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Recognizing the Need to Seek Help: Signals that Trigger Academic Help-Seeking among University Students

Reconocer la necesidad de buscar ayuda: señales que desencadenan la búsqueda de ayuda académica en estudiantes universitarios

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Abstract. *Objective.* The present study examines the signals that students consider clear indicators for seeking help at university, as well as the variables associated with those students who realize they need assistance only after failing a course. *Method.* In the study, 753 students from different fields and universities responded to a questionnaire on motivational variables related to seeking academic help. *Results.* The results indicate that poor grades are the most important signal for seeking help. On the other hand, it was found that 10% of the sample who needed to fail the course to realize they required help were characterized by greater shame, less social and academic integration, and less vocational strength. They also had a lower appreciation of academic support.

Keywords. Motivation, academic help-seeking, institutional academic support, higher education, undergraduate students

Resumen. *Objetivo.* Este estudio explora los signos que los estudiantes consideran indicadores claros para buscar ayuda en la universidad y las variables asociadas con aquellos estudiantes que se dan cuenta de que necesitan ayuda solo después de suspender una asignatura. *Método.* La muestra fue de 753 estudiantes de diferentes campos y universidades que respondieron a un cuestionario sobre variables motivacionales relacionadas con la búsqueda de ayuda académica. *Resultados.* Los resultados indican que las malas calificaciones son la señal más importante para buscar ayuda. Por otro lado, se descubrió que el 10 % de la muestra que necesitaba reprobar la asignatura para darse cuenta de que necesitaba ayuda se caracterizaba por una mayor vergüenza, una menor integración social y académica y una menor fortaleza vocacional. También tenían una menor apreciación del apoyo académico.

Palabras clave. Motivación, búsqueda de ayuda académica, apoyo académico institucional, educación superior, estudiantes universitarios



Introduction

Academic help-seeking at university has acquired a relevant role concerning academic persistence and the generation of conditions for the continuity and involvement of students in their educational process (Roland et al., 2015). These strategies can impact the university experience, especially in periods of transition from secondary to higher education (Chang et al., 2020; Venegas & Gairín, 2019), particularly in diverse and heterogeneous university contexts as the current (Gallardo et al., 2014; González & Dupriez, 2017). However, this may also be relevant in higher grades. We have evidence that the need for academic support in these grades does not cease to be significant (Valenzuela, Miranda-Ossandón, et al., 2021).

The profusion of institutional responses to student needs in higher education has led to an interest in exploring academic help-seeking from different perspectives. For example, studies on inhibitory variables associated with help-seeking (Apto et al., 2017; Dennis et al., 2018) studies on academic integration, retention, and persistence (Hall, 2017; Ishitani, 2016), or research that approaches the issue of help-seeking as a self-regulated learning strategy (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018). At the same time, other studies have addressed the role of trainers in the help-seeking process (Micari & Calkins, 2019). Help-seeking has been approached from the student's perspective by looking at the effects of university students' academic self-efficacy on their academic help-seeking behavior (Xie & Xie, 2019) and its relationship with social integration and persistence in higher education (Yang, 2019). It is worth noting that help-seeking has also been the subject of studies on people with disabilities (Puustinen, 2013).

In general terms, student academic support systems have emerged in tertiary education as a tool to improve universities' internal efficiency rates. These processes (timely graduation, failure, and early dropout) are defined as critical indicators of

quality assurance systems (Osorio, 2019). For this purpose, institutional academic support (IAS) has implemented, for the most part, programs for the development and leveling of skills and knowledge considered necessary for integration into university studies, thus favoring perseverance in studies and academic success.

In Chile, universities have developed academic support programs funded by the State, initially aimed at first-year students (Espinoza & González, 2015; Venegas & Gairín, 2019). However, the expansion of enrollment (Chiroleu, 2017; Ocegueda et al., 2017) and changes in university entrance criteria (Viancos & Contreras, 2019) have favored the entry of a more heterogeneous population (Bernasconi, 2020). These changes mean that the complementary support offered by institutions now extends well beyond the first year, and the range of institutional support available to students has increased.

A recent study in Chilean universities analyzed the diverse demand for academic support (Valenzuela, Miranda-Ossandón, et al., 2021). This study indicates that the student's perception of the need for additional support is high (many types of support required) and that the demand for each of the different kinds of support needed is also significant. In addition to the above, it was found that this demand for help is constant during university education.

However, despite the increase in the supply and demand for this type of support, it has been noted that the students who most frequently seek help at the institutional level are not those who require it most (Finney et al., 2018). Linked to the above, several studies found that students tend to seek help from those they consider closest to them, to the detriment of those who may be best equipped to provide such support (Amemiya & Wang, 2017; Zander et al., 2019). Similarly, age, gender, and other situational factors have been found to influence help-seeking (Brown et al., 2021). Indeed, scholars state that young people under 25 years of age ask for less academic help than older ones, and in addition, male students are less likely to seek aca-

demic help than female students (Kessels & Steinmayr, 2013). However, these gender differences are not conclusive (Martín-Arbós et al., 2021). On the other hand, it has been identified that first-generation students at university are less likely to seek help (Parnes et al., 2020). This could be explained, in part, by less access to support networks and poor management of the resources offered by the university (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Parnes et al., 2020).

The help-seeking process

The various authors who have studied the help-seeking process (e.g., Juvrud & Rennels, 2017; McDermott et al., 2017; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981) agree that this process begins with the awareness of a difficulty (academic, in this case) that can possibly be resolved through the help of a third party.

Similarly, it is recognized that asking for help (whether formal or informal) is done through an assessment of the associated costs and benefits (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Wirtz et al., 2018) and would therefore constitute a self-regulated strategy (Gonida et al., 2018; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018). However, it is unclear the signs the student understands as a clear signal that academic help is needed.

Awareness of difficulty

Awareness of academic difficulty (when it exists) would seem to be a self-evident experience for the individual, but it is not. There is evidence that demonstrates, although many students experience difficulties in making progress in their educational process, some do not clearly perceive this difficulty until it is too late (Karabenick, 2004; Parnes et al., 2020). In some cases, this delay in awareness is associated with attributing those academic problems to unmodifiable personal inabilities (Ryan et al., 2005). Even if the difficulty is detected, it is not possible to visualize that an external person can contribute to the issue solution.

Another important aspect highlighted by specialized literature on awareness of difficulties is the role played by university students' relationships

with their teachers in the process of recognition or invisibilization of academic and socioemotional difficulties (Baker, 2013). This aspect would be associated with certain teaching practices developed mainly in the first year or with first-generation students at university (Toutkoushian et al., 2019). Teachers tend to replicate certain "paternalism" that does not encourage students to recognize their difficulties.

Becoming aware of academic difficulties is not a sufficient condition to move forward in the process of seeking help (Newman, 2002). In addition to this recognition, it is necessary to be aware that the support of a third party is required. Many students recognize their difficulty but believe that it must be dealt with by themselves. The reasons for this behavior are associated with intrapersonal factors such as perceived self-efficacy, i.e., a feeling of competence in their academic abilities. Students with low perceived self-efficacy tend to seek less help (Ryan et al., 2005). Similarly, variables such as self-esteem (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991) or family judgment and disappointment (Mortenson, 2007) may be obstacles to this awareness of difficulty.

In formal education systems, a feedback mechanism is integrated by default to inform students about their level of performance (Stronge & Tucker, 2020). In this context, grades are a relevant source of information for achieving academic goals. Thus, when grades are low, they can be a signal of potential risk associated with failure.

On the other hand, failing subjects is undoubtedly a clear signal of academic difficulties. However, this situation requires a more detailed analysis, as it may be influenced by various determinants that explain the results obtained and that could have a differential behavior, for example, by gender (Douglas & Salzman, 2019) or the socioeconomic level of the student (Garbanzo, 2014).

However, the sources of information on performance and eventual supplementary help to reach the proposed achievements are not limited to the formal report that the system delivers to

the student. There are also informal channels that provide alerts in this respect. Peers and teachers are perhaps the closest and most relevant actors to make evident the need to seek additional help or support. These actors, in many cases, can be significant agents in raising awareness that it is positive (and not shameful) to ask for help, especially from the student academic institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Yang, 2021).

Despite the extensive body of research on academic help-seeking, most studies have focused on inhibiting factors (e.g., shame or self-efficacy) or their association with persistence and academic integration. Much less is known about the specific signals that students interpret as decisive triggers for seeking help. While existing evidence suggests that grades and social interactions may influence the recognition of academic difficulties (e.g., Schlusche et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2024), it remains unclear the signals perceived as critical for initiating this search for help.

On the other hand, in addition to helping to bri-

dge this knowledge gap, we are particularly concerned about the situation of those students who do not realize that they need academic support until having failed a course. In this context, vocational strength, or dimensions of academic and social integration, can contribute to profiling these students. This characterization would allow for an initial approach to a better understanding of why some students delay seeking support until failure occurs and provide clues for designing institutional strategies that promote the search for timely and adaptive help in increasingly diverse higher education systems.

Method

Participants

In the present study, 753 university students from different areas of knowledge (see Table 1) and studying from 1st to 5th year at university, belonging to four public and private university institutions with four and five years of accreditation (out of a maximum of seven years). This kind of institution is a type of

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by areas of knowledge

Areas of Knowledge	General Sample		ANH Sample	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Administration and Commerce	69	9.2	54	9.4
Agriculture and Livestock	41	5.4	29	5.0
Art and Architecture	10	1.3	7	1.2
Basic Sciences	19	2.5	13	2.3
Social Sciences	115	15.3	87	15.1
Law	44	5.8	39	6.8
Education	234	31.1	164	28.5
Humanities	9	1.2	9	1.6
Health	144	19.1	117	20.3
Technology	68	9.0	56	9.7
Total	753	100.0	575	100.0

Note. ANH sample: students aware of the need for academic help.

university with a medium level of certification, serves more than half (57.7%) of Chilean university students (CNA-Chile, 2021). Therefore, in a way, it accounts for the average student in Chilean universities.

The overall sample consisted of male and female students (71.7% female) with a mean age of 22.39 ($SD = 4.81$) years. Underage students (< 18) were not allowed to participate in this study, as they cannot legally give informed consent. From this sample, students who expressed an awareness of having needed any kind of academic help at some time (ANH sample) were selected. Although no significant differences were evident, this sub-sample allowed for a more accurate assessment of the phenomenon of interest: the signal that indicates to the student that they should ask for help.

Measures

Data collection was carried out through a broader questionnaire that assessed a set of variables that would influence the willingness to seek institutional academic support. Within this framework, students were specifically asked what they considered to be the unmistakable signal that, given an academic difficulty, they should ask for help. The response alternatives were a) a bad grade in an assessment, b) continuous bad grades, c) failing the subject, d) a suggestion from a classmate, and e) a suggestion from a teacher. These categories emerged from a preliminary inquiry process conducted by our research team. Furthermore, variables that could be related with the type of signal that students identify as a trigger to help-seeking were evaluated.

Shame. Embarrassment about asking for help was assessed through a 4-item Likert-type scale on a 6-point scale whose fit indices account for its validity ($\text{Khi2}(2) = .01$; $p = .93$; $\text{RMSEA} = .00$ [.00, .05], $\text{SRMR} < .01$, $\text{CFI} = 1$, $\text{TLI} = 1$) and whose reliability level was ω McDonald = .846.

Vocational strength was assessed through a 4-item Likert-type scale with good fit indices. $\text{Khi2}(2) = 5.49$, $p = .10$, $\text{RMSEA} = .05$ [.00, .11], $\text{SRMR} = .01$, $\text{TLI} = .99$, $\text{CFI} = 1$, and high reliability ω McDonald = .847.

Academic engagement (behavioral), through a unidimensional scale of 4 items with similar characteristics to the previous one, shows validity ($\text{Khi2}(2) = 2.17$, $p = .34$, $\text{RMSEA} = .01$ [.00, .082], $\text{SRMR} = .01$, $\text{TLI} = 1$, $\text{CFI} = 1$) and high reliability index: ω de McDonald = .867.

Academic integration, through a unidimensional scale of 4 items, inspired in Schmitz et al. (2010), shows validity ($\text{Khi2}(2) = 6.63$, $p = .04$, $\text{RMSEA} = .06$ [.014-.118], $\text{SRMR} = .01$, $\text{TLI} = .99$, $\text{CFI} = 1$) and a high reliability index: ω de McDonald = .899.

Social integration, through a unidimensional scale of 5 items, this scale built similarly to the previous one, shows good standards of validity: $\text{Khi2}(2) = 2.32$, $p = .509$, $\text{RMSEA} = .00$ [.00, .01], $\text{SRMR} = .01$, $\text{TLI} = 1$, $\text{CFI} = 1$; and high reliability: ω de McDonald = .826.

Valuation of the institutional academic supports, through a unidimensional scale of 4 items, shows validity ($\text{Khi2}(2) = 1.24$, $p = .539$, $\text{RMSEA} = .00$ [.00, .007], $\text{SRMR} = .00$, $\text{TLI} = 1$, $\text{CFI} = 1$) and high reliability index: ω de McDonald = .827.

All these scales were developed by our research team (Valenzuela, Gonzalez, et al., 2021) and reported in Valenzuela, Muñoz, Miranda-Ossandón and González-Sanzana (2025) and Valenzuela, Muñoz, Precht Gandarillas and Miranda-Ossandón (2025).

Procedures

Data for this study was collected through an online questionnaire that, in addition to collecting sociodemographic and academic background information, asked about motivational variables related to asking for academic help at university. After signing an informed consent form approved by the Ethics Committee of the first author's institution (act.204/2019), students accessed the survey. The system automatically excluded those students who declared themselves to be under 18 years of age, as they were not legally entitled to give consent to prevent them from answering the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Descriptive data are presented on the frequency with which students report different types of cues as determinants for recognizing the need to seek academic help. Analyses were conducted for two groups: the general sample and a subgroup of students who report being aware of academic difficulties. The proportions of these responses are compared by sex using a chi-square test. In addition, a MANOVA was performed to identify the variables that characterize the most critical group: students who delay seeking help until failing the course, and to explore the interaction effects with sex.

Results

What signals indicate to the student that they should ask for academic help?

The study participants show a similar pattern regarding what they consider to be the clear signals that they need to ask for academic help. The most frequent signal in this type of population is first a bad grade in one subject, followed by several bad grades. This feedback, provided by the academic grade (one bad mark or many bad marks), is the signal that would trigger 76.9% of the student body to seek help. In other words, three out of four students see one or more poor grades as a clear signal that they should seek support from a third party.

A third signal to ask for help is the failure of the subject. This late awareness of the need for support is the moment to activate this process for 10.36% of the students. Finally, we observe that 11.56% of students require the intervention of a third party as a signal to ask for help: the suggestion of a classmate (4.65%) or the teacher themselves (6.91%). This pattern (see Table 2) remains unchanged when considering only those students who report having needed academic help at some point (AHN=1).

It is observed that for females, getting a bad grade is a signal to ask for help significantly more frequently than for their male peers. Conversely, males depend significantly more on the intervention of a third party (peer or teacher) to realize that they need to ask for academic help (see Table 2). These differences are replicated in the sub-sample of students who report needing help academically.

In the case of men, the frequencies of the signals marking the awareness of the need to ask for academic help are stable over time. The percentages assigned to each of these signals for asking for help do not show significant differences by year of study, forming a single, homogeneous subset ($p > .05$).

However, in the case of women, differences between the different cohorts are observed in two specific signals (see Table 3). There is a significant decrease in the frequency of one bad mark as a signal to ask for help ($F(4,412) = 4.477$; $p = .001$), and,

Table 2. Signal to ask for academic help in university students (in %) and differences by gender

	General Sample				ANH Sample			
	Male	Female	χ^2	p	Male	Female	χ^2	p
One bad grade	40.2	49.2	4.21	.040	39,9	52,2	6.72	.010
Several bad grades	31.6	29.2	0.559	.454	32,2	25,6	2.79	.095
Course failure	10.0	12.3	0.575	.448	11,5	14,7	0.286	.593
Teacher's advice	11.5	5.5	5.49	.019	8,7	3,9	2.90	.088
Classmate's advice	6.7	3.8	2.87	.090	7,7	3,7	4.09	.043

Note. ANH sample: students aware of the need for academic help.

Table 3. Signals to ask for academic help by year and sex

	Male					Female				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
One bad grade	45.76	37.93	25.93	50.00	46.67	63.78	62.07	46.59	46.27	35.42
Several bad grades	27.12	37.93	37.04	32.14	20.00	20.47	20.69	26.14	29.85	41.67
Course failure	1.69	13.79	14.81	10.71	6.67	7.87	6.9	18.18	16.42	18.75
Teacher's advice	13.56	6.90	14.81	0.00	13.33	3.15	6.9	2.27	5.97	4.17
Classmate's advice	11.86	3.45	7.41	7.14	13.33	4.72	3.45	6.82	1.49	0.00

at the same time, a significant increase of several bad marks as a signal to ask for academic support ($F(4,412) = 2.529$; $p = .040$). In the rest of the evaluated signal options, their frequency does not show significant variation between the different years of study ($p > .05$).

Who are the students who need “failing the subject” as a signal to ask for help?

Although around 10% of the frequency of “failing a subject” is identified as a signal to seek academic help, it is essential to understand the characteristics of students who do not perceive the need to ask for academic help until they fail a course.

A factorial multivariate analysis of variance (2×2 MANOVA) was conducted using the General Linear Model (GLM) to examine the effects of the help-seeking signal (*signal3*: fail vs. others signals) and sex (male vs. female) on a set of five dependent variables: Shame, Academic Integration (AI), Social Integration (SI), Vocational Strength, and Valuation of Institutional Academic Supports (IAS).

Box's M test was nonsignificant ($M = 43.089$, $F(45, 7876.33) = 0.888$, $p = .685$), indicating that the assumption of equality of covariance matrices was met. Similarly, Levene's tests revealed homoscedasticity for all dependent variables ($p > .05$).

Multivariate Effects

The multivariate tests indicated a significant main effect of *signal3*, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.934$, $F(5, 475) = 6.685$,

$p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .066$; but not for sex, Wilks' $\Lambda = .979$, $F(5, 475) = 2.085$, $p = .066$, $\eta^2_p = .021$. Therefore, the dependent variables significantly differed between students who wait until failing a subject to recognize the need for help and those who do not, while the overall profile of the five dependent variables did not differ between males and females. Similarly, the interaction between *signal3* and sex was not significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.983$, $F(5, 475) = 1.629$, $p = .151$, $\eta^2_p = .017$.

Univariate Effects (Between-Subjects ANOVAs)

The main effect of the *signal3* factor, although small, was significant for all dependent variables (η^2_p ranging between .018 and .030) (see Table 4).

Students who wait until failing a subject before realizing they need academic help (*signal3* = 1) consistently reported higher Shame and lower scores in all other variables (Academic Integration, Social Integration, Vocational Strength, IAS Valuation) compared to their peers (*signal3* = 0).

Specific Effects of Sex and Interaction

Sex showed a significant main effect only on IAS Valuation, $F(1, 479) = 5.945$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2_p = .012$. Women (EMM = 4.62) reported significantly higher valuation of institutional academic support than men (EMM = 4.20).

Although no significant multivariate interaction was found between sex and *signal3*, a significant univariate interaction effect was observed for IAS

Table 4. Univariate Effects: failing the subject v/s all other options

Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2_p	EMM others signals	EMM fail
Shame	11.671	.001	.024	2.08	2.76
Academic Integration	8.791	.003	.018	4.24	3.66
Social integration	12.648	<0.001	.026	4.55	3.93
Vocacional strength	14.089	<0.001	.029	4.83	4.09
Institutional academic Support valuation	14.629	<0.001	.030	4.74	4.09

Valuation, $F(1, 479) = 5.568$, $p = .019$, $\eta^2_p = .011$. In this case, male students who waited until failing a subject to recognize their need for help reported a significantly lower valuation (EMM = 3.68) than participants in the other subgroups (signal3 = 1, female = 4.49; signal3 = 0, male = 4.73; female = 4.74). In contrast, women in the “fail to seek help” group showed a higher valuation (EMM = 4.49), similar to those who recognized their need for help earlier.

The multivariate analysis revealed a significant interaction between fail a subject and sex on the combined dependent variables, Wilks' $\Lambda = .936$, $F(10,1080) = 3.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .064$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs showed significant interactions for Shame ($F(2,544)=10.05$, $p < .001$), Academic Integration ($F(2,544)=5.07$, $p = .007$), Social Integration ($F(2,544)=9.15$, $p < .001$), and Vocational Solidity ($F(2,544)=5.07$, $p = .007$), but not for Institutional Academic Support Valuation ($F(2,544)= 2.44$, $p = .088$).

Results indicate that the effect of *signal3* differed by sex: although both men and women with *signal3=1* reported higher shame and lower integration levels, these differences were more pronounced among men, suggesting that male students may be more affected by the conditions represented by *signal3*.

Discussion

The present study shows how, for three out of four students in the sample, grading during their studies is a signal of regulation that, on the one hand, allows for evidence of academic difficulties

and, more importantly, allows for an awareness of the need for help to cope with these difficulties. This finding, although seemingly obvious, has important implications. The argument that if they give a poor mark, the student may become frustrated (Wass et al., 2020) is possibly dangerous. When teachers act from this argument, they can sabotage the possibility of students realizing that they must seek help. In fact, the literature has shown that even certain levels of “anxiety” associated with assessment failure can lead to improved motivation to avoid further failure (Pekrun et al., 2002). The balance between not “frustrating” the student and giving a signal, through a poor grade, for realizing that they need to ask for help is an issue that needs to be further addressed and discerned, considering contextual factors.

Consensus exists that the assessment and the respective grade report relevant information with a certain degree of accuracy regarding the level of learning achieved by the student and identify those aspects that require improvement (Care & Kim, 2018; Puig, 2020). Evidently, it is not enough to identify the score gap between the poor and passing grades; the assessment needs to generate information to identify aspects to improve (Brooks et al., 2021; Villarroel et al., 2018).

A second relevant aspect of this study is that there exists a non-negligible percentage of students (one in ten) for whom the signal to ask for help comes very late, only when they fail the subject. This group exhibited greater shame and lower levels of

academic and social integration, vocational stability, and appreciation for institutional support. Although the effect sizes were small ($\eta^2_p = .015-.039$), the pattern was consistent, suggesting a reactive and defensive help-seeking style (Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

The third finding of this study is that the signal that the student should ask for help in its different modalities is stable over time. The percentage of students who recognize these signals as clear indicators for asking for help does not vary between students in the first and fifth years. This pattern is consistent with recent studies showing that the types of support required by students are stable over time (Valenzuela, Miranda-Ossandón, et al., 2021). This general stability only changes in the case of women who start their university education, identifying as the primary signal to ask for help the poor mark. It gradually gives way to more than one poor mark as evidence of the need to ask for support. One explanatory hypothesis in this respect is that women start their university education with lower self-efficacy than men (Sachitra & Bandara, 2017). Preliminary results from our research team show very slight differences at the limit of statistical significance ($p=.052$). Nevertheless, this hypothesis needs to be tested with greater precision.

This study has at least two possible limitations. The first concerns the assessment of the dependent variable using a single question. Although the construction of that question incorporated relevant alternatives identified in a previous exploratory process, there remains the possibility that it could have been measured independently as a continuous rather than a categorical variable. A second limitation, predominantly female, relates to the sample, although this could have been a potential drawback, the comparison of proportions between men and women was performed using statistical tests (chi-square/test for two proportions) that take into account group sizes in the estimation of expected frequencies and standard errors, ensuring valid comparisons.

What are the implications of these results for university education?

A first finding is that not all students who require academic help do so on time and that this help-seeking depends on multiple factors. It emphasizes that it is essential to understand the signs that students identify as key to their awareness that they should seek help when faced with academic difficulties.

The results strongly suggest that one of these signals is poor grades. However, although this may seem obvious, it is not for a significant number of students. Many students interpret bad a grade as an act of injustice, misunderstanding, or lack of deference to them. On the other hand, some academics interpret the poor grades they give as a possible obstacle to the student's academic progress (especially if the student belongs to socioeconomically vulnerable groups).

The installation of mass access to universities has strained the dynamics associated with the assessment and grading of learning. Along these lines, many teachers are tempted to alter the demand standards and thus "provide opportunities" to these students. It is often expressed in the modification of performance assessment scales. This type of practice compounds the possibility of the student becoming aware that he/she needs to ask for help. The alteration of the results modifies the perception of the learning gap, generating the false idea in the student that he/she has reached a level that he/she never achieved.

Clearly, it is not enough to give a bad mark; the assessment needs to provide adequate information about the student's level of progress concerning what is expected (Puig, 2020). In this sense, it is not enough to give a poor grade without accompanying it with relevant information to guide help-seeking.

Finally, higher education institutions should ensure that assessment systems and academic support services work in synergy. For students to seek help, they must first recognize that they need it. Institutions should thus foster environments where academic support is visible, valued, and perceived as a normal component of the learning process.

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Data availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author, [JV], upon a reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that no competing financial interests or personal relationships could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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