Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)

GISSR Global Institute of Social Sciences Research

Between Reverence and Resistance: Negotiating Academic Voice in Pakistani Postgraduate Dissertation Writings

Rida Sarfraz[1], Saqib Mehmood[2]

1. PhD English, Department of English, University of Lahore, Pakistan.
2. Professor, Department of English, University of Lahore, Pakistan.

Cite This Article: Sarfraz, R. & Mehmood, S. (2026). Between Reverence and Resistance: Negotiating Academic Voice in Pakistani Postgraduate Dissertation Writings. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy. 4 (01), 1118-1130.*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.41.1118.1130

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)
ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 4, **No.** 1 (2026)
Pages: 1118-1130

Key Words:
Academic voice, authorial Agency, academic identity, Communities of Practice, Postgraduate writing, Second-language writing, Scholarly authority, Pakistan

Corresponding Author:
Rida Sarfraz
Email: rida.sarfraz@umt.edu.pk

License:

Abstract: *This study looks at the processes of authorial negotiation, identity construction and positioning of Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers in relation to existing scholarship in the process of writing dissertations. In postgraduate second-language (L2) writing, academic voice emerges in a complex interplay of disciplinary expectations, scholarly authority and writer's developing intellectual identity. The study takes a view of academic voice as a socially situated and negotiated practice as opposed to a linguistic achievement of an individual, informed by Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice and Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism. The research adopted a qualitative approach which is based on the interpretivist paradigm, where the experiences of postgraduate writers were explored by conducting semi-structured interviews which were then analyzed through the thematic analysis approach based on Braun and Clarke (2006). The results indicate a continuing conflict between conformity to disciplinary conventions and the goal to position oneself as an independent scholar. While participants see that academic voice is linked to intellectual ownership, credibility, and critical engagement, their experiences also demonstrate a reluctance to engage with more senior academics, power struggles with supervisors, and differential access to academic mentoring. On the other hand, engagement with disciplinary conversation, critical writing and discipline-specific learning activities are identified as significant ways of building authorial confidence and disciplinary belonging. The results indicate that the authorial agency is not solely an individual accomplishment and, not necessarily, a consequence of postgraduate studies, and is instead negotiated in relation to other forms of academic activity, disciplinary assumptions, and possibilities for engagement. The study foregrounds the experiences of postgraduate L2 writers from Pakistan and adds to the debates on academic voice, identity and scholarly authority in second-language writing and also the need for more supporting academic environments that facilitate independent critical engagement.*

Introduction

Academic writing at higher education also involves developing authorial identity, negotiating scholarly identity and authority and engaging in practices of knowledge making in the discipline. In the case of L2

writers in the second language field, the issue of building an identifiable voice as an academic author entails positioning oneself in the current scholarly discourse and showing critical engagement, originality and intellectual independence. From the point of view of Ivanič (1998), writing identity is socially and discursively constructed in a specific institutional and ideological context, while from the point of view of Hyland (2002), the construction of authorial identity is achieved through linguistic choices which afford writers an opportunity to assert their identities and negotiate relations with readers. Socioculturally, Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss how learning takes place through legitimate peripheral participation, in which learners gradually become part of a community's practices and understandings through a process of being on the outer edges of the community and gaining entrance to it through legitimate activities. Participation in socially organized practices is also a necessary condition for learning and identity formation, adds Wenger (1998). In the context of postgraduate academic writing, Communities of Practice offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process whereby novice researchers construct their scholarly identity by interacting with their supervisor, disciplinary communities and the dominant academic discourse. However, by being involved in academic communities, novice researchers don't automatically become independent authors, especially when they have conflicting aspirations between the reproduction of knowledge and the construction of their own interpretation.

In the context of Pakistani postgraduate education, the negotiation of academic voice is of great significance because the writer may experience conflict between his or her sociocultural values about respect for academic authority and disciplinary values that emphasize critical and independent argument. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism complements this approach by providing a conception of discourse as an interactive process involving multiple voices, whereby a writer not only reacts to and adopts, but also challenges and questions the voices of the other authors holding authority. Likewise, Canagarajah (2002) emphasizes the unequal power dynamics at play in academic writing and the production of academic knowledge, especially for academics operating in multilingual and non-dominant academic settings. Lea and Street (1998) also provide examples to show that academic literacy practices are part of institutional relationships, epistemological beliefs, and identity and power negotiations. The present study is an extension of these viewpoints to examine the interplay of authorial agency and academic identity in the process of negotiating with prior scholarship in the writing of dissertations for PG writers in Pakistan. The paper aims to make a contribution to the research on L2 writing and Applied Linguistics by foregrounding the relationship between disciplinary participation, scholarly authority and independent critical positioning to understand the development of academic voice as a negotiated social and dialogic practice.

Literature Review

Academic voice and authorial identity have been the focus of much attention in Applied Linguistics and second-language writing studies in relation to the ways that novice academic writers make themselves present in disciplinary discourse. According to Hyland (2002), authorial identity is a discursive achievement that enables the author to gain visibility, authority and credibility in academic texts. Drawing on this view, Hyland (2005) suggests a model of stance and engagement, which illustrates how academic writers situate themselves and make their attitude to propositions and readers visible in the language they use, such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. They are particularly crucial for second-language (L2) writers, who as well as being linguistically competent, need to know what is expected of them as writers by the disciplines they are writing for. Ivanič (1998) also claims that writer identity is socially constructed as part of the experience, discourses and repertoires of subject

positions of individuals. Academic voice does not only imply the learning of the conventions of writing, however; writers must negotiate how far they should go and how much and to what degree their intellectual positions support or challenge the current knowledge in the disciplin. The perspective is summarized to argue that academic voice is a linguistic, social and ideological phenomenon, and that there are important questions to be raised regarding the ways in which postgraduate L2 writers are allowed to be intellectually independent while also being held to account by the expectations set for writers in their discipline.

The sociocultural approach to Communities of Practice offers a different understanding of the development of authorial agency and academic identity in that it considers learning as participation in socially organized activities, as opposed to the acquisition of knowledge by the individual. To account for how newcomers gain both competence and membership to the community as a result of their engagement with existing members, Lave and Wenger (1991) introduce the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, and Wenger (1998) describes three dimensions of communal practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. In postgraduate academic writing, these notions can be used to analyze how new scholars negotiate new ways of being in the discipline, build scholar identities, and strive for meaningful engagement in the production of scholarship. Casanave (2002), by using multicultural case studies of academic literacy practices, shows that academic writing involves more than just learning prescribed texts; it involves engaging with the conventions, relationships, and identity positions of the academic institution. Bakhtin's complementary dialogic approach to discourse, on the other hand, sees discourse as being inherently responsive to voices that have come before and will come after it; academic authorship, then, stems from responding to multiple and sometimes conflicting voices of authority. As a result, the term authorial agency is not intended to be synonymous with autonomy from disciplinary influence, but rather a quality of ability to interpret, evaluate, appropriation, and challenge the given positions in the discipline. While Communities of Practice offers a valuable account of disciplinary participation and identity construction, the construct of postgraduate writing needs to be attended to because of the unequal power dynamics that can influence newcomers' possibilities to challenge the taken-for-granted and create legitimate disciplinary positions.

Negotiation of academic identity is especially relevant in the context of postgraduate writers who are faced with both institutional hierarchies and culturally entrenched expectations, as well as unequal access to authoritative academic discourse. From the academic literacies perspective, Lea and Street (1998) claim that students' writing practices are situated within the institutional power dynamics, conflictual epistemological claims, and negotiations of identity. Likewise, Canagarajah (2002) explores the geopolitics of academic writing, which refers to the unequal ways in which knowledge is produced and published in academic writing and how this affects the engagement of scholars situated outside the dominance of the dominant intellectual centers. These views are important for L2 writers in Pakistan who may encounter a variety of experiences of academic authorship that are formed from the relations between the English-mediated conventions of academic writing, the expectations of supervisors, and the personal experience of respect and critique. Yet these aspects must be taken into consideration as real affects not merely a holistic effect on Pakistani HEIs. Starfield (2002) subsequent shows that academic authority is not evenly distributed among student writers, and Casanave (2002) illustrates how student writers engage in constant renegotiation of academic expectations and identities as they participate in academic writing practices. In spite of the theoretical contributions of these studies, the research must be carried out further into the Pakistani postgraduates' perceptions of their status as knowledge producers and their notions of authorial agency when critically interacting with the

established scholarship but not in the Pakistani context. In terms of the Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and the dialogism of Bakhtin (1981), the present study accordingly aims at an analysis of academic identity as a dynamic process resulting from disciplinary engagements, and of authorial agency as an emergent negotiation of the construction, defense, and critical positioning of scholarly knowledge in the writing of postgraduate dissertations.

This article highlights a key issue in postgraduate academic writing: are developing academics creating new scholarly voices or adopting the voices of authority already used in their disciplinary communities? In the view of Hyland (2002), the process of authorial identity is manifested in discursive decisions which make the writer visible and authoritative; Ivanič (1998) understands writing as a space where people construct their identities by drawing on the discourses of institutions and disciplines available to them. Such perspectives suggest that academic voice is not a personal voice, and is not a given as much as a result of the writers' accommodation of conflicting expectations as knowledge producers, as credible citizens, and as legitimate scholars. Rhetorical strategies in writing that communicate commitment, evaluation, and interaction with readers is further demonstrated by Hyland's model on stance and engagement (2005). However, the ability to operate such resources does not guarantee that the writer is the rightful owner since he or she must also attend to the rules and power of acceptable academic writing. Starfield (2002) is an example of how the power relations within institutions and participation in the discipline's discourse affect L2 students' writer identity and authority. Communities of Practice view learning from a legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) and identity formation (Wenger 1998) perspective. These perspectives can serve as a basis for understanding the position(s) that may be adopted by a Pakistani postgraduate L2 writer with regard to the scholarly voice from which he/she draws ideas to a position in which he/she creates ones own. Academic participation – writing in the academy – involves postgraduate writers in demonstrating respect for existing knowledge while also being able to challenge it, and this dynamic is particularly complex in such a relationship. An explanation of this tension can be found in Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism which frames discourse as a dialogue between several voices, implying that authorial views emerge in relation to, rather than in opposition to, authoritative scholarly discourses. Likewise, both Casanave (2002) and Lea and Street (1998) show that academic literacy practices engage negotiations of identity, institutional expectations, and disciplinary conventions, and that student writing is a product of the negotiations among knowledge, power, and institutional authority. Canagarajah (2002) further explores this issue when he considers geopolitical inequalities in the production and circulation of academic knowledge and asks who gets to have legitimate scholarly perspectives within dominant academic traditions. The need for such concerns to be examined is especially true for the Pakistani postgraduate context, where the scholarly respect/critical positioning is inextricable, without giving the premise of all writers the same experience of academic authority. Sarfraz and Mahmood (2026) build on these discussions in their analysis of the negotiations of academic voice by Pakistani postgraduate dissertation writers in relation to their supervisors' feedback, criticism, and notions of authority within a culturally situated context. Their study reveals conflict between acknowledging of the existing scholarship and creating a critical positioning, which offers an empirical basis for exploring authorial agency in a more explicit way. This is the basis for the current research which focuses on how postgraduate writers experience, assert and negotiate their academic voices in the presence of feedback. Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice and Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism thus allows authorial agency to be seen as a socially negotiated ability to critique received knowledge, to formulate interpretive claims or statements, and to engage in disciplinary dialogue rather than as a rejection or separation from all scholarly influences.

Research Questions

1. How do Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers author themselves to negotiate authorial agency and to construct their academic voice when critically engaging with the existing scholarship in a dissertation writing?
2. What are the perceptions of L2 writers in Pakistan regarding their academic identity as they negotiate it with scholars and demands of their disciplines during the process of writing their dissertations?

Research Objectives

- To examine the ways in which Pakistani post graduate L2 writers create their own academic voice and are critical of the existing scholarship on writings of dissertations.
- To discuss and understand the negotiation of postgraduate Pakistani L2 writers to the authority of the scholars and dispositions of the disciplines in their academic milieu.

Significance of the Study

This study is pertinent in Applied Linguistics and second-language (L2) writing studies because it aims at furthering the understanding of how Pakistani postgraduate writers negotiate authorial agency and negotiate the construction of academic identities in disciplinary communities. In addition to being assessed linguistically (accuracy, coherence, disciplinary conventions), establishing an independent scholarly voice also includes negotiating authority, establishing intellectual legitimacy, and being critical in knowledge construction. This topic has received particular attention from Hyland (2002) who notes that the author is present in academic discourse and how writers construct their identity and scholarly stance in the language. The same applies to Wenger (1998), who views identity as a key dimension of learning in Communities of Practice, and who offers a sociocultural perspective on an inquiry into the processes by which novice researchers gradually become a part of a community of practice. Based on these insights, the current research aims to shed light on the interplay between academic voice, authorial agency, and scholarly identity in the Pakistani postgraduate scene, where writers might face conflicting demands for respect for the inherited scholarship and critical autonomy. Theoretically, it is hoped that the study will provide an extension of the application of Communities of Practice to the negotiation of authorial agency in L2 dissertation writing and pedagogically in informing supervisory practices aimed at fostering critical positioning, intellectual independence, and meaningful participation in the academic discourse.

Research Gap

Despite While there has been much research on academic voice and authorial identity, there is still a need for further investigation by post-graduate second-language (L2) academic writers from a contextually embedded perspective to explore the relationship between authorial agency and academic identity. As shown by the works of Hyland (2002) and Lea and Street (1998), L2 writers are negotiating authorial visibility and scholarly authority in ways that are embedded in institutional power relations and identity negotiations, as they negotiate academic texts. These studies provide linguistic and sociocultural perspectives, but they have not examined the understandings of intellectual legitimacy and authorial agency of Pakistani postgraduate dissertation writers when they engage critically with the existing scholarship. An exploration of the ways in which post-graduate writers actively make their own claims to knowledge and assert themselves as emerging writers of knowledge and the ways in which they negotiate and position themselves as writers of knowledge and develop academic identities through participation in disciplinary communities is warranted. In addressing this more specific gap, the present study engages with Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice and Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, in

studying the inter-relatedness of the processes of authorial agency, scholarly positioning and identity construction among the L2 writers from Pakistan, postgraduate level. The study aims to provide a more complex description of academic voice by focusing on writers' own perceptions and actions of intellectual agency instead of how such agency is understood and represented by the supervisor.

Theoretical Framework

The present study was theoretically fortified by Communities of Practice (CoP) theorized by Wenger (1998) and a concept of dialogism by Bakhtin (1981), in order to explore the intertwined educational voice, authorial agency and scholarly identity of Pakistani postgraduate second-language (L2) writers. Lave and Wenger (1991) define learning as legitimate peripheral participation in which newcomers become members of a community of established practices by participating in them. Wenger (1998) expands upon this with the extension of concepts of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, in which learning is viewed as negotiations to create meaning and construction of identity through participation. These ideas form the basis of understanding of the postgraduate dissertation writer's relationship with the supervisor, with established writing scholarship and with the conventions of the discipline and with the expectations of the academic community, in which he or she is an emerging contributor to knowledge. Academic engagement is seen in modes of scholarly interaction and feedback, shared disciplinary expectations for credible, critically informed research, and shared rhetorical conventions, evaluative discourse, and forms of citation and argumentation that constitute the repertoire of academic knowledge. Importantly, legitimate peripheral participation is not seen as an inevitable and sequential stage of intellectual autonomy as opportunities are created in accordance to institutional structures and unequal power dynamics. CoP offers an analytical framework to analyze the ways in which postgraduate L2 writers demonstrate authorial agency in relation to critical engagement with existing research, the negotiation of disciplinary conventions, and the construction of an academic voice. To answer the first research question and first objective, CoP offers an analytical foundation for examining how postgraduate L2 writers demonstrate authorial agency in relation to critical engagement with established scholarship, in negotiating the conventions of disciplines, and in the development of a recognisable academic voice. With regard to the second research question and objective, the framework allows for an examination of writers' perceptions of their scholarly legitimacy, their negotiation of disciplinary belonging and their building of academic identities through involvement in academic communities. Authorial agency is the situational ability to make, defend, and justify scholarly choices in the practice of a field, and academic identity is seen as a fluid understanding of oneself as a legitimate member of a field and a potential producer of knowledge.

Communities of Practice helps to describe the social environment in which academic participation and academic identity are formed, whereas Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism offers a complementary theoretical lens for exploring how academic voice is created when engaging with different, often conflicting voices of the academy. Bakhtin's notions of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse are especially relevant to the central question, “Whose voice is it anyway?” because the negotiation of the extent to which established scholarly interpretations are reproduced, critically evaluated, and even transformed into independently defensible positions is a challenge that post-graduate writers must face. In dialogism, however, academic voice is not a singular response to individual originality but a process of responding to the previous arguments, predicting alternative readings, and building meaning by responding to the previous discourse. This view is in line with the theoretical framework put forward by Ivanič (1998) that writer identity is a socially and discursively created construct, and with the work of Hyland (2002) on the “authorial presence” and the “authorial authority” of academic writers. In the

Pakistani context of postgraduate writing, these viewpoints provide an analytical framework for exploring L2 dissertation writers' understanding of scholarly authority, their ability to navigate between deference and critique, and their negotiation of academic ownership of their arguments, as well as the assumption that these experiences are culturally uniform. As such, the integration of CoP and dialogism provides a comprehensive view integrating the two research questions and two objectives of the study, namely, CoP sheds light on the participatory and identity-building aspect of academic writing in postgraduate studies, and dialogism illuminates discursive processes that enable writers to respond to authoritative knowledge and demonstrate a critical agency. These views together allow this study to explore the positioning of postgraduate writers in the disciplinary community, as well as to examine their construction, negotiation and claims for their scholarly voice in academic writing.

Methodology

The study takes a qualitative research design based on interpretivist epistemological orientation to explore how the Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers develop L2 academic voice, assert authorial agency, and negotiate academic identity in institutional and disciplinary spaces. The framework of Communities of Practice (CoP) developed by Wenger (1998) with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) are used to conceptualize academic writing as a socially situated practice in which emerging researchers are negotiating participation, disciplinary legitimacy, and scholarly belonging. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism offers a useful complementary interpretive lens for analysing the relationship between postgraduate writers and authoritative voices in the field and for seeing how the writers construct their own intellectual stances. These frameworks can be especially useful for the article's central question, “Whose Voice Is It Anyway?” in that they allow for a consideration of academic voice beyond being just a way of studying it as linguistic skill or as a response to disciplinary norms, and as a way of claiming it as an intellectual ownership, agency, and academic identity. Audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with ten Pakistani postgraduate researchers were undertaken. The interview guide focused on participants' academic histories, their perceptions of an expert-like academic voice, the way they developed as writers, how they received feedback from their supervisors, their sense of authorial identity, their sense of support from their institutions, and their experiences of constrained agency. Ten interviews were chosen for detailed case-specific analysis as representative of sufficient variation for cross-participant analysis but also comprehensive enough to allow exploration of each case's experience. The size of the study is appropriate for the specific research questions, the narrow focus of participants and the in-depth qualitative analysis (Malterud et al. 2016), and not for statistical representativeness or the assumed saturation point. The recorded interviews were transcribed for systematic analysis, making special effort to maintain the participants' original expressions and meanings in the context.

Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) is used to analyze the interview transcripts as it is an approach suitable for exploring patterns of meaning found across participants' accounts, whilst also being sensitive to the individual differences and contradictory experiences. Analysis is a process of several cycles of reading through the transcripts, systematic coding, elaboration and refinement of candidate themes, and interpretation of the thematic patterns in relation to the research questions. The study's conceptual interests guide coding, but it is open to meanings that arise from the participants' accounts, preventing the introduction of theory-based categories. While the CoP framework aids in the interpretation of disciplinary participation, mentorship, legitimacy, and identity formation, dialogism helps to interpret the negotiation of scholarly authority, critical engagement, and ownership of

academic arguments. These perspectives, combined, offer a theoretically consistent ground for thinking about the individual and social articulations of academic voice in Pakistani writing of postgraduates.

Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis Table

Sr #	Respondents	Quotes	Themes	Codes	Theoretical Construction
1	R1	"No two academic voices can be regarded as one.	Academic voice as disciplinary traditionalism	Disciplinary variation; writing conventions; academic legitimacy	CoP: disciplinary practices and shared repertoires
2	R2	"gaining confidence to sort my own argument was difficult for me specially when engaging with well established scholars"	Negotiating Critique and Scholarly Authority	Scholarly intimidation; hesitation; emerging agency	Bakhtin: authoritative discourse and dialogic positioning
3	R3	"they were more into changing my academic voice. But they didn't point out where I was wrong."	Supervisory influence on authorial agency	Supervisory control; unclear feedback; constrained agency	CoP: mentorship and unequal participation
4	R4	"Establishing a distinct authorial presence is crucial for me as it enables me to claim ownership of my ideas"	Academic identity as intellectual ownership	Ownership; scholarly identity; intellectual positioning	
5	R5	""It's an ongoing process. I still believe that I need some more practice"	Learning academic voice through participation	Developing expertise; gradual learning; scholarly apprenticeship	CoP: legitimate peripheral participation
6	R6	"One of the major challenges is people hardly guide us."	Institutional constraints on scholarly development	Limited mentorship; institutional barriers; unequal access to expertise	CoP: restricted opportunities for participation
7	R7	"These workshops focused on academic writing conversations, structure clarity and style specific to my discipline of English Linguistics."	Academic Voice as Disciplinary Traditionalism	Disciplinary conventions; academic writing norms; linguistic clarity	CoP: shared repertoire and disciplinary practices
8	R8	"an expert like academic voice conveys authority and credibility on a specific subject within a formal context."	Academic Voice as Scholarly Authority	Academic credibility; disciplinary authority; expert positioning	CoP: legitimacy through recognised disciplinary competence

9	R9	"I practiced writing critical reviews and engaged in discussions with colleagues and mentors"	Learning Academic Voice Through Participation	Critical writing practice; mentorship; collaborative learning	CoP: mutual engagement and legitimate peripheral participation
10	R10	"I used plagiarism detection tools and took workshops on academic integrity"	Negotiating Disciplinary Writing Conventions	Academic integrity; ethical writing; citation practices	CoP: acquisition of disciplinary norms and shared repertoire

Descriptions

The results of the thematic analysis of the participants' interview extracts, using the six phase approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), show that disciplinary conventions, scholarly expectations and opportunities to participate in the academic world affect the construction of academic voice and authorial identity of Pakistani postgraduate researchers. The themes which are beginning to emerge, that of academic voice as a discipline's traditionalism, negotiating critique and scholarly authority and academic identity as intellectual ownership, indicate the complexity of the process in attempting to establish an individual voice in the discipline while at the same time conforming to recognized academic practices. For example, R1's "No two academic voices can be regarded as one" emphasizes the uniqueness of academic voice, and R8's "voice that conveys authority and credibility" an expert-like voice, emphasize the legitimacy of the discipline. Similarly, R4's emphasis on 'ownership of my ideas' indicates the sense of authorial identity as a means of securing intellectual independence. Yet the journey towards self-confidence in making arguments against well-founded authorities, as R2 also concedes, suggests problems about scholarly authority and the exercise of critical agency. This discovery was supported by Bakhtin's (1981) distinction between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse and suggests that emerging researchers might encounter difficulties in negotiating dominant discourses that they have to work with when they try to establish a discourse of their own. Academic voice can also be seen from the perspective of Communities of Practice (CoP) as a process that unfolds through engaging with disciplinary communities with their shared practices, conventions and expectations that help to shape the construction of academic voice (Wenger, 1998). The participants' narratives therefore point to academic voice as a socially negotiated practice, as well as one that involves a negotiation of credibility, intellectual property and scholarly authority.

Furthermore, themes of the role of supervisors in authorial agency, gaining academic voice through engagement, and the boundaries of institutions in shaping academic identities of postgraduate researchers emphasize the significance of mentorship, feedback, and access to academic communities in developing researchers' academic identities. R3's comment on supervisors being "more into changing my academic voice" but not explaining what was wrong with the writing indicates that sometimes, the supervisory interventions might have limited rather than supported independent authorial expression. Likewise, R6's response that "people hardly guide us" indicates a limited mentorship and access to the disciplinary expertise. By contrast, R5's recognition that this academic voice is "an ongoing process" and R9's experience of critical review and discussion with colleagues/mentors demonstrates how this academic competence is acquired slowly as they participate in the academic arena. The results may be understood in relation to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation that describes learning as a process of incrementally greater participation in the practices of a community.

R7's involvement in discipline-specific writing workshops and R10's involvement in academic integrity training also indicate how institutional support can help to acquire academic conventions or build up a common disciplinary repertoire (Wenger, 1998). However, the differences in experiences of supportive learning environments and inadequate guidance suggest that opportunities for scholarly participation are not shared equally. As a whole, these themes point to how the individual work, supervisor dynamics, discipline and institutional support systems contribute to the development of academic voice and authorial agency. The analysis thus reveals a key paradox: postgraduate researchers are expected to establish themselves as independent scholars while having to grapple with the authority of established scholars and the rules that govern their legitimate engagement with academic discourse.

Findings

Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to conducting the thematic analysis the results have shown that Pakistani post-graduation L2 writers negotiated a voice in their academic writing, which is an ongoing process between the individual negotiation of their positioning as writers and the negotiated positioning of the disciplinary discourse. Regarding RQ1 which focused on how post-graduate L2 writers position themselves as agents in enabling them to write in an academic style and voice with a degree of critical response to the existing literature, it was found that the participants link the competence of the author to linguistic accuracy, credibility in scholarship, critical response to the literature and intellectual property. The themes Academic Voice as Disciplinary Traditionalism, Negotiating Critique and Scholarly Authority and Academic Identity as Intellectual Ownership suggest that the participants see the need to establish their own voice in academic writing and stand out from their disciplinary peers while still abiding by the conventions of the academic field. R1's observation that "No two academic voices can be regarded as one" reflects an understanding of academic voice as individually distinctive, whereas R4's statement that establishing an authorial presence enables ownership of ideas demonstrates an emerging awareness of intellectual agency. However, the fact that R2 struggles with articulating his own position in the face of well-known scholars indicates that the importance of personal independence does not necessarily mean one can make it happen. This tension is consistent with Hyland's (2002) idea that academic writing is about "the construction of authorial identity through rhetorical choices which position writers in relation to their disciplinary communities. Likewise, Ivanič (1998) views writing identity as a construction of the social that emerges from the discursive practices at one's disposal. The participants' accounts can be understood as Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse, the interpretation and negotiation of which can be a source of power for emerging researchers and a process that may involve challenging the established scholarly voices. In response to the first research objective, the results show that postgraduate L2 writers try to establish their voice in the academic sphere by engaging in critical reading, positioning themselves intellectually, and conforming to the norms of the field, but critical dealing with previous work seems to be a gradual process that is also affected by the perceived authority of more established researchers.

With regard to RQ2, which inquires Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers' perception of their academic identity as they go about negotiating the authority of writers and the expectations of the discipline in the process of dissertation writing, the findings indicate that authorial identity is perceived not as an independently established attribute but as a developing and socially mediated accomplishment. Supervisory Influence on Authorial Agency, Learning Academic Voice Through Participation, and Institutional Constraints on Scholarly Development suggest that participants' conceptions of academic writers self-concept are shaped by their supervisor's relationship, opportunities for engaging in the discipline and institutional resources. R3 experiences supervisors who want to attempt to "improve" the

participant's academic voice without providing enough explanation of the limitations in the writing, making it feel more like they were exercising their authority. Similarly, R6's utterance "people hardly guide us" suggests a lack of mentoring in the academic sphere, which may limit opportunities for acquiring academic confidence and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, R5 noted that the acquisition of academic voice is a process and R9 described developing critical writing in the context of an ongoing engagement with colleagues and mentors, implying that academic identity is a process that develops through repeated involvement in the disciplinary practices. These findings can be interpreted by Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation which describes learning as a process of gaining access into the community's practices. Wenger (1998) added that identity progresses via participation and the conciliation of meaning inside communities of practice. With this view in mind, postgraduate L2 writers might be in the midst of developing academic roles within academic communities, with their chances of academic legitimacy being partly dependent on their access to experienced researchers, constructive feedback and collaborative academic spaces. The results thus respond to the second research question by showing that participants negotiate academic identity not just in their own writing, but also in their interactions with existing scholars and the discipline's expectations that shape their academic involvement.

Considering all above discussed, it can be inferred that the development of academic voice, authorial agency, and scholarly identity in the writing of L2 Pakistani postgraduates is an ongoing struggle for conformity with the discipline and independence in thinking. While participants see the need to be original, to critically evaluate and to own academic arguments, their accounts show that the cultivation of these is dependent on existing scholarly authority, institutional processes and academic support. R7's mention of discipline specific writing workshops and R10's reference to academic integrity training suggest that there is formal academic support that can help make people familiar with discipline conventions and R8's reference to the expert academic voice as authority and credibility highlights the significance of scholarly legitimacy. But learning the conventions of academic discourse is not always enough to create an independent critical attitude. This distinction, as Canagarajah (2002) points out in his discussion of the difficulties and potentialities of negotiating conventions and voice in academic writing, especially for writers in unequal linguistic and institutional situations, is appropriate. In addition to this, Matsuda and Tardy (2007) explain that readers' perceptions of writer's identity are shaped by the writer's use of text features, which further emphasizes the connection between academic voice, disciplinary expectations, and scholarly recognition. From the perspective of Communities of Practice, the findings indicate that the development of an authoritative academic voice involves opportunities to participate in the community beyond the acquisition of language conventions, to engage in critical conversation, to make intellectual contributions, and to be recognized by the community (Wenger, 1998). However, the interview excerpts offer evidence of the perceptions and reported experience of participants, rather than their actual textual practices in challenging established scholarship. So the results of this study, as manifest in the extracts analyzed, suggest that the possession of authorial agency was not purely personal and was not automatically assumed as a result of post-graduate education; rather, it was negotiated in the interplay between academic writing practices, disciplinary power and opportunities for scholarly engagement. This interpretation weaves in the research questions and objectives by focusing attention on the understanding, development and negotiation of Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers' academic voice to attain legitimacy as producers of disciplinary knowledge.

Conclusion

To sum up, the results of the study highlight that the construction of academic voice, authorial identity, and agency of Pakistani postgraduate L2 writers is a complex and dynamic phenomenon which is shaped by disciplinary norms, academic authority, institutional environment, and personal intellectual stance. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke (2006)) reveals that participants value the characteristics of originality, critical engagement and ownership of academic arguments, but have problems in developing their own academic perspective in relation to the authority of the established researchers. These findings in relation to the research questions and goals suggest that postgraduate writers' academic voices are not achieved through their linguistic ability alone, but through the constant negotiation of the expectations of the discipline, feedback from supervisors and opportunities for meaningful engagement in academic discourse. The findings also suggest that writers' academic identities are shaped through engagement in the Communities of Practice, as access to support, discussion and resources within the community help shape writers' opportunities to participate in academic practices legitimately, drawing on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). But participants' accounts of poor guidance and supervisory intervention, and their reluctance to challenge existing scholarship, indicate that participation in itself does not guarantee authorial independence. The concept of tension can also be explored from the perspective of Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, as the postgraduate writers engage with existing scholarly views and try to formulate their own ideas. In line with Ivanič (1998) who views writing identity as socially constructed and Hyland (2002) who conceptualises the idea of academic voice, the study reveals that academic voice is not merely a matter of conforming to academic practices, but is rather gradually negotiated in terms of authority, critical engagement and intellectual ownership. The results thus point to the need for academic contexts that will enable postgraduate L2 writers to transcend the role of reproducing published L2 writing to become confident, critically engaged, and independently positioned academic writers.

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). The dialogic imagination: Four essays (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). A geopolitics of academic writing. University of Pittsburgh Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjn6c

Casanave, C. P. (2002). Writing games: Multicultural case studies of academic literacy practices in higher education. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hyland, K. (2002). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. Journal of Pragmatics, 34(8), 1091–1112. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00035-8

Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. Discourse Studies, 7(2), 173–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365

Ivanič, R. (1998). Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing. John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/swll.5

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355

Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. Studies in Higher Education, 23(2), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364

Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. Qualitative Health Research, 26(13), 1753–1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Matsuda, P. K., & Tardy, C. M. (2007). Voice in academic writing: The rhetorical construction of author identity in blind manuscript review. English for Specific Purposes, 26(2), 235–249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2006.10.001

Starfield, S. (2002). "I'm a second-language English speaker": Negotiating writer identity and authority in Sociology One. Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 1(2), 121–140. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0102_02

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932