarly, as learning progresses, literacy develops in complexity throughout a student's educational career. Along with the growth of complexity, there are expectations for growing learner independence.

Secondary school level literacy builds on primary school level literacy, therefore as well as foundational literacy, meaning the ability to read, write, and communicate there are general and content area literacies in secondary school as the level of text, knowledge, and specialisation increases (Hitchcock, 2021). An example is the inclusion of more complex and abstract concepts, texts, vocabulary, and critical thinking.

In addition to shared skills and features of literacy within subjects in the curriculum there are also subject-specific demands, otherwise known as disciplinary literacy, where,

Each learning area has its own language or languages. As students discover how to use them, they find they are able to think in different ways, access new areas of knowledge, and see their world from new perspectives. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18).

The understanding and teaching of literacy varies across schools which can lead to differing educational experiences for students in the education system (Hood, 2022). Hence, the government is making efforts to address what is perceived as a problem of teaching and ideology.

### Educational experiences –NCEAs

To enter university in New Zealand with NCEA qualifications students must meet the required credits at NCEA level 3 (NZQA, n.d). There are no compulsory subjects but there may be particular subject standards required for some tertiary university courses. Literacy credits are a requirement, which include reading and writing “from specific standards in a range of NZQA English language -rich subjects” (AUT, n. d). There is some flexibility in the NCEA system, as there is an element of choice for students. They can also select subjects according to their interest and abilities. This differs from other qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate or Cambridge assessments which have more structured and standardized curriculum and assessments.

The choice and flexibility of NCEA standard-based assessments can lead to varied experiences and outcomes in learning opportunities that are not always beneficial to a student. Student and teacher decision-making play significant roles in NCEA subject choices and educational outcomes. Research by Wilson et al. (2016, as cited in Hood & Hughson, 2022) found that students in schools in lower socio-economic areas often enrolled in pre-selected standards, resulting in fewer learning opportunities and less challenging options for some students. As schools vie for position on league tables there is perhaps a temptation to exclude students from learning standards if there is a sense of not achieving. Victoria University researcher Woods (2024) also highlights how teachers influence student choices, including the option to complete fewer external assessments or drop subjects entirely. Consequently, students' academic literacy levels may vary based on their high school experiences, subject choices, and the socioeconomic status of their school. According to data, Māori and Pacific students are more likely to be enrolled in courses that utilize unit standards rather than achievement standards (NZQA, 2022). Consequently, those students entering university with unit standards may be under-served and under-prepared for the academic demands of tertiary education.

Career and academic guidance as well as opportunities to undertake more complex assessments differ from school to school. Specifically, academic literacy development at high school is influenced by the way in which the curriculum and assessment are interpreted and implemented (Hood & Hughson, 2022). Palmer et al., (2014) indicated a strategy for understanding literacy outcomes would be to investigate the relationship and correlations between entry pathway demographics and academic literacy assessment data. This would require some form of measurement or standardised tests such as a post-entry language assessment or diagnostic assessments to provide a baseline measure of students' academic literacy skills.

An aim of the research will be to gauge the perspectives of students with different NCEA subjects and from different high schools. Literacy skills have a significant impact on students' performance and progress. High school literacy levels can indicate future success, at tertiary or further study or training (Hitchcock, 2021). Higher achieving students (those acquiring merits or excellence grades) often have greater well-being and better outcomes. (Ministry of Education, 2021).

To be more precise, those students with higher grades in their NCEA were more likely to succeed at university level compared to those who simply met the 'achieved' level (Shulruf, Hattie & Tumen, 2008). For example, a New Zealand study by Engler (2011), showed that university pass rates are better for those students with NCEA level 3 and University Entrance (UE) than those who did not pass NCEA level 3. Comparing NCEA levels 2 and 3, those students with level 3 demonstrated the greatest improvement in academic performance.

Another study suggests that students who select and succeed in multiple external assessments in their Year 13 NCEA choices are likely to be better prepared for common first-year university assessments methods (Madjar et al., 2010). This suggests that higher-achieving students who complete external assessments and achieve quality grades should be prepared for success in their studies from the start of their university experience. However, this is not always the reality.

### Academic literacy in the first year of university

Students often expect to continue studying and learning in a similar fashion to high school. In New Zealand for example, this means a flexibility in assessment requirements and few exams similar to NCEA study (Woods, 2024). However, literacy demands at university level are distinct and differ from those in high school. Some studies show that NCEA teaching and learning is highly scaffolded with the provision of templates and examples, provided by experienced teachers (Baker, 2018, Emerson et al., 2014). Whereas at the university level, there is an expectation that students will present with higher-level skills, advanced reading and writing abilities, more complex language use, and higher-order thinking, all with reduced support from lecturers. For example, Hyland (2004) cites critical reading as an essential literacy competence. When the structures provided at secondary school are removed at university, and students are expected to be more self-directed, challenges can arise. This highlights the importance of support mechanisms.

For example, Shannahan and Shannahan (2008), outlined that increased specialisation of literacy (disciplinary literacy) is associated with more diminished support (Figure.2). As the literacy demand increases the support lessens.

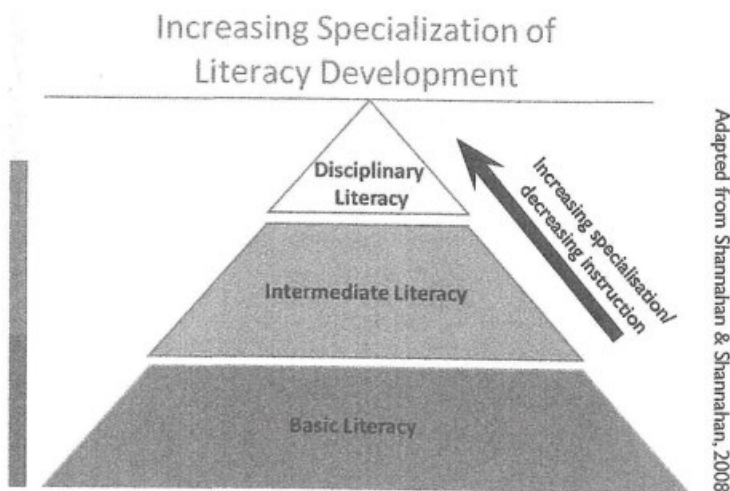


Figure 2 Relationship between literacy and academic literacy and levels of instruction (Maurice- Takerei & Anderson, 2018)

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of explicitly teaching academic literacy skills. Academic language and literacy teaching has more commonly been directed to diverse groups and international non-English-speaking students often prior to entering mainstream courses. However, it can be seen from the literature that all students have some needs in this area and deficiencies are noted in academic literacy teaching at university (Botha, 2022). From a New Zealand perspective, Read (2015) argues that enhancements in both language proficiency and academic literacy are required by many domestic students not only those with English as an Additional Language. This is supported by his work in developing the Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA), an assessment of English language skills in the first year of university.

In scoping the literature to ascertain students' perspectives on academic literacies, student voice seems underrepresented. Moreover, there is limited current New Zealand research in the field of literacy and transition. Since Australia and New Zealand are similar in terms of diverse student bodies, this section contains multiple findings from Australian research.

The first year of university introduces new types of assessments and tasks. In an Australian study by Nallaya et al. (2022) uncertainty facing task types and less confidence in critical thinking and writing skills were identified as a source of anxiety for students (Kift & Moody, 2009). Another Australian survey discovered that in terms of reading skills; academic articles were perceived to be the most challenging. For writing skills, writing essays was the most difficult (Botha, 2022). In a recent study, Amar and Amar (2024) discovered that many students reported infrequent engagement in academic writing at high school which contributed to a lack of experience and confidence in their writing abilities, hampering their academic performance at university.

Group work was another area that many Otago first-year students found difficult according to van der Meer (2008). Engineering student responses in a University of Auckland survey (Mendieta et al., 2019) identified time management, writing concisely and academically, searching for reliable resources, referencing in APA style, and reading critically as challenges. These challenges were accompanied by emotional responses, with reflective comments referring to the following: “intimidated,” “overwhelming,” “scared,” “worried” and “daunting”. A relevant finding for this study was that results showed confidence levels were largely related to high school experiences, highlighting the connection between past experiences and current confidence/experience.

Reflections on personal study habits, behaviour, and reports of anxiety were also reported in the research by Botha (2022). For example, results from focus groups in Wollscheid et al., (2020) study indicated that students struggled with self-discipline, self-directed learning, and managing their workloads. Similarly, on reviewing data from diagnostic tests Palmer et al., (2014) suggested students accepted for the first year of a nursing degree arrived ill-equipped or poorly prepared for the relevant academic requirements. The researchers indicated that further research should include a review of what aspects of academic literacy students find challenging as well as an exploration of students' lived experience of academic practices.

Thus, being prepared and confident for tertiary study and specific disciplines is an important concept that can influence learning success. (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012) To support the development of well-prepared and confident students it is important to understand the unique student body that makes up an institution, where they have come from, their experiences, and perceptions.

### Academic literacy and pedagogical challenges

There is often an expectation that high school students will arrive at university confident and fully prepared with the appropriate skills and literacy for study in their discipline. Yet early research by Jansen and van der Meer (2012) suggests that lecturers expect university students to possess a different skill set compared to those typically developed in high school. One possible reason is that university academics hold ingrained assumptions of tertiary education learning and assessment based on their personal lived experiences (Emerson et al, 2014). These assumptions though are not reflective of current teaching and learning pedagogies or cognizant of the population of a contemporary university environment.

Concerns about academic literacy among beginner students in higher education are shared by both students and their institutions. For example, Wollscheid et al, (2021) note a lack of preparedness in academic literacy skills, such as writing and reading, among beginner students. One of the issues is that discipline-specific academic literacies are frequently taken for granted by individual lecturers and sometimes by entire departments. (McWilliams & Allen, 2014). Discipline-specific academic literacies are often assumed to be understood by students but are not explicitly taught or reinforced by lecturers and faculties.

Academic literacy can be compared to the acquisition of another language (Canagarajah, 2020) It is not something individuals are born with nor is it common sense. As Bourdieu and Passeron, (1965) state, 'academic discourse is no one's mother tongue, but the children of middle-class families with mastery of the standard language find it considerably easier'. Some students may present at university with higher 'cultural capital' required for successful study (Bourdieu, 1986) and have more developed language skills and knowledge giving them an advantage.

Some schools may have provided more access to resources and support to enhance academic literacy while other schools may lack this. Since there are variabilities in the exposure to academic literacy over a student's educational career it justifies a need for explicit academic literacy teaching and development to meet needs and provide for equitable outcomes (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

In higher education academic literacy development is seen as a prerequisite for integration into an academic community. Literacy skills can have an impact on student identity, access, and sense of belonging within academia since there are 'discourse and power' present within institutions (Lillis & Scott, 2007). According to Lea and Street (1998), literacy practices contribute to these power relations. There is a need to communicate effectively and appropriately to gain membership and participate in what Lave and Wenger (1998) coined 'communities of practice'. Without the relevant literacies or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998) there are barriers to learning and issues of exclusion, the impact of which can disadvantage diverse cohorts of students. For example, according to a Ministry of Education report (2019) there is a tendency for Māori and Pasifika students to enter tertiary study with lower qualifications and literacy skills than their counterparts. The same report identifies research by The University of Canterbury (Ministry of Education, 2019) which suggests that despite arriving with the same entry score Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) and 'other' students consistently perform better than Māori and Pacific students at tertiary level. Differences in cultural capital and individual's literacy development can affect active participation, engagement, and completion rates.

As Li (2022) outlines "academic literacy development is considered a powerful tool for knowledge generation, communication and transformation", suggesting if academic literacy is not focused on, marginalization and inequities among student cohorts may widen. Gee (2015) similarly notes that the development of academic literacy is related to social justice and equality. However, questions arise as to how or when to teach academic literacy. Likewise, who designs literacy

interventions if they are not considered core curriculum or part of assessment, and how the impact of those interventions is measured.

Literacy is an enabling skill. For students to successfully continue education from secondary to tertiary level, there must be awareness and familiarity with literacy demands from both a student and teaching perspective. If teachers have a strong understanding of the literacy demands of their own subject/discipline they are in a better position to scaffold students into the required learning within that subject.

It is recommended that at secondary level, there should be better teacher education and pedagogical decisions that support students transitioning into tertiary level (Madjar et al., 2010). Additionally, to support diverse student populations in the demands of higher education it is suggested that literacy needs to be supported at institutional levels through pedagogy and curriculum (Emerson et al., 2015).

### Approaches to developing academic literacy

University-level study often relies on students knowing what they need to learn. Research shows that all students and subjects could benefit from explicit academic literacy support at university (Lea, 2016). Gourley argues that discussion of tacit practices could be opened up if academic literacies were recognized as threshold practices (2009). Not only are academic literacies skills required, but they also contribute to new ways of thinking and being a university student, ultimately affecting a student's identity. For example, understanding and being able to undertake the preferred writing style and citation systems of a particular discipline. Therefore, a student might gain a deeper understanding of their subject if they are made aware of the necessary academic literacies. Compared to tacit practices, which are implicit knowledge and skills, threshold practices are explicit in nature.

A factor contributing to issues in academic literacy development is the provision and positioning of academic literacy within secondary and tertiary education curricula and institutional

positioning. Internationally, there is variability in the situatedness or positioning of literacy; it is often linked to linguistics, education, EAP, and learning support.

More locally whether it is the responsibility of high schools or universities to support transition and develop academic literacy knowledge has been discussed in literature (Baker, 2018; Wollscheid et al., 2021) These factors contribute to issues with who and how literacy is taught and the approaches adopted.

Currently, academic literacy approaches within and across tertiary institutions are disparate. Academic literacies often sit on the periphery of higher education, often as a hidden curriculum or a mystery (Lillis, 2001 as cited in Wingate, 2019).

In higher education, models, and frameworks for teaching academic literacies vary across universities and levels, from centralised institutional approaches like Western Sydney University) to a more tailored and smaller scale school and faculty offerings. Offerings vary from generic to discipline-specific interventions. Criticisms of the generic supplementary study skill approach (Lea and Street, 1996) are that it infers transferability of a set of skills at the detriment of context and discipline specificity. In addition, generic skills support is often the result of retention issues and failing courses, so are based on a deficit model of remedial support. This type of support is often an add-on, or an adjunct or students must self-select (McWilliams & Allen, 2014; Bassett & McNaught, 2024). In this way, literacy is not seen as a priority by institutions and can perhaps lead to disengagement and lower levels of participation

An alternative approach is an 'embedding' approach to academic literacy (Wingate,2018). This approach is also used in vocational and foundation tertiary organizations in New Zealand (Ako Aotearoa, n.d). and is underpinned by tailored learning and teaching towards discipline-specific knowledge. By making literacy a core component, engagement, and participation are stimulated through the integration and practical application of knowledge in a student's own discipline. Some perceived benefits of embedding are enhanced engagement and performance among

students, particularly those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Bassett & McNaught, 2024). However, an investment of time and money in teacher professional learning is central to success in this area, along with a recognition of the value of such an approach.

The promotion of a more integrated approach to developing academic literacies is highlighted in the literature (Lea & Street, 2006; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). This approach, however, requires collaboration between subject matter experts and other stakeholders, such as learning advisors. For example, Wingate (2019) suggests that lecturers should dedicate their time to academic literacies but also include the support of learning advisors. The extent of teams working together could range from cooperating on curriculum development or fully team teaching in an embedded process (Dudley Evans, 2001; Jones et al., 2001). This approach requires time investment and teaching focus which is not often accommodated for in the current workload or schedules of university lecturers also conducting research.

## Transition

When students transition to the first year of university from high school, ways of learning, language, managing time, and workload are different. A successful transition experience is often defined as continuation, success, and retention (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012). This progression might entail navigating academic challenges and academic skill development (Trautwein & Bosse, 2017). According to Emerson et al., (2014), academic literacy is central to the transition for a learner. Universities tend to provide a range of activities and resources to support transition experiences such as preparation courses and orientation days and programmes. Yet, these transition experiences do not always factor in explicit literacy development (Baker, 2018). The reason for this may be caused by differing perceptions and understanding of academic literacy by educators. Offerings are often seen as optional and positioned as opt-in rather than integral.

The potential discrepancies between high school and the first year of university are due to differences between what students are expected to know and do, and what they actually know and can do (Sotardi & Brogt, 2016; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Previous studies have shown

students exhibit feelings of vulnerability and shock during the early phase at university in managing ideals and expectations of academic literacies (Palmer et al., 2009; Elliot et al, 2019). In contrast, a study by Gourley (2009) suggests that phases of transition and academic writing development are often destabilizing and challenging to a student's identity, but this should be expected.

In addition, experiences of transition into higher education and academic communities differ between academic programmes, for example as previously stated those disciplines with higher selective entrance criteria appear to be structured more similarly to the structures experienced at secondary school (Botha, 2022; Wollscheid et al, 2021).

Moreover, academic literacy demands vary depending on discipline. Emerson (2014) suggests that there are gaps in both generic and discipline-specific academic literacy skills and require ongoing development (Emerson et al., 2014). For example, some suggest, generic or discipline-specific skills embedded within programmes or curricula (Botha, 2022; Wingate 2019)

### Transition -Support people

As well as more explicit academic literacy skills development, forms of transition support for students progressing through educational levels also seem to be crucial. Madjar et al. (2010) claim that this is even more important for students who are the first in family attending university. Confidence can improve if there are enabling 'champions;' people who can provide individual guidance and support (TEC, 2023). Support in decision-making and careers advice but also parental emotional support (Reid & Davidson, 2022) can influence preparedness and student success. Thus, family circumstances, preparedness for university, and specific disciplines are important concepts that may indicate future success or challenges (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012).

Support mechanisms and networks are also vital to a successful transition. An important New Zealand study by Zepke and Leach (2005) suggests that effective support systems are essential

for facilitating this transition such as comprehensive orientation programs, academic writing workshops, and ongoing mentoring to help students acclimatise to the academic environment. When students have no one at home or social networks to call on, they would like to access relevant “just in time” and “just for me” support (Kift, 2014). The impact and reach of support can differ with Chanock (2013) suggesting that face-to-face teaching has greater effectiveness, while institutions including AUT are complementing and integrating the use of new technologies for online resource development in a learning management system.

### Transition -Student dispositions and positive learner identity

There are both internal and external factors influencing a student's transition and their chances of academic success. Students need to develop relevant dispositions and behaviours, a kind of educated habitus (Reid & Davidson, 2022) and this includes confidence and willingness to learn. Without confidence, a learner cannot develop their own judgments and make independent decisions. Barnett argues that human qualities such as “carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage, and stillness” (2004, p.258) enable authenticity in education reflecting ways of being in the world. Furthermore, academic literacy research indicates personal characteristics or personality traits such as self-confidence (Nallaya, 2022), believing in yourself to reach a goal, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). The influential effect of believing in your own ability to perform a task seems to be significant. Connected to this is academic socialisation, which can contribute to students’ development of academic language and literacies (Wilson & Devereux 2014).

Positive identity formation is also an important part of transition. Briggs et al. (2012) point out that the development of a positive learner identity is essential to effective student achievement and transition. Navigating this transition involves engaging with different academic communities and negotiating past, present, and future learner identities (Tobbell & Turner, 2017). Personal educational experiences and academic skills can have both positive and negative impacts on learner identity.

Being prepared and confident for tertiary study and specific disciplines is an important concept that can influence learning success or challenges (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012). To ensure preparedness and identity development both students and universities have roles to play. Students have a responsibility to engage actively in their learning, seek support, and demonstrate abilities to self-reflect in order to understand themselves as learners. Institutions should seek to become familiar with and understand their unique student body, where they have come from, their experiences, and perceptions. Universities should also adopt teaching practices that support the development of academic skills (Wollscheid et al, 2021). The implementation of effective intentional pedagogical practices might support preparedness and confidence in transition for first-year students.

### Factors affecting academic literacy development

A significant factor to consider with research undertaken in the 2020s is Covid and its impacts. Incoming students' education was affected by lockdowns and schooling online which may have adversely impacted their academic literacy development. More recently, the introduction of literacy and numeracy credits for NCEA assessments has been phased in since 2023. These are possible areas of future research, the exploration of the impact of Covid on academic literacy skills and teaching, and the impact of these new credits on students transitioning to university. What, if any, difference they make to transition and preparedness of students. Due to current policy delays and limited research outputs, this literature's scope did not include detailed attention to these issues.

### Conclusion

There are many elements that factor in the academic transition from high school to university. These include educational experiences, cultural and emotional capital, support, and approaches to academic literacy skills development. It is important to note that academic literacy can be viewed as a continuum, with students requiring ongoing support along it (Emerson et al., 2014; Green et al 2017). 2024's first-year students will be those whose schooling was affected by Covid,

and the significance of its impact is still being evaluated. Consequently, the need for support may be greater compared to other intakes.

In general, the reviewed literature focussed on the 'why' academic literacies are significant and the 'how' academic literacies should be supported but less so on the 'what.' Considering this, this research will explore what academic literacies are perceived as important and underdeveloped in the first year of study. The choice to work with and alongside students is an attempt to focus on inclusive and relevant academic literacies as perceived by them. The experience of transitioning into a first-year university often differs between university programmes.

This study will look at the lived experiences of a group of students studying in the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Law. It will investigate how students navigated their academic transition and what literacies they perceived as important.

## Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, there is a review of the characteristics of the study participants. Findings are presented and divided into two major themes: expectations and misconceptions, and adaptations.

### Participants

To set the context of the research, Table 2 provides the background information of the participants and demonstrates the diversity of students at this particular university.

Table 2: Participant information

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>NCEA subjects</b>
1	Male	NZ	Auckland, EQI 473	Science, Maths, English, Earth & Space Science, Accounting, Economics
2	Female	Fijian/ New Zealander	Napier, EQI 445	Physics, Economics, English, Statistics, Graphic Design
3	Female	Malaysian/ New Zealand	Auckland, EQI 440	Chemistry, Calculus, Physics, PPI (innovation) Geography
4	Female	New Zealander	Tauranga, EQI 466	Psychology, English, Maths, Sewing, Personal Finance
5	Female	Nigerian/ New Zealander	Auckland, EQI 416	Performing Arts, English, Business Studies, Health Studies

In total five current participants agreed to be part of the study, four females and one male. Although this is not a fully representative cohort, 2023 data show female students made up 62% of the student body at this university. The majority of participants identified with dual ethnicities, and all completed compulsory formal education in New Zealand. Due to the intensive nature of the interview and the exploration of the experiences and perceptions of individual students, the length of the interview took up to 1 hour. The sample size was restricted in order to control the amount of data for a qualitative study.

In New Zealand, the Schooling Equity Index (EQI) is used to estimate the extent to which students face socio-economic barriers to achievement at school. The numbers range from 344-569. Higher EQI numbers indicate that a school has students facing more socio-economic barriers on average. Lower EQI numbers indicate that a school has students facing fewer socio-economic barriers on average. Therefore, it is a way to understand the relationship between social and economic factors and student achievement.

Participants came from a range of high schools inside and outside of Auckland. All participants received entry to the university with university entrance qualification, having completed NCEA assessments. Each participant completed a range of subjects as indicated in the final column. In summary, students were from varied backgrounds, with varied NCEA subjects. All the students were studying Business papers.

### Themes

Initial analysis of the data revealed that academic literacy in the transition from high school to university was influenced by a number of factors (Figure 3). These factors contributed to levels of readiness for university learning.

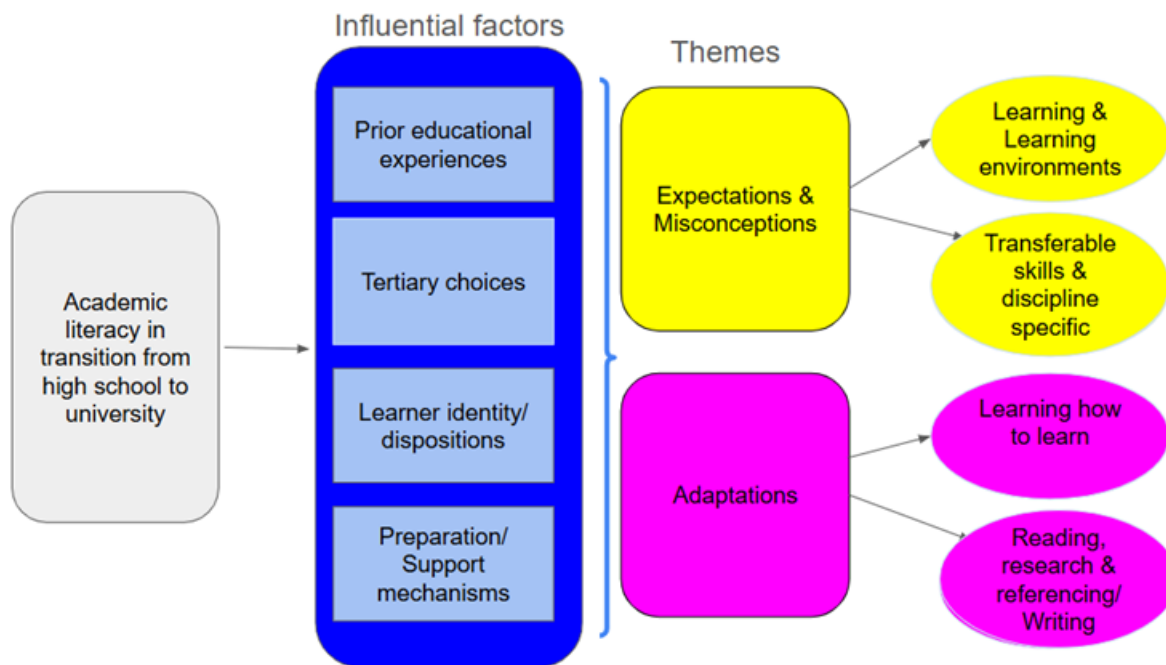


Figure 3 Themes & subthemes

During the data analysis phase, themes (Figure. 3) emerged that focused on interviewees' perceptions of what they needed to learn and how they needed to learn at university level. Participants identified distinctive areas regarding their academic transition that differed from their expectations and identified the adaptations they needed to make. Many interviewees initially reported that the transition into their first year was relatively easy and comfortable regarding procedural aspects such as enrolling in classes and understanding timetables. However, they also reported that their perception of expectations did not always align with reality. The experience of university learning spaces and the type of learning and teaching were unfamiliar to most participants.

Participants reported misconceptions, for example in terms of learning environments, participants expected large lecture theatres with many students but in fact, encountered classroom delivery with smaller groups. In addition, there were greater blended modes of delivery than anticipated. As a result, there were different academic literacy requirements that learners had not regularly been exposed to at high school. These factors contributed to a kind of academic culture shock necessitating adaptation and modification of their learning and literacy strategies in a new environment.

Participants also reported that high school learning was characterized by greater support from teachers, including scaffolding strategies and models of student work. In contrast, at the tertiary level, participants found themselves needing to engage more in independent thinking, with more varied learning opportunities and less one-to-one interaction. This shift highlighted the challenges of self-regulated learning, particularly in knowing how to study and self-managing time and workloads.

In terms of academic literacies, some skills and competencies were anticipated by participants due to crossover from high school. However, there were surprising results regarding what was required in the first year and what needed development. There was much discussion around the reading, researching, and referencing literacies demanded at university. The academic transition from high school to university posed questions about new ways of learning, being, and becoming for the participants

## Expectations and Experiences: Learning Environments & Learning

“I was just expecting it to be so easy and just so smooth you know... but it's the opposite” (Participant 4).

This study reveals gaps between students' expectations and their actual experiences during the transition to higher education. Many participants reported challenges in adapting to the new disciplinary learning content in the curriculum and learning environment of higher education. As new first-year students coming straight from a high school education system, they felt under-prepared regarding their transition to study their subject. This seemed to stem from the access and dissemination of information from institutions and anecdotal information from family or peers who had previously attended university. For example, Participant 2 mentioned, “I was told that it's basically full-time study and that you don't really get one-on-one time as you do with your teachers, that was about it”.

Individual participants started their studies with varying levels of knowledge about university study depending on their previous educational experiences. Rather than being seamless, navigating the transition posed questions about not only the types and sources of transition information but also, the prior preparedness of the learners.

### Preparedness for learning

The participants' responses indicate that despite gaining university entrance qualifications, students were not fully prepared for the challenges of university study. It seems that participants relied on some of their high school English experiences to deal with information literacy. In contrast, university learning and literacies faced in the first semester were frequently unfamiliar and considered more difficult than those in high school.

Participant 1 noted, “I think 70% of the things I had to learn in uni was new, but the rest, 30%, I used from my high school knowledge, which was mainly about how to analyse information or skim read paragraphs”.

Participant 1's assessment of preparedness suggests that there was a greater adjustment needed to learn at university, despite having some transferable skills, in areas such as critical thinking, communicative, and collaborative skills. For Participant 4, this adjustment was also underestimated. As a result, this had a negative impact on the student. "They said it would be hard, but I feel like they didn't go into depth on like how hard it actually is and how stressful it can be. Yeah, that was like a big shock..." (Participant 4). From their experience, the induction information from student ambassadors at orientation at university had focussed on only positive aspects of university study.

Formality was a feature of university study identified as unfamiliar. Most participants noted that structure and formality were more rigorous than high school. For example, participants referred to teachers in high school as being more lenient and subjective than the 'strict' university lecturers. In high school, approaches to students' academic writing and referencing were more 'casual' and 'informal.' Participant 5 noted that "in university, it's very much rigid". They also likened academic writing to being put in a box, where the required styles and conventions are limiting. Similarly, another participant complained that they felt like they could not express themselves because of this. Whereas, for other students university assignments compared to NCEA tasks are more straightforward and direct.

From the responses it is possible to infer that participants' levels of preparedness for their university experiences were influenced by prior educational experiences, specifically, the NCEA standards-based assessment.

### Impact of prior NCEA standards-based assessment

Participants noted some levels of under-preparedness due to the lack of alignment between their first-semester subjects and prior learning. For example, when asked if high school had prepared students for first-semester work, Participant 3 replied.

"No, because I didn't really do business. Well, I did business in like, year 11. But in year 12 and year 13, I never took business, never did any like finance stuff. The closest thing I did was calculus, I guess".

For many participants, NCEA English often provided the closest experiences to university study due to the writing and essays they had to complete.

Participant 5 noted that “with English back in high school, we did a lot of like film studies and novel studies, and then we had to do a whole essay”. For Participant 1 writing skills learnt in English became an interim literacy. They pointed out, “initially my writing was a bit high school based on what I used to write in my English subjects.” As a result, subject choice could influence preparedness levels in terms of generic and disciplinary academic literacies.

Interestingly, Participant 4 referred to NCEA Psychology as the subject that was most like what they were doing in their level 5 university courses. They explained that this was because it included exploring different ways of thinking. It was also the only subject where they were introduced to APA referencing. Participant 4 stated,

...because Psychology is already a hard subject to grapple with...and learning all these new ways of thinking was just difficult sometimes, but it helped to apply like in uni if that makes sense, using those sorts of thinking ways.

Participants expected familiarity in not only learning but also learning spaces.

### Learning environment-spaces

“I didn't realise that we had lectures online” (Participant 2).

In their first semester, participants found that learning environments and modes of delivery were different from traditional high school models. They were surprised by the digitalization of learning systems and teaching. Participant 4 explained, “I had to learn a whole new sort of system, I guess, especially with like Canvas. I did not know what that was. Wow, a lot of technology I had to learn.” In some academic subjects, participants had to utilise and have knowledge of additional computer programmes and software. This presented a new challenge to some participants who had varying levels of capabilities. Participants' self-rated levels of confidence with technology were surprisingly low. Two of them suggested they were not particularly tech-savvy or digitally literate students.

Digitization also had an impact on the time spent with lecturers. According to Participant 1, “you don’t get enough one-on-one time like what you do with teachers at high school. It’s more like independent learning. Lots of emailing”. Students did not anticipate engaging in as much blended learning as they faced. For most participants in the study, elements of course content and recorded lectures were accessed online, and participants felt like they had to learn to adapt to this mode of delivery.

Participants highlighted attention and engagement issues when referring to online learning. They noted that when lectures are provided asynchronously online, it can be demotivating. For example, Participant 2 claimed, “I’m always like, tempted to skip it, or like fast forward it and stuff”. However, having the option, flexibility and convenience of online lectures was also highlighted as positive in some instances, with the ability to revisit specific content for assessments and exams.

Another issue with blended learning was a potential disconnect or lack of cohesion between asynchronous and synchronous resources. Participants suggested it was harder to focus online and that there was the possibility of forgetting or avoiding what they had to do. Additionally, the connection of course content online to tutorials was not always apparent.

*Interviewer: And so then with that (online) lecture you talk about the content during those (face-to-face) tutorials?*

*Participant 3:...We don’t really, we kind of like briefly go over it in the workshop*

Participants reported that learning face-to-face was preferable over online learning as it could avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

### Generic academic literacy and transferable skills

While participants suggested they did not feel adequately prepared for the university environment, there was some discussion about the crossover in skills from high school and university and across disciplines. In particular, participants noted that the skills developed for analysing information and researching online garnered at school were highly applicable to the University context.

Participant 1 suggested, "I think that works pretty much in a lot of different degrees and disciplines. So yeah, it's quite transferable". They also suggested that they were learning soft skills and general skills during their degree.

Group work was cited as an example of a soft skill common in high school and university education. Participants held a positive view regarding group work in terms of idea sharing. Most participants thought that there was a higher amount of group work and collaboration in their level 5 Business classes than they had previously experienced in high school. At university level, it also seemed to have more value attached to it.

Group work also contributed to grades, therefore requiring all students to put in effort. Participant 1 suggested that in high school there were chances to 'free ride' and not contribute. Similarly, for Participant 5 they mentioned picking up the slack for teammates if they were not doing their fair share at both school and university. In the discussions, there was no mention of learning how to participate in group work, dealing with conflict in group work, or how groups were formed.

The significance of understanding assessment tasks and marking criteria as a useful general skill emerged through interview discussions. Participant 3 brought up, reading, and understanding a question as being important skills for success at university. Participant 1 also saw this as a key skill in the assignment process, as it was something they could repeat in future assignments regardless of discipline.

### Discipline-specific literacies

Participants noted that there were discipline-specific literacies. For example, business and marketing papers were defined by theoretical concepts and a lot of writing, whereas in finance remembering information and numbers was key. In contrast, fashion design was more hands-on and practical with digital and hand drawings. From Participant 4's perspective, their business course papers were the most familiar with what students had done in high school. Although participants had to adapt to different course requirements to some extent. Participant 3 reflected, "...varsity, it's like it has to be like a certain way like in academic essays, you can't even do subheadings like I just found that out last week".

Additionally, understanding assessments and meeting the criteria for each assignment posed challenges. Participant 1 expressed with a sense of disappointment, “I didn't have a problem with writing, but each time I tried it was like I didn't really get far because my (university) teacher would say it's still not good enough”.

University-level study was described as more difficult, and participants reflected that they needed to develop or acquire new skills at the start of their university courses in line with their discipline-specific requirements. A common reflection was that high school subject teachers often provided student examples and strategies, for example, the PEEL paragraph (point, explain, example, link). Yet, in their classes at university, students felt like they were left to figure it out or self-access support to develop their academic writing. For example, Participant 1 received encouragement to go to the library for writing and research workshops.

Participants' comments relating to writing demands were mostly linked to essays and other textual tasks. When asked about academic literacies at university Participant 3 explained “[academic literacy] is like being able to write an essay. However, some participants in the study also referred to more diverse assessment types, like reflective writing. There was some surprise at the inclusion of reflective writing in a business context. From the perspective of Participant 1 “I think it was meant for having a more creative view from the students and creating more engagement on how you think at a personal level, but it was a bit confusing, surprising”. Participant 4 mentioned SWOT analysis as being a new assessment type for them. They viewed it easier than an essay because it required pinpointing key ideas and arguments rather than forming structured cohesive paragraphs.

To sum up, participants faced both familiar and unfamiliar academic literacy tasks in the first year of study. Participants had some interim literacies that they could use to support themselves. However, to learn about the university's academic culture, such as writing standards and conventions, participants needed clear assessment instructions and marking rubrics. To support this, students found that they were required to self-access available resources. As new learners, they may not know that they are available.

## University academic culture

“... the content is quite different” (Participant 3)

Most participants faced making a cultural adjustment to the new academic culture and environment. The participants in this study were from diverse backgrounds reflective of the broader New Zealand population. These varied cultural and educational backgrounds can be seen to influence their expectations and experiences during their transition.

Participant 5, who had emigrated to New Zealand when they were young, felt that the transition was harder for them. They felt like assumptions were made about expected academic knowledge and skills. They had expected more consideration and resources in their courses to support academic literacies.

Participants with siblings or family who had attended university thought they had a better understanding of how a university works. In discussions around support, participants reported that they initially talked to their friends and family. There was a sense that participants were willing to reach out to teaching assistants and lecturers for questions at the end of a lecture.

During the interviews, students frequently spoke about establishing connections with teaching staff. For one participant, establishing positive relationships and connections to culture significantly impacted engagement and learning. They cited relatability and connection as important in their learning journeys. However, participants also reported that there was a reduction in one-to-one time with a key lecturer and this was a cause of concern for them

## Adaptations

Most participants felt they needed to make adaptations to their understanding of learning and academic literacies to achieve academic success. The development of learner identities was shaped by personal dispositions. The development of interim literacies also contributed to integration into the academic community. In other words, reworking past discourses and adapting to new ones. Each participant to some extent underwent a process of learning to learn for their first-year university courses.

Many participants identified self-regulated learning strategies such as seeking examples and responding to feedback as particularly useful in the transition.

In addition, participants noted the necessity to extend their knowledge and literacies around reading, research, and referencing. The significance of digital literacy to these literacies was highlighted, along with its interconnectedness to information literacy.

During the initial period of study support mechanisms, both human and artificial intelligence were crucial in literacy development, during the first semester. For some participants, it was clear their transitional journey was ongoing with support extending into their second semester and beyond.

### Learning how to learn

“... the whole thing about uni...It is about passing, but it's also about learning” (Participant 4)

Participants reflected on the need to become more independent and autonomous learners at university. They noted that high school teachers were more available and supportive, engaging more in individual students' learning journeys, whereas university required more self-direction. Participant 5 highlighted this shift, stating “no one forces you to do anything you know like whereas back in high school, you know, if you came to school late, you would get a detention or the teacher tells you what to do, like no one actually (spoon) feeds you in university, you're meant to just know what to do” (Participant 5).

Participants also emphasized the importance of metacognitive awareness. Participant 4 mentioned the significance of “learning how I learn” (Participant 4). This understanding of themselves as a learner helped them gauge their position in new knowledge and develop effective study strategies. The use of the term ‘figure out’ occurs multiple times in the interview data, indicating that students were working out how to adjust to new conventions and practices.

Participants indicated that learning the new skills required for successful study involved a significant degree of self-directedness and repeated practice. This led to their development of strategies and study habits.

In another example, participant 1 described their approach to assessments, "the last one that I went over again and again and that every subject that I did had the same procedure which was research write and analyze. So that kind of process was repeated for every subject and for every assignment. So, I think I got used to that".

The development of relevant academic literacies, such as academic writing and reading, seemed to boost learner confidence. For Participant 2, "references and the academic writing (workshops) definitely changed my writing compared to when I didn't take those workshops. I didn't really realise how important that was."

Similarly, Participant 1 described overcoming initial challenges with reading through repeated exposure and practice. Participant 4 talked about how having confidence in your own work meant knowing what you are doing is right.

### Learner dispositions and positive learner identity

It is interesting to note that learners developing a sense of identity within the university appear to have been shaped by positive and negative experiences. A couple of participants reflected that resilience and perseverance were part of becoming a university student. In other words, self-efficacy, believing in the ability to succeed.

You know, sometimes you put in your best, and even that's not enough. And there have been times where I did that and didn't achieve as much. But the whole point is not to give up and keep going for it (Participant 1).

Participant 5 also reflected "all the mistakes I've made in all the learnings and all the successes, they shaped me into the person I am right now". In the interview discussions, participants defined academic success by good grades and gradual improvements through sustained efforts.

Participants reported that resilience coupled with an open-minded or growth mindset was crucial for their academic success and future career aspirations. Some participants had a strong sense of themselves as learners and had clear personal goals for their futures, having followed a pathway chosen from their high school subjects.

Whilst a few participants discussed that they were considering changing minor subjects or had second thoughts about the courses they had chosen. “Life's not just about uni and you have to consider you know what this might be in the future for you” (Participant 4).

### Learning how to learn - Self-regulated strategies

With the reported increase in the need to manage, participants identified self-regulated learning strategies such as seeking examples and feedback on their work as particularly useful in their transition. For many, this was a familiar strategy from NCEA teaching and learning where they had detailed marking criteria and achievement standards for achieved, merit, and excellence grades. It was suggested that graded student examples helped them understand assessment expectations. Participant 4 explained their strategy as follows, “you know, I think what I do is I just look at examples like I always like to ask the TA teams or the lecturers for examples like essays and I try to see what they've done in order to like model it similarly so that I have the correct structure. So, I know exactly what I'm doing. “.

Receiving formative feedback, on content, style, vocabulary, and APA referencing, was considered useful in identifying what was required to be successful in future assignments. Participants stated that feedback helped them identify and improve problem areas. Reflecting on writing feedback, Participant 1 suggested, “So the [university] teacher said that you're doing good but just use more professional terminology and try to answer the question more directly rather than going around, you know, waffling around”. Participant 1 also found marking rubrics were useful in distinguishing quality student work, for example comparing, the ‘good, best, and bad’ parts of submitted work.

A further step some participants took was to seek out institutional support such as attending library workshops or self-accessing resources. Participant 1 explained, “I just go to the library and like study myself or like watch like YouTube tutorials on certain topics. Yeah, that's pretty much what I do”.

## Learning to learn - Academic reading

Despite reading being a literacy expected across educational levels; participants highlighted clear distinctions. Examples of generic reading skills transferred from high school included extracting key ideas and note-taking (Participant 2), analyzing information, and skim-reading paragraphs (Participant 1). By contrast, participants commented on the increased significance of reading and a wider range of information sources at university.

Interviewees noted the importance of developing advanced reading strategies like comprehension and critical thinking to effectively engage with university-level texts. Participants mentioned that extensive reading was primarily a feature of NCEA English classes. When they started their first semester at university, course readings for each subject were therefore often challenging in terms of length and complexity. Participant 1 was surprised by the amount of time required for reading, “I just had to like spend the evenings and nights just to read through it on my laptop and that was like pretty challenging at first”.

Participants also pointed out that university-level reading is more independent, and self-led. At high school readings and tasks are exploited in class time. Although there are course resources available, at university there is less time and support spent on managing course readings. Participant 1 explained, “so it's more like you're just on your own and that was the reason why reading felt a bit more difficult than high school”. Because of the nature of learning at university, there was also the option of avoiding or not completing the readings, as noted by Participant 3, “I don't always do them”.

Interestingly participant 5 made a distinction between reading and research, stating “It's still a lot of readings because obviously we have readings every week and stuff, but I would say it's a lot more research than reading”. Perhaps for the participants research is being referred to as a distinct type of reading, requiring deeper more active critical reading skills.

## Learning to Learn - Academic writing conventions & style

There were some discussions around similarities in structure between high school English and university essays. However, participants often noted that university-level writing demanded adherence to more rigorous academic conventions. Participants highlighted the challenges they faced early in the semester in adapting to these conventions. Participant 5 reflected, “with academic essays like it must be a certain way. You can't use a children's novel or whatever, like it has to be like specific things”.

Features of academic conventions and styles included the use of precise language and appropriate academic vocabulary. For instance, Participant 1 struggled with developing from a ‘childish’ vocabulary to integrating more professional terminology, which they saw was necessary to achieve high grades. They were also advised to answer a question more directly rather than ‘waffling around,’ perhaps indicating the inclusion of irrelevant content.

Additionally, the importance of elaborating ideas and incorporating feedback from lecturers was pointed out by Participant 3, who learned to do this from writing. The lecturer suggested, “add certain things more about what we are learning.”

When asked about how reflective writing was different from other types of writing Participant 3 articulated how they perceived those differences:

...usually, a lot of writing talks from a third person view instead of I’ (reflective writing) is opinion... yeah maybe students’ voices, and just saying what you think, and relating it what you’re learning.”

## Learning to learn - APA referencing

Another challenge participants faced was learning about the faculty’s referencing system and writing conventions. For most, referencing was a new skill that needed to be acquired and applied across courses and for assessments. Participants often cited APA referencing as the cause of feeling lost or something that students struggled with during the early phases of Semester 1.

Referencing was either something 'really new' (Participant 1) they had not encountered before university starting university or something superficially covered at high school for example by the use of 'According to...' when writing texts with external sources.

Initially, some participants were confident about their referencing skills but after receiving feedback on assignments they identified areas for development. Participant 2 described their experience, stating "I thought I was quite prepared, but back then that was when I didn't fully know the APA referencing and the in-text citations". As a result, participants sought support, with some accessing library resources to upskill. Participant 5 highlighted the pervasive nature of referencing at university, stating, "Coming into uni and they make us do it for every single thing." This sentiment underscores the importance of mastering referencing for academic success.

### Transition support

There were differences in the participants' knowledge about what kind of academic support was available to them during the transition and also how and when they accessed it. It appeared participants often did not know what skills they needed to develop until after receiving feedback. Participants discussed a range of support networks available to them in their learning and development of academic identity; some were personally recommended, and others were self-accessed.

Three of the five participants had family or older siblings who also attended university and could guide and advise on starting at university and becoming accustomed to university systems. Moreover, some students consulted with career advisors at school. Before the start of semester, the university's student hub services were consulted for course-related matters and some students attended orientation for the faculty.

All participants named the university library as a key source of support. Students particularly valued workshops on APA referencing and academic writing. Participant 2 noted, "The workshops... changed my writing compared to first semester where I didn't take those workshops, so I didn't really realise how important that was".

In terms of seeking help, peers and teaching assistants were preferred over lecturers due to their closer age and availability during class time. Despite this, lecturers were described as approachable and encouraging, often referring students to the library and the app for support.

Despite the university offering various support services, students were not always aware of how to access them. One participant made the comment that there are an “awful lot of services and stuff, so it can be more freeing” (Participant 2). Perhaps meaning if you access and take advantage of what support there is then you have more flexibility or confidence in concentrating on the subject matter. In contrast, another said, “one of the challenges was that I didn't know how to use resources that we had available... like the library database we had for references and that was definitely a new thing” (Participant 1). Even though there are resources available the knowledge of and ability to utilize them are themselves components of the literacy learning environment.

### Transition support - technology

An interesting finding was the use of technological tools, particularly GenAI. GenAI emerged as a rapid resource for providing timely 'just in time' study support. Participant 1 shared, “Sometimes I don't understand some concepts in finance I would just go ...and search it up so that part of online is definitely helpful and you know, some websites explain it better than the class teachers”. Generative artificial intelligence was cited as a valuable resource that could help with understanding concepts and ideas, notes, and structure.

The immediate and easily understood outputs of AI made it a useful tool. Some participants made reference to prior exposure to these tools in high school, making them familiar and comfortable with using GenAI independently to support their university studies.

### Transition journey

From the participants' perspectives, they would have liked to have known more about university academic study and managing expectations, from the outset. This would have helped them be more prepared for university study and assignments. Learning opportunities to upskill in academic literacy often came too late, after assessments were completed.

Participant 1 reflected on their initial struggles stating, “that (APA referencing) was a very tough thing to overcome, and I didn't really know about workshops, for example, that we had at the library. So, I kind of missed a lot of marks on that in my assessments.

Participants reported that by the second semester, they had a better understanding of academic culture and the required literacies. For example, Participant 2 confirmed, “I understand how everything works better, taking lecture notes... writing it in easy ways for me to understand”. Likewise, Participant 1 identified areas that had developed. “I can do really good research now compared to what I did in semester one and my writing has also changed a lot. So, I've improved the way I use my vocab and my grammar”

To sum up, in the transition experience, the idea of enhanced connections and integration between prior experiences and the demands of the new learning environment in the first semester seems significant.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and some of the key issues outlined in the literature review. Implications for academic literacy development and for individuals, faculty, and institutions are explored.

### Summary of findings

#### **RQ1 How do students experience navigating the academic transition from high school to university?**

Overall, the findings from this study highlight the complexities of the academic transition from high school to university for students gaining university entry with NCEA qualifications. Participants expected an easy transition but faced some challenges. Many participants noted inconsistencies and misconceptions around their entry experiences and initially felt overwhelmed in the first semester. There were gaps between expectations and actual experiences. According to the literature, some levels of discomfort and uncertainty are to be expected in learning (Gravett & Kinchin, 2020) however if there are persistent barriers or aspects of hidden curriculum hindering academic and social integration it can become an issue for academic success and retention (Tinto, 2005). This suggests that institutions should consider more targeted ongoing academic literacy development starting in the transition from high school to university to help students achieve academic success.

#### **RQ2: What do students perceive as important academic literacies in the first year of study?**

The transition from high school to university highlighted the importance of several key academic literacies. There was some adjustment to academic literacy, related to university culture with adjustment to the norms and values of the new academic environment. Participants acknowledged the need to develop more advanced reading strategies to effectively engage with university-level texts. Participants were expected to independently build on more traditional high school reading and writing skills of comprehension and production and engage critically with diverse information and modes of communication. In relation to reading, participants noted not only their own lack of digital and information literacy skills for research but also the insufficient attention given to these skills in class.

Both digital and information literacy were also considered important in researching and referencing. Instead of having a teacher provide supported resources, participants needed to find relevant sources, often through digital databases. Participants needed competencies in finding, evaluating, and utilizing credible information effectively. With advancements in artificial intelligence, the benefit of AI and the ability to summarise was mentioned. This suggests that AI literacy and associated ethical implications are emerging as an important field for research.

## Discussion Part 1

### Navigating transition

In the move from high school to university participants reported that they needed to understand and adapt to the academic conventions and requirements of different courses and lecturers. Past literature related to transition such as Tinto (1993) has often viewed this process as linear and focussed on the initial weeks of study. This perspective is widely reflected in university offerings of generic preparation-type courses and orientation weeks and an intense focus on the first 5 weeks. However, in this study, findings indicate that the 'transition' experience was not uniform, but rather dependent on their educational experiences, degree courses, and personalities. This aligns with research by Gravett et al., (2020) who suggest that transition is a more personal and fluid experience. She argues that there is a need to move beyond traditional linear models and acknowledge the multifaceted nature of transitions, viewing it as a rhizomatic process.

This demands a rethinking of transition which is more personalised and not fixed to a particular time. For example, some participants mentioned that the 'learning to learn' for university was still ongoing into their second semester. This suggests that rather than transition being something to complete, there is more of a sense of 'becoming' and ongoing formation of learner identity (Briggs et al, 2012). According to Briggs et al., (2012), there are three stages of transition. Firstly, when students transition to university, there is significant social displacement, and 'letting go' of familiar identities and environments. Subsequently, there is a period of adjustment and uncertainty. The third stage involves ongoing support that suggests continuous adaptation when students face new challenges and opportunities.

This indicates that time and resources must be allocated for support of an ongoing nature to facilitate this process. It is also interesting to note that the pre-transition phase is also a critical period. Students can navigate expectations, skills, and new environments more effectively if they have clear and accessible information (Maymon et al., 2019).

### Learning environments & learning

The participants' reported experiences point to the importance of managing expectations and providing clearer information about the realities of university study and modern curricula. As Briggs et al. (2012) suggest, there are certain expectations for new students in higher education. For example, not only will they have to perform 'alien' academic tasks but also adjust to new methods and learning environments. Most participants noted their surprise at the quantity of online and blended learning in their courses. Compared to high school experiences, where they had primarily used the Google suite for learning to varying degrees, students were faced with adjusting to Microsoft, Canvas, and other software for almost all operations and teaching and learning. This also affected traditional methods of communicating with lecturers and access to course information and content. Participants (presumably) are less familiar with emailing their lecturers and have an expectation that lecturers will be available in person to respond to questions. Despite the flexibility of blended learning and its 24-hour nature human responses and feedback are not as immediate.

In the post-COVID tertiary setting, the digitalization of learning processes and the extensive use of learning management systems have informally become the status quo. There is widespread use of blended and online learning, with advocates citing benefits like flexibility and accessibility. However, this has added complexity to the student transition experience, potentially overlooked by educators as another element of a 'hidden curriculum' (Cotton et al., 2013). There are assumptions that Generation Z students are digitally literate (digital natives) and proficient in online learning and independent self-directed study from the emergency pandemic response days. In fact, the participants reported mixed experiences with technology with one individual only purchasing their first laptop to start university.

Ng (2012) emphasizes that skills and strategies used for learning in education are different from those used in everyday technology use. It is also important to note that unequal access to devices and digital literacies can add to equity issues (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010).

Blended learning poses challenges for student engagement. If blended learning environments are not anticipated by students they may suffer from levels of under-preparedness, with added pressures to self-regulate or navigate technologies (Dziuban et al., 2018). Other issues of not being prepared for this mode of delivery could include isolation, demotivation, and even confusion stemming from these ways of learning.

This shift in expectations for high levels of digital literacy underscores the need for more comprehensive orientations that familiarise students with not only academic expectations but also the digital tools and platforms they will be using.

### University academic culture

Most participants faced a cultural adjustment to higher education, requiring effort and modifications to existing learning strategies. Participants highlighted that a distinct feature of university learning is learning how to communicate in the academic community they have joined. University cultural literacy plays a significant role in transition and academic success.

Each university setting has unique academic and social conventions, values, and practices that students need to navigate. Often, this institutional knowledge is part of a 'hidden curriculum' consisting of the implicit norms, behaviours, and perspectives that can profoundly impact students' academic success and their comfort levels in unfamiliar environments (Quince, 2021). A lot can go unsaid, by lecturers and students. If not made explicit, then the hidden curriculum can disadvantage students and perpetuate social inequalities (Cotton et al., 2013).

As Quince notes "knowing how to navigate the processes and practices of environments such as universities is not second nature to members of communities who have little connection or experience of them" (2021). To participate in scholarly conversations in their academic communities, learners need to know the processes, practices, and conventions of academic culture unique to their institution.

This reflects Lea and Street's (2006) academic socialisation concept, suggesting students need some kind of induction into the culture of the academia they have entered. New students must adapt to the cultural norms of an institution while maintaining their individual cultural identity which adds to their sense of belonging. These norms and values also influence communication and expected academic standards (Ivanič, 2014).

### Generic versus disciplinary academic literacy

Another reason for inconsistencies in skills is related to the extent to which students have transferred relevant generic and disciplinary academic literacy skills from high school. The distinction between generic and disciplinary academic skills at university is a critical area of discussion in higher education. Generic skills under the umbrella of literacy such as collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills have grown in importance in education policy in response to a need to cultivate employment-ready graduates (Hyytenin et al., 2023). These generic skills are seen as transferable across various learning contexts.

On the other hand, disciplinary literacy skills are context specific. Foundational literacy is not always transferable since meaning and written texts can differ between disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998). University is home to a collection of discourse communities that have distinctive ways of communicating. Discourse 'with a capital D' as defined by Gee (2011) refers to the distinctive way language is used in specific societal contexts.

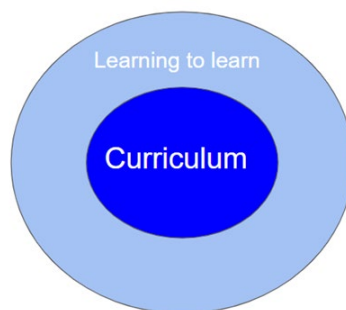
When students move onto post-secondary education academic literacy becomes expected since learning a specific discipline implies learning how to communicate the discourse and knowledge within those disciplines. (Hyland, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012; Wingate, 2019). Shanahan and Shanahan suggest explicit instruction in discipline-specific literacies (2012). This enables learners to acquire specialised knowledge and skills in their field. Therefore, increasing opportunities to participate and communicate more proficiently.

## Transition support for academic literacies

Despite the participants starting university with some apparent interim literacies or generic skills, there are some inconsistencies between academic literacy requirements at high school and university. In the findings, participants noted that academic literacy practices are not uniform across subjects or courses within subjects. There are specific literacy practices associated with each, some of which students had had no prior experience with. In the case of reflective writing, there were some instances where participants could not see the rationale for this particular skill in Business.

This relates back to Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) who claim effective disciplinary literacy practices involve explicit teaching of the reading, writing, and communication skills valued in each discipline. Furthermore, the academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) views literacy as a social practice, in which literacy is shaped by the context in which it occurs, and thus practices should be more integrated.

## Positioning of academic literacy



*Figure 4: Separation of learning to learn from the curriculum*

Participants' comments suggested that lecturers often regard academic literacies as something students should arrive with. Several participants suggested that lecturers rely on students knowing what and how they need to learn when they commence their studies and do not spend class time on this. A common model noted by some participants (Figure.4) was where support and learning-to-learn offerings were adjunct to the curriculum.

In some cases, lecturers provided guidance but there was a sense that individuals should know or be self-directed to access academic literacy resources. This assumption that students will engage in self-directed resources can have an impact on effectiveness, because if academic literacy support is seen as an additional task, it may not be perceived as an integral part of learning (Bassett & McNaught, 2024). Notably, one participant pointed out that they knew about the university's resources but did not know how to use them. Consequently, students may be less inclined to engage with them or appreciate their relevance or value. According to Hoadley and Hunter (2018), there are different approaches to integrating academic literacy into a curriculum, which can be categorized as non-integrated, integrated, and embedded.

The non-integrated approach involves the provision of separate or adjunct courses or workshops. In an adjunct model, since involvement is voluntary for both students and discipline-specific teaching academics, neither may be aware of nor committed to participating. There is also an issue of outreach. Students who choose to attend separate workshops are often what our team calls the 'anxious able.' These students, who actively navigate and utilize support systems, are often already motivated, and engaged, seeking reassurance but are likely to already have or easily acquire what they need.

Although an integrated model is defined by more collaboration and involvement with academics and workshops in class time Hoadley and Hunter (2018) claim that since content of generic skills workshops is only slightly tailored to disciplines and not assessment focussed, they are effectively still adjunct teaching.

As an alternative, rather than overburdening students with the extra cognitive load of a standalone separate resource, institutions could explore a more embedded approach to academic literacy (McWilliams & Allen, 2014; Wingate, 2018). This approach aims to integrate literacy activities into the curriculum, making them relevant to subject matter, applicable, and available to all students. The perceived usefulness of an embedded approach is perhaps greater because it also involves greater scaffolding of academic literacy to assessment tasks. However, this model depends on investment in enhanced collaborations, time, and resources.

Bond (2020) asserts that changes should be driven by policy rather than relying on individual teachers' ad-hoc efforts. Policy-driven interventions may have a greater impact by ensuring more consistent and sustainable integration of academic literacy across the curriculum.

### Adaptations- Learning

Students needed to adapt their previously acquired learning strategies in order to succeed at university. At university, students are often expected to find and construct their own knowledge, in contrast to high school where the teacher is often thought of as the knowledge giver (Baker, 2018). A distinct feature of university transition highlighted by participants is thinking for yourself and the ownership for actively constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it. This requires an awareness of how to learn, metacognitive strategies, and learning processes as in self-regulated learning (SRL).

Self-regulated learning is defined as the ability of learners to manage their own learning processes through strategies like goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation (Williamson, 2015). Students can be supported in developing strategies through collaborative opportunities to reflect or work with their peers to share feedback. Zimmerman and Moylan (2009) developed a cyclical phase model of self-regulation, which includes a forethought phase, a performance phase, and a self-reflection phase. By analysing their own learning processes first-year students can become more effective learners and self-regulated learning can contribute to this (Robbins et al., 2004).

Learners also need to take an active role in the educational process. New students should reflect on their understanding and their approach to learning. Students can be supported in successfully crossing critical learning thresholds with the integration of SRL by educators. For example, mastering academic writing can be a threshold practice (Gourlay, 2009) where students transition from basic writing skills to more advanced, discipline-specific writing. Exposure to self-regulated learning strategies at high school and university can help students set and achieve learning goals and ultimately adapt how they engage in their academic study (Hawe et al., 2017). van Rooij et al (2017) suggest universities should integrate the development of self-regulated study skills into first-year programmes.

Along with metacognitive practices, self-regulated learning can foster university-long and lifelong learning skills contributing to transformative experiences that can shape a student's identity.

### Transition- support

Participants discussed a range of support networks available to them when navigating the academic transition from high school to university. Some were recommended and others that they had to find for themselves. For those first in family attending university or those students lacking in social networks, this could be a greater challenge. Reid and Davidson (2022) suggest that emotional support from parents and peers plays a crucial role in fostering confidence and academic capital. Although as mentioned previously the experience of family and peers may add to misconceptions if their university experiences were different.

Regardless, it is suggested that students require support and if they are not able to access appropriate support through their own networks, universities might consider enhancing networking opportunities as part of a suite of transition-focused programmes. Figure 5 below represents a continuum of support students identified within this study. They sit between the two extremes. To the left, there is a student who did not know what support was available to them until they had received feedback on an assessment. They found the support valuable and accessed additional resources. Whereas, on the right, there is a student who is self-directed and independently seeks help or resources at the time of need.

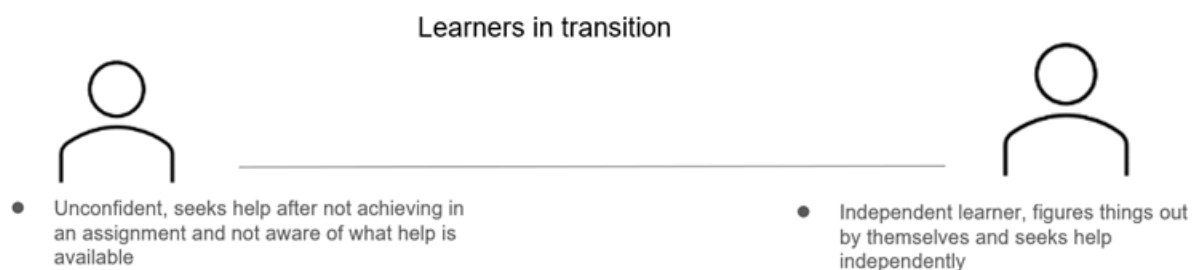


Figure 5: Continuum of learners seeking help

In reality, there was one participant to the left of the above continuum who did not actively seek help or think that they needed help. This may be part of a previous schooling culture that students bring with them or the fact that students often do not know what they do not know. Often there can be stigma attached to a remedial or deficit model of support. Disclosing the need for academic support may be perceived as a sign of weakness or inadequacy. Cook et al., (2019) highlight that the socio-economic background of students significantly impacts their openness to seeking academic support. They found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face additional barriers, such as a lack of awareness about available resources or a reluctance to seek help.

The boundaries of professional relationships and behaviours are influenced by cultural norms and values (Quince, 2021). A common model of support is self-accessed generic academic support. However, this one-size-fits-all model does not often fit diverse cohorts of students and their needs or expectations. It may be perceived as the institution being inhospitable and not including the diverse needs, for example, non-traditional, first-in-family international, and mature students.

Personalisation, as in the demonstration of manaakitanga (academic hospitality) and timely support is perhaps more impactful. Manaakitanga (academic hospitality) reflects openness, generosity, and a sense of welcoming, which can stimulate authentic conversation (Phipps and Barnett, 2007 as cited in Author Collective, K. I. N., 2021) For example, targeted academic counselling and goal setting have been effective for Pasifika students (Chu et al, 2013).

The way in which help-seeking is framed or positioned by an institution seems significant. Rather than being seen as remedial or deficit there could be more recognition of the novice nature of the first year, and the disciplinary demands, and the different backgrounds and cultures that students come from. In a sense the encouragement of 'becoming academic' (Robbins, 2023).

### Transition Support: Learners Cultures and Pedagogies

Participants discussed that some level of cultural relatability fosters a supportive learning environment. This might add to a student feeling a greater sense of belonging and shared knowledge. Student cohorts are culturally and linguistically diverse.

In the context of New Zealand, many students come from communal cultures such as Māori and Pacific. Therefore, teaching and content should aspire to be responsive and representative of the institution's diverse student population. Berryman et al. (2018) emphasize that successful learning relationships consider a student's whole identity and well-being. Such culturally responsive pedagogies can assist in bridging achievement gaps and enhance overall student success.

A feature of academic counselling that participants pointed out was the relatability and similarities in age of peers and teaching assistants. This suggests that students felt more connection or closeness to these individuals, highlighting the benefits of some form of mentoring. This perhaps supports the rationale for providing peer mentoring or tuakana teina opportunities. The tuakana-teina relationship, rooted in Māori culture, involves a more experienced student (tuakana) mentoring and guiding a less experienced student (teina) (Ministry of Education, n.d). In sharing experiences, there are mutual benefits since it can help foster relationships and enhance engagement. Moreover, establishing networks of peer mentors are potential methods to support cultural identity (Webber, 2022).

Participant comments about their own culture and identity suggested that ways of supporting cultural identity include acknowledgment and representation. This could lead to a greater sense of belonging within an academic community. Providing mentors can offer learners with role models at a higher level with characteristics to aspire to. "From a Māori worldview, role models are like 'poutokomanawa', they are people who hold the whare up, connect people to their cultures and futures, and at the same time embody the traits of people ākongā aspire to be" (Webber, 2022).

In summary, help-seeking behaviours and the provision of help will look different for different learners. Provision of and access to appropriate, relevant support mechanisms, less formal and formal when students need them can support student success. Support systems play a role in the development of learner identity in higher education settings (Reid & Davidson, 2022). They are especially important in navigating the academic transition into university-level study.

Therefore, there is perhaps a need for greater recognition of relational and culturally responsive approaches to enhance relationship-building among students and educators in a transition period.

### Learner dispositions and positive learner identity

Relational pedagogies and culturally responsive pedagogies require an understanding of students and their identities. According to Barnett (2004), adaptability, resilience, and critical thinking are essential dispositions that enable students to navigate the complexities of higher education. For first-year students developing a sense of oneself as a learner and dispositions can help them cope with challenges and setbacks they may face. For the participants, confidence grew as they gained a greater understanding of the learning landscapes to develop their academic literacies. This learning continued into the second semester, suggesting that perseverance is also a crucial part of being successful in an academic journey.

Teaching and fostering key dispositions can contribute to increasing students' feelings of legitimacy and engagement within the university community. For example, Zepke and Leach (2010) proposed that enhancing students' self-belief and autonomy can significantly increase their motivation and engagement.

Moreover, with advancements in technology, dispositions such as integrity and ethical behaviour are increasingly relevant in both educational and professional settings. Therefore, these qualities prepare students not just academically but also for the complexities of modern life.

## Discussion Part 2

### **RQ2: What do students perceive as important academic literacies in the first year of study?**

#### Cultural literacy

Overall, the participants highlighted that a distinct feature of university learning is learning how to communicate within the academic community they have joined. They acknowledged that this required effort and modifications to their existing learning strategies.

The difficulties students encounter with college literacy practices are frequently shaped by their high school experiences (Harklau, 2001). For example, certain aspects of transition were troublesome as a result of a positive bias in information conveyed about university study during transition initiatives. The findings suggest that more effort is needed prior to and in the early weeks of semester one, to better inform and prepare new students for university study. Students need to be made aware of the connections between high school and university learning.

### Digital literacy

Participants needed to navigate digital environments with their first-year course content being designed for blended delivery. This required technical skills to navigate the learning management system in order to access and submit course and assessment details. These technical skills were often assumed or overlooked. Proficiency in digital literacy enables students to support their self-regulated learning by using technology to personalize their learning experience.

Digital literacy emerged as a critical skill for researching, reading, and referencing for course assignments. Without explicit instruction, there was a tendency to resort to high school behaviours such as searching YouTube for help or not completing tasks. This aligns with a study by Amar and Amar (2024) which found deficiencies in students' digital literacy, negatively impacted their academic writing practices. To improve engagement with information and the quality of research outputs there is a clear need for digital skills and literacy development.

According to Ali and Shier (2024), institutions have a role in developing digital literacy by integrating it into curricula. Embedding digital literacy within disciplinary subject matter can tailor these skills to specific fields. However, this approach depends on the digital competencies of subject matter experts, who may themselves be at varying levels of digital literacy. Alternatively, educators and staff, such as information literacy librarians can collaborate with lecturers to facilitate digital literacy learning. Digital capabilities are essential not only for academic success but also for future professional work.

### Reading, researching, and referencing

Participants reported they were underprepared for the amount of reading at university. In addition, the underestimation or unanticipated importance of reading is evident in the results.

Most participants commented on the difficulty level compared to high school texts and tasks. The findings further suggest that students must develop advanced reading strategies and skills such as extensive reading and critical thinking to effectively engage with university-level texts.

Maguire et al. (2020) argue that academic reading is integral to developing the skills necessary for successful participation in academic discourse, which is essential during the transition to university. They refer to 'writing capital,' in order to be part of scholarly conversations, implying students need the knowledge and skills acquired through reading.

However, several researchers have addressed the decline in reading skills and culture among university students in New Zealand. Relating to both the willingness to read and the amount of reading required. McNaughton (2021) suggests this decline in reading is multifaceted citing deficiencies in curriculum along with increased social media usage over reading of books. In general, reading behaviour in everyday life today requires less cognitive processing, as it is shorter and more 'bite-sized' (McNaughton, 2021).

There are also emerging artificial technologies that can not only simplify reading but also summarize and identify key points. As a result, in daily life and study, there is a reduced need to process and comprehend longer texts. Wood (2024) suggests that students need help to build resilience and perseverance to understand longer university texts. Integrating reading into the curriculum and reading as a social practice at both high school and university can enhance students' preparedness for the demands of university-level reading and research.

## Writing

The findings of the study show that there are complexities in transitioning to university writing, involving familiarisation with the conventions and practices of specific disciplines. Faragher (2021) suggests that first-year students bring some academic skills with them, including basic academic writing skills. However, there are gaps in skills, particularly in using academic language, discipline-specific jargon, and varied vocabulary. Therefore, there is a need to help students understand the conventions of academic writing in different disciplines, a kind of genre-based pedagogy (Hyland, 2003).

Firstly, knowing the starting point of writing may also help educators. Knowledge of entry qualifications such as NCEA or English language test requirements can provide insight into familiar genres and expectations. This understanding can help educators design more effective instructional strategies and support services. Often this knowledge sits within the 'third' space and student support services but is not widely discussed within faculty. Within institutions professional development or training of academics in the teaching of writing is undervalued (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004).

For this reason, in the literature there is debate over whether academic writing should be taught by disciplinary experts or writing specialists. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) emphasize that disciplinary experts should teach the specialized writing within their fields, as they understand the specific conventions and expectations of their disciplines. This approach ensures that students learn to write in ways that are directly relevant to their academic and professional futures. Others such as Faragher (2021) and Lea and Street (1998) believe that writing specialists are better equipped to teach the fundamentals of writing, including structure, argumentation, and clarity. A collaborative approach, where writing specialists and disciplinary faculty work together, may offer the most comprehensive support, leveraging the strengths of both groups to help students develop both general writing skills and discipline-specific conventions (Faragher, 2021; Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2019.)

## Referencing

Interrelated to reading was the mastering of APA referencing. In discussions with participants, the value of referencing extended beyond pure formatting conventions to encompass other learning around information literacy, writing, and research skills.

The process of referencing fosters critical thinking. Participants had to evaluate information for credibility and relevance. This is supported by research that points out that this kind of deeper thinking allows the learners to appreciate how sources contribute to scholarly conversations (Gourley, 2009; Gravett & Kinchen, 2021). It also allows learners to consider their own roles as scholars.

From this, it can be noted that APA referencing knowledge can also help students develop their academic voice and identity within communities, through the development of ideas and arguments. Gourley (2009) argues that APA referencing is a threshold practice, allowing access to academic communities. Without referencing knowledge, there is a power imbalance at play and a sense of being an 'outsider.'

Referencing is perceived as a critical academic literacy practice connected to belonging and becoming a proficient student at university. However, attention to referencing is perhaps peripheral and inconsistent among courses. If lecturers send students off to find help or 'bolt on' (Wingate, 2006) referencing support provided in the form of additional workshops, then it perhaps gives the impression that referencing is not integral. In addition, with the evolution of AI automation, there is the potential for students to turn to technological referencing support to replace humans if they are not made available. There is a risk then of the ethical misuse of information.

A more explicit scaffolded approach to referencing during transition may help in preparing students more effectively and emphasize its importance in academia. There is also perhaps a case for technology to be leveraged to support students in developing stronger referencing skills and academic literacy. For example, a study by the University of Sydney highlighted the importance of technology-mediated feedback in improving students' referencing skills. The pilot program showed that combining educational technologies with standardised feedback significantly helped students understand and apply proper referencing practices (O'Donnell et al., 2020). By integrating these strategies using technology, educational institutions can reduce referencing angst and better equip students with the necessary skills to navigate content knowledge and uphold the standards of scholarly work.

### Feedback literacy

Participants reported that they were familiar with feedback based on criteria. There was an appreciation of the crossover from high school to university study of the practice of feeding back on work using marking criteria.

The idea that feedback provides a strong basis for learning is consistent with Hattie and Timperley (2007) who claim feedback is essential for promoting student learning. In particular, it might be of more importance to first-year students who are building on their prior knowledge from high school. As suggested in a previous section, self-regulated learning and being able to identify strengths and weaknesses in your own learning can help in adapting and adjusting to new learning environments. Evaluative judgment, the ability to assess the quality of one's own work and that of others (Tai et al., 2017) is an increasingly important skill in distinguishing quality and accuracy in the digital era.

Formative feedback is crucial for ongoing learning, in a way feeding forward. Not only is the effectiveness of feedback dependent on the timing, clarity, and comprehensiveness of feedback it also requires active engagement from a learner. Learners must be able to interpret and utilize the feedback they are given, a kind of feedback literacy. According to Carless and Boud (2018), feedback literacy encompasses the "understandings, capacities, and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies".

On reflection, most participants felt that their learning over the first semester could have been more scaffolded with appropriate and timely development of relevant literacies, such as academic cultural literacy, digital literacy, and feedback literacy (Figure 6).

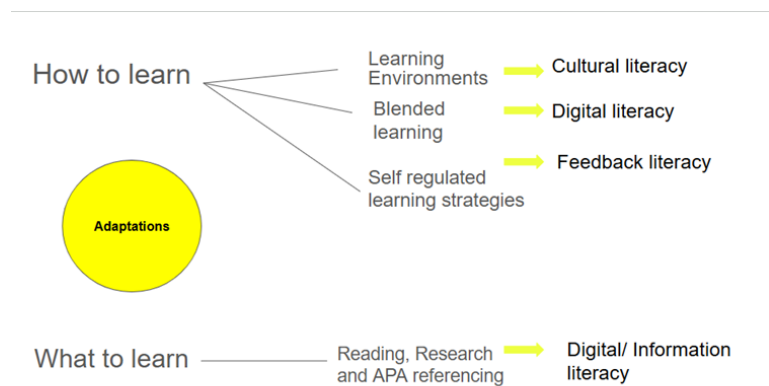


Figure 6: Academic literacies associated with transition

## Implications

Student expectations were often for an easy or smooth transition. However, in reality, participants often felt underprepared despite having university entrance qualifications. Their high school experiences were not fully transferable to university learning. Participants suggested that high school experiences did not fully equip them for the more rigorous and formal learning environment or hybrid style of learning in higher education. The digitalization of learning systems and the requirement for self-directed learning further complicated their transition. There was a need for students to develop more independent self-regulated learning strategies, such as seeking feedback and examples, to adapt to university demands. They also emphasized the importance of advanced reading and research strategies and mastering APA referencing.

Regarding transitioning from high school to university, this study found that some high school students have specific expectations that differ from reality. Adapting to these realities is part of becoming a university learner, but some adaptations are unanticipated. How well learners can adapt and the transparency of teaching, facilitation, and support they receive are key elements since transitional experiences can influence academic success, student satisfaction, and ultimately whether a learner continues in their learning journeys. The question of who takes responsibility for ensuring an impactful academic transition from high school to university remains a key issue highlighted by this research.

### Implications for students

Institutions expect that new students should be prepared to actively participate in their learning processes for their first-year courses. In other words, attending classes regularly, contributing to discussions and group work, and completing assignments. However, this expectation can be problematic due to the diverse profiles of new students and the diversifying academic literacies they meet in their courses. Even though they start at the same entry point, students' interim literacies from their respective high schools are insufficient and need to be developed. Often this development is left to self-accessed resources, or students are referred to support only after they have failed an assignment.

While a range of resources and support services is available, these are often generic and not tailored to specific subjects. Additionally, with multiple services, students may not know how or which to access. Students experiencing a transition felt if learning content was outside of the curriculum, then there were issues of disconnection and disengagement.

In contrast to prior standards-based assessment and focus on outputs, students need to take advantage of opportunities to work within the new academic culture to learn systems and conventions, make mistakes and learn from them. Formative feedback and examples of quality students' work can support students in this, helping them to take control of their own learning, by developing self-regulated learning strategies, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-assessment.

Rather than framing a first-year student as lacking in skills, a focus could be on intentional transparent teaching and learning in the first year of study, to motivate and encourage students to take ownership of their learning. New students need to be made aware that challenges and setbacks are part of becoming a university learner. University-level study is more complex and formal, requiring higher-order thinking and skill. Actively promoting positive dispositions such as perseverance, resilience, and self-efficacy can better equip students for the future.

### Implications for institutions

This study also highlights the critical need for educational institutions to recognize and support the diverse learning adaptations students need to make when transitioning from high school to higher education. There is a need for better preparation for the realities of contemporary university study and ways of learning. According to Bowden et al. (2021), expectations are an important antecedent to engagement. Therefore, to know and understand student behaviours and performance, institutions should seek to know what expectations learners have prior to coming and the origin of those expectations. Apart from managing levels of anxiety within student cohorts, this could also aid in identifying groups of learners who may benefit from added preparation.

Digital literacy for education stood out as a significant area of uncertainty. Unlike emergency remote teaching, the purposeful and intentional use of digital technology in the forms of a learning management system and online learning must be made explicit.

If institutions seek to cultivate inclusive education, they must enable access and engagement with blended learning through upskilling learners with the digital competencies that are required. A challenge is identifying where the responsibility for digital literacies lies. Within the current landscape in the researcher's institution, there is limited teaching or support of digital literacies for study. The information technology unit supports technical needs, but it is unclear the scope of responsibility to guide students in how to navigate digital tools and content related to their relevant fields. The library and its information literacy librarians could be afforded greater responsibility for teaching digital literacy skills if digital literacy is considered part of information literacy, in terms of finding and communicating information in digital landscapes. Additionally, there is a demand for educators to keep up to date with technological advancements. Institutions could invest time and resources to upskilling through professional development. Collaborative efforts to tailor or embed digital literacy into curricula would make them more relevant and aligned with course learning objectives and disciplinary practices.

The research has also shown the importance of recognising and addressing the integration of interconnected academic literacy development within curricula, both transitional and disciplinary. In my experience as a learning advisor, students do not always see the links between workshop foci or the distinction between 'support' services like learning advice and information literacy support. Increasing the visibility of connections and the interwoven nature of academic literacies would be beneficial to teaching and learning. An example of a project under development within our team is a 'Getting started with assessment' series, where the distinction between academic literacy and information literacy is not imposed. The information and conventions required for an assessment are identified and practised. This approach connects reading and researching strategies to a written assignment. The series includes understanding your assessment task, searching for information effectively, and reading and note-taking strategies. This presents itself as a more holistic student-centered approach to academic literacy development, student feedback on this will be collected in 2025.

From the student perspective, significant academic literacies encompass not only traditional reading and writing skills but also digital, critical, and feedback literacy. All of these are considered essential for student success. This implies that institutions should strengthen academic literacy support by recognising and adopting a multiliteracies approach to academic literacy, covering the multiple diverse forms of communication and responding to emerging literacies such as AI literacy.

This further supports the need for developing students' self-regulated learning strategies to take control of their own learning, which can be done as classwork or online by students and peers. Allocating time to foster metacognition and self-regulation within a transition can help students understand their learning processes better and contribute to self-efficacy and levels of confidence. Examples include goal setting, reflective journals, and experimenting with strategies.

In summary, there could be increased outreach and more equitable access to resources if attention is paid to connecting academic literacies to transitions or having a shared understanding of what it means to manage transitions from high school to university.

## Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest the need for enhanced transition support (content, knowledge, and skills) for all students entering their first year of university study. This could be achieved through a more coordinated, more formalised whole-of-institution approach to transition as reflected in studies associated with transition pedagogies as conceptualized in Australia by Kift (2009) and Faragher (2021). More locally, some institutions envision transitions as "a continuum of cohesive experiences, both social and academic, across the student journey, and embedded at all levels of the institution" (Vickers & Beare, 2022). According to Gale and Parker (2014), transition is the "capability to navigate change" (p. 737). All point to the effectiveness of an institution-aligned approach. Working towards a shared institutional understanding and approach to the numerous transitions at tertiary level could have a significant impact on teaching and learning and students' academic and social integration.

The participant's comments regarding 'figuring it out' and not realizing the importance of certain aspects of academic literacies highlight a disconnect between the expected learner profile and their actual capabilities. With regards to academic literacy development, participants reported that they were often left to their own devices or sought help only after their initial assessment grades rather than understanding the academic requirements in advance. A further challenge as reported by participants was finding support due to the multiple services available, some offering similar provisions, leading to varied advice on which ones to utilize.

To address these issues, a range of recommendations are outlined below:

### *Towards a proactive transition pedagogy*

Working towards a proactive transition pedagogy prepares students in advance, rather than reinforcing a remedial or deficit view of academic literacy development that often stems from a schooling culture. This means meeting students where they are at in their learning journeys and showing awareness of an individual's not only social and academic but also digital contexts. Reframing the development of transition pedagogy from perceived gaps or deficiencies to a 'getting started' approach could be a more strengths-based method.

### *Cohesive interventions and support systems*

By implementing more cohesive interventions and support systems, institutions can better equip students with the necessary academic literacies from the outset. This preparation could contribute to increased confidence and readiness for study. This approach aligns with Lizzio's (2006) concepts of the five senses of student success, which include dimensions of confidence, curiosity, resourcefulness, resilience, and responsibility. If institutions can help students develop these key attributes early on in a learning journey it can lead to improved long-term academic outcomes and overall student well-being in all transition experiences.

### *Links to organisational goals*

At a strategic level, for universities of opportunity with growing non-traditional student populations adopting a transition pedagogy within the institution can align with the university's strategy and values of promoting fairness and equity. A transition pedagogy emphasises the importance of students feeling valued and significant within their learning environments. The interconnectedness of students, educators, and learning environments matters (Gravett et al., 2020). Additionally, recognizing human aspects in education such as emotional, personal, and cultural elements all contribute to a sense of belonging.

A transition pedagogy is also not people or department dependent. In other words, it is more adaptable, sustainable, and has the potential to withstand change. In the creation of a consistent framework with clear principles and practice it ensures consistency, continuity, and stability. Future research should focus on the practical implementation of these recommendations, exploring the roles and involvement.

## Transitions strategy

### **Managing expectations of academic culture**

New students should understand that challenges and setbacks are part of university learning. University-level study is more complex, requiring higher-order thinking and skills.

Navigating this requires perseverance, resilience, and self-efficacy. Institutions should use multiple channels and opportunities to disseminate information prior to and during a transition.

### **More collaborative teaching and learning environment**

Developing collaborations between students, faculty, and support staff can add to a more inclusive learning community. This collaborative environment fosters a shared responsibility for student success and respect for areas of interest and expertise.

### **Integrated academic literacy activities**

Integration of academic literacy activities into the curriculum rather than treating them as standalone resources. A co-curricular approach can make literacy practices more relevant and accessible to all students, enhancing their academic success. This method can level the playing field and give all students, regardless of their backgrounds, opportunities to prepare for study from the outset. This replaces a deficit orientation to academic literacy development.

### **Digital literacies**

Design and support effective online pedagogical practice for emerging digital contexts, including provision of explicit instruction on navigating digital environments, using learning management systems, and conducting research using digital databases. Digital skills should be aligned with discipline learning and learning outcomes. Leveraging technology can also provide multimodal support for students off campus.

### **AI Literacy and Ethical Use**

Educating students on the ethical implications and responsible use of AI tools in academic work. Develop AI literacy to help students utilize AI for reading, researching, referencing, and writing while maintaining academic integrity.

**More scaffolded first-year curriculum**

Implement scaffolded learning approaches to support students as they transition to university-level study. This includes providing structured guidance on academic literacies, such as reading, researching, and referencing, and providing students with examples of quality work.

**Assessment for learning assessments & assessment literacy**

Use early formative assessment and feedback as an integral part of the learning process. Focus on promoting learning through assessment activities that engage students

**Foster a feedback culture & literacy**

Ensure that students receive timely and constructive feedback on their academic work. Increase and vary the methods of conveying feedback and use this feedback to help them understand and improve their academic literacies and learning strategies. Teach students how to interpret and utilize feedback to enhance their learning. Train faculty on providing effective feedback.

**Personalized Support:**

Recognize that each student's transition experience is unique. Offer personalized support that considers individual educational backgrounds, degree courses, and personal characteristics. This could be done through the sharing of or creation of learner profiles (e.g., exploiting data from a student readiness survey or a learning self-assessment/ need analysis).

**Mentors**

Establish peer support networks to help new students feel more connected and supported, including peer mentoring programs or study groups

**Support for self-regulated learning**

Encourage the development of self-regulated learning strategies in class or online, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning processes and collaborate with peers for feedback.

Allocating time to foster metacognition and self-regulation within a transition can help students understand their learning processes better and contribute to self-efficacy and levels of confidence. Examples being, goal setting, reflective journals, and experimenting with strategies.

### **Focus on first-year pedagogies - culturally responsive & relational teaching**

Offer professional development opportunities for educators to enhance understanding of first-year students' backgrounds and needs. Explore teaching approaches that are student-centered.

### **Student feedback mechanisms**

Acknowledge and allow for student experiences and voice in processes, ensuring that it is relevant and inclusive.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations should be considered in relation to this study. Firstly, the research was based on five interviews, which restrict the generalizability of the results and may not fully capture the diverse experiences of the broader student population. During the project, there were definite recruitment challenges, despite incentives and multiple advertising attempts. The limited number of volunteers for participation suggests potential challenges in engaging with the entire student cohort, indicating that those who chose to participate might have had different experiences compared to those who did not.

Time and understanding of concepts and constructs may have constrained the depth of exploration into participants' experiences. A longer interview duration could have allowed for more comprehensive discussions and richer data. Furthermore, there is a notable discrepancy between how students articulate and understand academic literacy, which could lead to misunderstandings. For example, learners were unfamiliar with the metalanguage and linguistics concepts that the researcher used. This may have been remediated with a more detailed examination of specific assessments or examples of student work at both the NCEA and university levels, as this would provide clearer insights into the practical application of academic literacy knowledge across different educational stages.

Overall, while the study offers valuable insights, these limitations highlight the need for further research with a larger, more diverse sample. With the findings demonstrating variations in transition times and experiences, an extended timeframe for research would have enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the academic transition. This could also allow for document analysis in terms of assessed student work and feedback.

## Conclusion

This research study aimed to explore the academic transition from high school to university, with a focus on academic literacies. The study's findings have practical implications for students and institutions. The research revealed that students often held misconceptions about university learning and learning environments. Learners need time and support to adapt to the academic culture of their chosen university. However, academic support is often marginalised.

A shared understanding of transition across an institution could streamline and exploit the existing offerings to work towards an explicit transition pedagogy. An effective transition pedagogy and curriculum would emphasize the interconnected nature of academic literacies and skills. It would require a cohesive support system, with increased collaborations between lecturers, learning advisors, peers, and other support to scaffold learning.

Furthermore, a broader multiliteracies approach can also enhance academic transition experiences. This aligns with previous research by Feekery et al. (2014) which at the time emphasized the significance of information literacy in facilitating smoother transitions. Notably, there was evidence in this current research that pointed specifically towards the areas of digital literacy and feedback literacies including self-regulation learning strategies as contributing to greater academic success. The responsibility for the development of students' digital literacy requires further review.

Interestingly, during the course of research and data analysis, my ideas and understanding of academic transition have evolved. Rather than viewing transition as a gap to be bridged, it appears that transitions are not linear, time-bound, or ever fully completed. Transitions are personal, influenced by prior learning, backgrounds and the specific discipline students enter. Transition is not necessarily confined to first-year students but applies to any students who are facing new ways of learning and being. For example, there is the case of international students coming to New Zealand to study at postgraduate level, they can experience academic culture shock due to differences in education systems and the prevalence of exam-based assessments.

For these students research knowledge and processes could also benefit from greater scaffolding and support.

This study has contributed to research by exploring the experiences of students transitioning into their first year in the Business Faculty. It has highlighted misconceptions and adaptations that can impact student performance and success. Future research could expand on these findings by examining the transition experiences of students entering other faculties or those who have gained university entrance through alternative high school pathways into university study. A longitudinal study might focus on following a student from the first year to the third year to explore experiences of other transitions. Anecdotally it is reported that levels of support drop off after year one, yet there are different more complex challenges as a degree progresses.

In summary, attempting to understand these diverse transition experiences can help tertiary institutions to develop a strengths-based, personalised approach used across the university which meets students where they are at. A transition pedagogy appears an equitable and sustainable option to be explored for students navigating academic transitions.

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*Glossary of Māori terms*

Aotearoa	New Zealand
ako	reciprocal learning
rangatahi	young people
manaakitanga	academic hospitality
whakamana	empower
whakatauki	māori proverb
whanaungatanga	relationships

## Appendices

### *Appendix A – Ethics Approval*

## APPENDIX A: Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

5 August 2024

Lisa Maurice-Takerei  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Lisa

Re Ethics Application: **24/181 Academic literacy from high school to university**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 5 August 2027.

**Note:**

Condition 3 referred to thinking about ways in which the dissemination of the findings of the research once complete might be available to other interested parties, such as lecturers, programme and course leaders. It wasn't about dissemination of the advertisement for additional requirement.

**Standard Conditions of Approval**

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Rachael.harding@aut.ac.nz

Appendix B- Tools

## APPENDIX B : Oral Consent Protocol

*Project title: Academic literacies from high school to university*

*Researcher: Rachael Harding*

*The participant joins the video meeting*

Do you agree to my recording your consent to participate?

*If they agree, then the record function will be activated, and they will be asked the following:*

Have you read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated x?

Do you have any questions about the research?

Do you understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed?

Do you understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (your choice) and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way?

Do you understand that if you withdraw from the study then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used? However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Do you agree to take part in this research? Yes  No

Do you wish to receive a summary of the research findings? (please tick one): Yes  No

Do you want me to send you a copy of the audio recording for this consent? Yes  No

Please confirm your name and contact details

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

*I will now turn off the recording of the Consent and then will start a separate recording for the interview.*

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on:*

*AUTEC Reference number: 24/181 Academic literacy from high school to university*

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form*

## **Appendix B 24/181 Academic Literacy from high school to university**

### **Indicative interview questions:**

#### **Opening:**

Thank participants for attending.

Ensure participant is comfortable and understands

- what the study is about
- what the interview process is
- that the consent form is signed,
- agrees to interview being recorded

#### **1. Participant background information**

Tell me a bit about yourself – your family - Where you live – where did you go to high school - what NCEAs did you do? what you are studying now, why did you choose this subject?

How are you finding your first year at university academically? course – assessments – culture-community

How would you describe moving from high school to university ( compared to intermediate to high school)

#### **2. Identity**

How would you describe your character/ personality?

How confident did you feel when you left high school? How confident did you feel when you started at AUT? What Is something that affected your confidence?

How would you describe life as a first-year university student?

Did you need to do anything to adjust to feel like a first-year university student?

What skills/ knowledge do you think you need to belong in an academic community?

#### **3. Expectations**

Was university study what you expected? What did you expect in terms of studying at a university?

What academic skills or competencies did you think you needed for reading/ writing/ communicating at university?

What academic language and thinking skills did high school develop? Were they adequate for university?

Follow up on reading/ writing/ communication as you see fit?

How did you develop skills once you started Semester 1? Did you have enough time?

#### **4. Experience**

How academically prepared did you feel when you started at AUT? How well do you think high school prepared you?

Were you aware of academic literacy skills you needed at high school/ for NCEA?

What academic skills or competencies have you needed in general?

What academic skills or competencies have you needed in your discipline?

How did the work and assessments compare to work you had done at high school?

How do you think you developed from Week 1 – end of semester?

What was your impression of the assessments you completed?

Talk me through your first assignment

How did you face any academic challenges?

Who helped/ supported you - at high school/ at university

How would you describe academic success?

Was there anything you wish you had known or done that would have prepared you better?

Do you feel any different starting Semester 2?

Did Covid affect your study?

(Additional probing questions: Why do you think that is? How did that make you feel? What did that mean to you? Tell me more about? )

#### **5. Conclusion**

What advice would you give a student completing NCEA at high school?

Is there anything you would change between then and now?

Is there anything more you wish to say?

Anything important you think you have left out?