Article

Negotiating Voice and Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of ESL Saudi Graduate Writers in U.S. Academia

Sultan Ayed Alanazi
University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia
(Email: S_alanazi@ut.edu.sa)

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Abstract
This qualitative critical case study evaluates the experience of three Saudi graduate students in their experience with authorial voice and identity in the United States academic environments. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine two academic papers and one comprehensive interview from each of the three participants: Manea (English Literature), Ali (Curriculum & Instruction), and Saleh (Educational Foundations). They are all U.S. PhD students who have lived there for 3 to 5 years. The results show that there are two different but strategically useful types of voice: a postcolonial voice (Manea), which challenges Western epistemic dominance through personal and theoretical positioning, and a critical pedagogy voice (Ali and Saleh), which draws on Freirean critical theory and other frameworks to critique educational practices in Saudi Arabia. Rather than fixed traits, participant voices emerged as dynamic performances shaped by disciplinary socialization, their anticipation of how readers within their academic communities would receive their arguments, and how they negotiated their transnational identities. The findings point toward a "pedagogy of voice" and the idea of "pedagogical safe houses" to help second language (L2) writers from underrepresented backgrounds find their own critical but strategic academic voices.

Keywords
L2 writing, voice, identity, Saudi students, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Composing in a foreign language is a complicated process that involves more than the manipulation of grammar and lexis. It is a sign of the connection between the writer's personal tradition, their cultural background, and education paradigms. The concept of authorial voice also plays a role in this process, demonstrating how individuals express themselves and their thoughts (Matsuda, 2001; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). That is to say, the voice is not fixed but is constructed by the choices of the writer and can, therefore, be used to signify his or her discursive and ideological choices (Prior, 2001; Ivanič, 1998). Given that all writing is staged performance shaped by the social and political worlds of the writer, written text is considered fertile land in which to explore identity construction. This performativity of voice is especially acute when applied to writers whose academic endeavors involve transnational realities, in this case Saudi graduate students.

The value of the study lies in its contribution to a more nuanced interpretation of authorial voice negotiation at the boundary between identity and socialization at the disciplinary level. Although voice is an issue studied in L2 writing, there is comparatively little research taking

voice as a variable to examine Saudi L2 writers (Alharbi, 2019; Giroir, 2014), and most empirical studies treat their writing with a deficit approach by analyzing linguistic errors (e.g., Alkubaidi, 2019). A growing body of scholarship has appreciated the fact that multilingual authors use translanguaging practices and face complicated negotiations of identity in their academic lives (Zhu & Li, 2025; Phyo et al., 2025). As the extant literature underlines, there is a field of growing scholarly/pedagogical concern in analyzing the ways in which L2 writers form authorial identity by means of discourse socialization and reader interaction practices (Wu et al., 2025), and a new set of challenges, including the preservation of authentic voice in writing produced by AI, is identified (Sandstead & Kibler, 2025). This paper fills this gap by going beyond a conventional epistemology of differences to dispute the deficit, assimilationist, and essentialist orientations. It investigates the creative and critical expression of voices of Saudi L2 writers' voices across contexts and genres, an area that has gained increasing prominence amid growing mobility, globalization, and translingual writing practices (Canagarajah, 2004; Kaufhold, 2023). To explore such complicated dynamics, this research is guided by the following question: What is the process through which Saudi graduate L2 writers negotiate and construct their voices as authors in the U.S. academia?

Literature Review

Voice in L2 writing has been a theoretical and pedagogical battleground for several decades (see, e.g., Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Stapleton, 2002; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003). This is similar to the larger debates about power, identity, and cultural membership (Fairclough, 1992; Canagarajah, 2004). For L2 writers, especially those who are learning new ways of writing and what institutions expect from them, developing a writerly voice is not just a language skill but also a social and ideological one. This literature review considers voice as a negotiated, performative, and contextually situated phenomenon, examining how it intersects with writer identity and is shaped by sociocultural structures. It also presents Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992) as an analytical framework to shed light on these intricate relationships. Finally, it foregrounds a notable gap in the literature: although some studies have examined Saudi learners' identity negotiation in U.S. contexts (e.g., Giroir, 2014), there remain a near absence of research specifically focused on Saudi graduate students' experiences as L2 writers entering U.S. higher education—a population whose multilingual and multicultural histories hold significant potential for exploring voice outside deficit perspectives.

Voice in L2 writing

Whereas voice in L2 writing is a multilayered term and has been defined as "the textual representation of the writer" (Bachman, 1990, p. 94), it has been widely debated in the literature. It includes an author's tone, stance, and authority in their writing (Hyland, 2012; Matsuda, 2001). Scholars have debated for decades whether voice reflects individual authenticity or social performance, whether voice is the individual being true to themselves or if voice is a performance shaped by society itself (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Prior, 2001). Recent research emphasizes that voice development is not merely a linguistic skill but involves complex negotiations of identity and disciplinary socialization (Kaufhold, 2023; Norova & Gutiérrez, 2024). For L2 writers, negotiating a voice requires getting to terms with the linguistic and rhetorical norms of an unfamiliar discourse community as well as coming to terms with their personal and cultural identities. Writers can find this kind of production especially difficult when they must meet the requirements of scholarship and still avoid compromising their point of view (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič, 1998).

Voice as a concept in L2 writing has had a contested history within L2 writing scholarship (Bitchener, 2008). On the one hand, some scholars have argued that voice is overly

individualistic and culture-specific to be meaningful or pedagogically useful for L2 writers (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). On the other hand, proponents maintain that all writers, regardless of linguistic background, possess the capacity to express their ideas in writing (Matsuda, 2001; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). The position adopted in this study is that writers do not have or lack voice; rather, they negotiate and enact voice in particular social and rhetorical situations. How writing is received by readers depends on a range of factors, including writers' linguistic backgrounds, cultural affiliations, and professional contexts in which they operate (Matsuda, 2001; Ivanič, 1998). Recent studies suggest that L2 writers do not acquire voice passively; instead, they actively construct it by attending to how they position readers, engage audiences, and conform to or challenge disciplinary conventions (Wu et al., 2025; Hyland, 2012). Moreover, voice is not a question of pure personal expression but one that is wholly involved in systems of power and ideology. Therefore, L2 writing voice research should keep in mind microanalytic textual units, as well as macro social and institutional frameworks restricting what may be said. In such a way, voice is not inherently perceived as natural expression, but a performance that is involved in the sociopolitical situation (Prior, 2001; Canagarajah, 2004).

Identity and writing

There is the broader issue of writer identity, in which voice plays a central role. Writing is not simply the transmission of knowledge but also a performance of identity, through which writers position themselves in relation to the sociocultural scripts and horizons. As Ivanič (1998, p. 154) observed, "the discomfort of writing is not merely a discomfort with the act of composition, but a location of self into the sociocultural scripts and horizons in which we are positioned to inhabit". Discomfort with these prescribed subject positions can, in fact, give rise to a range of forms of academic or scholarly writing. At its core, writing is the act of identity construction; writing and identity are closely intertwined because, in any writing act, both the text and the writer's identity are simultaneously constructed and negotiated (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). Building on this insight, more recent research on students who study in countries other than their own has shown that the ways they present themselves in academic writing are strongly influenced by how they navigate multiple languages and cultural contexts (Norova & Guti érrez, 2024; Kaufhold, 2023). These students experience a tension between maintaining aspects of their home identities and conforming to the writing conventions expected in Western universities (Norova & Guti érrez, 2024; Kaufhold, 2023). From this perspective, identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through the act of writing. This process can be particularly challenging when students must negotiate between two markedly different cultural contexts.

Critical discourse analysis

The study employs the CDA framework to critically engage with the dynamics of language, power, and identity in writing. CDA is an interdisciplinary theory of language that sees discourse as a form of social practice such that it does not only focus on the structure and use of language, but also what discourses do in terms of reflecting, consolidating or contesting societal structures and ideologies (Fairclough, 1992). A core principle of CDA is that language is not neutral; there are always value and interest behind the language. Accordingly, CDA provides a lens through which social inequality is revealed and resisted in language. CDA works at three levels: the textual level (*of linguistic analysis*), the discursive practice level (how texts are produced and consumed) and the social practice level (how discourse connects with larger social-cultural structures). It is this multi-dimensional nature that also makes CDA especially appropriate for investigating how L2 writers mediate their voices in complex institutional and ideological environments. By connecting micro-level text analysis with macro-level social structures, CDA offers a powerful framework for understanding the politics

of voice. CDA's attention to the interplay between micro-textual choices and macro-ideological structures makes it uniquely suited to analyze how L2 writers negotiate voice under constraint.

Saudi students in the U.S. context

Although Saudi students represent one of the largest groups of international students in U.S. higher education, their lived experiences as L2 writers remain underexamined in composition scholarship. While a substantial body of research has addressed issues related to language proficiency and cultural adaptation among Saudi students, studies that frame non-native English speakers from a deficit perspective risk portraying them as lacking proficiency in English rather than recognizing their linguistic and cultural resources (see Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This study challenges such deficit-oriented perspectives by examining how Saudi graduate students actively develop their writerly voices through the interaction of their cultural knowledge, disciplinary expectations, and institutional contexts during the writing process. Understanding the experiences of Saudi L2 writers is particularly important at a time when higher education is increasingly globalized and the number of students from the Middle East studying in U.S. universities continues to grow. These writers often navigate multiple cultural and linguistic frameworks, frequently positioning themselves between the academic conventions of Western institutions and the expectations of their home contexts. Consequently, they may experience tensions as they consider how the knowledge and practices acquired in U.S. academic settings can be applied within their home countries. These considerations highlight the need to move beyond deficit models and instead examine how Saudi students' linguistic and cultural repertoires can serve as sources of critical and scholarly voice.

Methodology

Research design

The study employed a critical case study approach within a qualitative research design to examine the particularity and complexity of writerly voice. This methodology was selected for its capacity to provide a holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, allowing careful attention to how the members of a particular group construct their voices and how these voices are shaped by social and institutional influences (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Although the case under investigation concerns a classroom context, the data were collected through analysis of student papers and in-depth interviews rather than through direct classroom observation.

Participants

Participants were purposely selected following the sampling principles outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994). The three focal participants in this study—pseudonymously referred to as Manea, Saleh, and Ali—were Saudi graduate students pursuing doctoral degrees at different universities in the United States. Each participant had been immersed in the US academic environment for more than a year, which was considered sufficient time to become familiar with its academic conventions. The participants provided recorded interviews and written texts that served as the primary data sources for analysis. All participants had met institutional language requirements for admission (e.g., a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 or an equivalent qualification), although their individual scores were not collected for this study. To protect participant anonymity, geographical details (e.g., "Northeastern") were intentionally generalized. Table 1 below presents the demographic details of the three participants.

Instruments

The data sources consisted of participants' written academic texts (henceforth referred to as papers) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. For the analysis of writerly voice, two sample

papers were collected from each participant. The interviews, each lasting more than one hour, were conducted via Skype and telephone and focused on participants' conceptions of voice, their writing processes, and the ways institutional practices shaped their written expression.

Table 1
Participant Details

Pseudonym	Gender	Field of Study	University Location	Length of U.S. Residence
Manea	Male	English Literature	Northeastern	3 years
Saleh	Male	Educational Foundations	Midwestern	4 years
Ali	Male	Curriculum & Instruction	Southern	5 years

Data collection

Data were collected between January and April 2024 using secure digital transfer. The data collection process proceeded in several phases. First, participants were contacted via email, where the study was introduced and they were invited to participate. After written informed consent was obtained, individual Zoom interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. Second, the three participants took part in semi-structured interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews explored their perceptions of writerly voice, the processes involved in academic writing, and the ways institutional practices influenced their written expression. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Third, each participant was asked to submit two graduate-level essays (e.g., seminar papers or literature reviews) produced during their doctoral studies. To protect participants' confidentiality, all materials were transferred through a secure digital platform and stored on encrypted university servers. The dataset therefore consisted of interview recordings, interview transcripts, and student papers, all managed in accordance with institutional research ethics procedures.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using CDA as both the theoretical framework and the analytic approach. The analysis was conducted iteratively in several stages. The initial stage involved thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and student papers, during which emergent themes related to voice, identity, and institutional habitus were coded. This stage focused on identifying recurring patterns and themes across the dataset. Following this initial coding, CDA was applied to examine the relationships between textual features and broader social and cultural structures. In particular, the analysis explored how participants' language use both reflected and reproduced or, in some cases, challenged dominant ideologies and institutional power relations. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, several strategies were employed. First, peer debriefing was conducted with colleagues to discuss emerging themes and interpretations. Second, reflexivity was maintained through a researcher journal documenting my positionality as a Saudi researcher and its potential influence on the analytic process. Third, an audit trail was kept to document key analytical decisions made throughout the analysis. All data were coded manually, and no qualitative analysis software was used. The development of the codebook was an iterative process. It began with preliminary open coding of a subset of the data, during which initial themes were inductively derived from the interview transcripts and written texts. These initial codes were subsequently refined and reorganized in relation to the study's theoretical framework (CDA), resulting in a more structured set of deductive codes including voice, identity, and ideology. The codebook was further reviewed through peer

discussions to improve the clarity, consistency, and comprehensiveness of the coding scheme. The final codebook included definitions of each theme as well as detailed coding guidelines. Exemplars presented in the findings were selected based on their ability to clearly illustrate the major themes identified during the analysis.

Findings

The section interprets participants' texts and interview data to examine how disciplinary contexts influenced their writerly voices and ideological awareness. Consistent with the perspective of Fairclough (1992), language is understood as ideologically embedded and capable of both reinforcing and challenging existing power relations. The examples that follow illustrate how the participants, through their academic and social experiences, learned to strategically employ language to express their voices while remaining attentive to rhetorical practices that might marginalize them. Table 2 provides a comparative overview of the two voice types identified in this study.

Table 2
A Comparison of Participant Voices

Voice Type	Definition	Representative Lines from Texts
Postcolonial Voice (Manea)	The voice that questions colonial authority structures and provides the voice to the repressed voices. It tends to use individual experience to subvert mainstream accounts and dismantle stereotypes.	The idea of thinking myself as a third world country makes me think that the field that I will focus on is post-colonialism because narrowing the problems that affect the politics of the Middle East should be determined using the said field.
Critical Pedagogy Voice (Ali & Saleh)	The voice that fights against repressive education and promotes social justice. It is frequently informed by the personal experience as a teacher and is based on the critical theory to criticize the status quo.	One of the most disturbing rationales that the NCAAA stresses on, in their strategic practices, to legitimate their means is the need for creating "healthy competition among institutions.

Manea: Postcolonial voice

Manea was motivated to write this paper through his broader interest in postcolonial studies. His attention to the ways in which Shakespearean texts construct *others* illustrate his belief that language can function as a powerful instrument of marginalization. This ideological position is reflected in the following passage from his paper.

> *I think about myself as the member of the third world country and this makes me believe that post-colonialism is my narrow specialty according to which the political problems of the Middle East should be determined. This essay is an account of my personal experience in the field of academics. It demonstrates the connection I have with postcolonial literature, and why I would feel similarly to some of the postcolonial writers who are plagued by the shadow of colonialism.*

As a student from the Middle East, Manea's political voice reflects an aspect of his identity. In this writing, he draws on broader intellectual frameworks such as postcolonial theory and the historical legacy of colonialism to articulate his perspective. He also strengthens his argument by citing the work of Edward Said, a foundational scholar in postcolonial studies. Manea explained this decision during the interview:

> *In this paper, I mentioned Said to help me argue my point and have more power in speaking. Said is a magnificent postcolonial author, who also experiences the same pain and vision as I do in my academic research as a postcolonial graduate student.*

Ali and Saleh: Critical pedagogy voice

Both Ali and Saleh were PhD students in education, and their writing reflected highly politicized perspectives shaped by their training in critical pedagogy. In their respective fields of study, they drew on this critical lens to interpret and critique educational practices in Saudi Arabian society. In doing so, they grounded their arguments in both theoretical frameworks and their own personal experiences.

Ali's voice

Ali addressed the issue of the importation of quality assurance frameworks into Saudi higher education in his paper, *Problematizing Quality and Assessment in Education.* To establish authority in his argument, he drew on his professional experience, explaining:

> *The rationale behind my topic of choice is that I worked in the dean's office of Quality and Development at the College of Education, for a year and a half. I was able to familiarize myself with the mission statement, objectives, and tasks of the Development and Quality Department at the university... I remember having a conversation with some of my colleagues in the presence of the vice of the dean about the notion of 'quality and quality assurance standards in higher education' and what they mean. The vice dean gave us an honest answer and told us that he only knew the literal meaning and he was not familiar with the history of the quality in higher education because it is a new phenomenon in the country.*

Ali's critical voice became particularly evident when he directly challenged the rationale of the Saudi accreditation body, National Center for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA). In his paper, he wrote:

> *One of the most disturbing rationales that the NCAAA stresses, in their strategic practices, to legitimate their means is the need for creating "healthy competition among institutions." Aside from the fact that the commission does not define healthy competition, it perceives competition as a positive indicator of good education. This perception 'is interwoven with neoliberal ideology in education in which knowledge, learning, and intelligence are understood through the register of economic competition, social mobility, and opportunity' (Saltman, 2016, p. 21). Agreeing with the aforementioned, Nguyen (2016) asserted that 'neoliberalism installs a new social imaginary that values competitive individualism over social responsibility and redefines democracy as market choice' (p. 18).*

When asked during the interview what facilitated his critical awareness of the implications of importing Western educational standards, Ali emphasized the role of scholarly engagement and theoretical frameworks. By citing scholars whose perspectives aligned with his own, he strengthened and legitimized his critical stance. Ali future articulated his critical pedagogy orientation by arguing that the system was intended "to mimic the success that other countries

of the world had displayed," and that "critiquing current practices makes us aware of the problems and helps us think about possible solutions."

Saleh's voice

In his paper *Critical Intervention for Teacher Alienation,* Saleh argued that teachers should be understood as *public intellectuals*. When asked where his voice was most visible in the paper, he referred to the following excerpt. Saleh's call to *rupture* the teaching system reflects his broader aim of fostering critical consciousness among teachers. He elaborated on this position during the interview. Saleh also problematized the ideological practices embedded within his own educational context. As he explained:

> *The dominant discourse was a psychological and religious. So, whenever an issue or failing happens in the education, we start to blame the individuals [teachers] of not being honest, altruistic, and hard working. Even if we blame the system, our analysis will be focused on narrow issues such as class size and teacher preparation.*

Saleh's awareness of the *dominant discourse* that sustains existing power relations in his context reflects his ideological stance as a critical educator, shaped by his academic training.

In another section of his paper, Saleh argued for broader social change through education:

> *Third, as mentioned above, we need to change the way we teach in teacher education, from banking education, where we deposit our students with decontextualized and objective knowledge that is useless and irrelevant to the reality of the students, and where the teachers possess the knowledge that needs to be transferred and poured into the students' head (Freire, 2018), to critical pedagogy where the students learn to question, reflect, theorize, and interpret their experiences, reality, and the dominate discourse.*

Saleh's rejection of what Paulo Freire termed the *banking model* of education highlights his transformative orientation toward teaching and learning. By critiquing this model as disconnected from students' lived realities, he articulates a pedagogical vision aimed at empowering students to develop critical voices and engage with the social conditions that shape their educational experiences.

Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings in relation to the research questions. The discussion is organized into three main themes: the participants' discursive and ideological representations, their resistance to the status quo, and their processes of ideological becoming. The section first summarizes the key findings, then situates them in relation to existing studies, and finally considers the broader significance of these comparisons.

Discursive ideological representations

The findings reveal the multifaceted nature of voice development among Saudi ESL writers in U.S. academia. Drawing on diverse personal and professional experiences as well as disciplinary training, the participants crafted distinct authorial voices. Manea's postcolonial voice and Ali and Saleh's critical pedagogy voices illustrate how these writers challenged hegemonic ideologies in different ways. This aligns with prior research showing that L2 writers' voices are shaped by their disciplinary memberships and use of critical theory (Canagarajah, 2004; Hyland, 2012). This study extends previous research by focusing specifically on Saudi writers, a group underrepresented in the literature, and by applying CDA to bridge micro-level linguistic features and macro-level institutional and socio-political processes.

Participants developed both ideational voices (representing their ideological positions) and interpersonal voices (negotiating power relations with readers) by leveraging their experiences as insider-outsiders of text and their ideologically inflected selves. This observation supports Clark and Ivanič (1997), who emphasized that writing and the right to write are inseparable from broader sociopolitical considerations, and Street (1995), who argued that literacy practices, including written texts, are socially constructed and ideologically shaped. This comparison enriches our understanding of voice as a socially situated phenomenon in which individual agency and social location are often in tension.

Identity and voice construction

Identity emerged as a central factor in the construction of voice. Participants' identities as Saudis, Arabs, and Muslims influenced both their perspectives and the ways in which they articulated them. Their position as *others* in a Western context further shaped their voices, as they sought to counter stereotypes and represent their cultures more fairly. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of identity in L2 writing (Ivanič, 1998; Norton, 2000). Consistent with Hyland (2012), participants constructed voice by signaling authority, certainty, and engagement with readers (Hyland, 2012, p. 178), highlighting that "voice is not a unified whole but shaped by identity, experience, and disciplinary background".

Resistance and agency

The findings also indicate that participants used their writing as a site of resistance against hegemonic beliefs and practices. Ali and Saleh, for example, employed critical pedagogy to critique educational issues in Saudi Arabia, While Manea used postcolonial theory to challenge Western representations of the East. This resonates with Canagarajah (2004), who argued that L2 writers exercise agency through writing, using it as a means of empowerment for social and educational change. Resistance, in this sense, can be understood as a positive indicator of agency (Ewald & Wallace, 1994), reflecting the writers' ability to use their voices against controlling powers and reconceptualize experiences shaped by sociopolitical and educational practices in their home contexts.

Participants were acutely aware of the institutional and sociopolitical limits on their voices, particularly regarding their home contexts. While they exercised agency in U.S. academic writing, they did not expect their critical positions to be received similarly in Saudi Arabia. Ali noted, "Here, I can say this. At home, it would be... difficult. Maybe impossible." Saleh similarly expressed concern that his critique of traditional teaching might be perceived as insubordination rather than constructive criticism, observing that, "It is a Western concept to be a public intellectual. The teacher in our culture is a mentor, and not an accuser of the system." These examples underscore how cultural and ideological norms constrain voice and how participants strategically modulate their expression depending on geographic and institutional context.

Institutional and sociopolitical constraints

Although participants demonstrated agency and resistance in their writing, they were aware of the institutional forces that could limit their voices in their home settings. This highlights the complexity of voice: it is shaped not solely by individual agency but also by social and institutional contexts. Participants recognized these constraints and displayed a nuanced understanding of power relations, supporting the view that voice is always socially and ideologically mediated.

While identity and disciplinary socialization strongly influenced voice development, other factors may also have shaped how Manea, Ali, and Saleh articulated their positions. Academic advisors, for example, may steer students toward certain theoretical frameworks or disciplinary stances. Manea's use of Edward Said can be read as both a personal ideological alignment and a strategic alignment with the expectations of his postcolonial studies program. Similarly, Ali's declaration, "We are committed to critical pedagogy" suggests that his critical voice was fostered by a community of practice rather than emerging in isolation.

Audience expectations also shaped participants' writing. They addressed an academic readership likely receptive to critical and postcolonial perspectives, which may have influenced the construction of their academic identities. Saleh's effort to localize critical teacher interventions in Saudi education while appealing to a U.S. audience illustrates this dual consideration of personal conviction and audience reception.

The participants' voices reflect both adaptation to dominant academic discourses and critical engagement with them. Their use of disciplinary jargon and theoretical concepts demonstrates not only ideological positioning but also strategic navigation of the power structures they critique. While empowered and authorativave in U.S. contexts, they acknowledged that these voices could be muted or constrained at home. This duality underscores that voice is not an innate attribute but a strategically enacted performative, sensitive to institutional and cultural norms.

Ultimately, the participants' voices exemplify a complex interplay of resistance and compliance. They simultaneously challenge mainstream ideologies and establish authority within their academic disciplines. Their discourse thus represents both intellectual critique and academic survival, highlighting the situated and negotiated nature of voice in L2 academic writing.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings and discussions above, five teaching practices warrant particular attention. Teachers can support students' voice development by: (1) Incorporating critical literacy activities that prompt students to examine power relations in academic texts; (2) offering opportunities to write about topics connected to students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences; (3) explicitly teaching how to negotiate genre conventions while sustaining an authentic voice; (4) rewarding intellectual risk-taking in writing; and (5) valuing plural perspectives in peer review rather than privileging a single *correct* stance. Together, these practices position voice not as an individual trait to be *found*, but as a resource that can be developed through instruction, feedback, and reflection.

To enact these principles, I propose the notion of a *pedagogical safe house*: a classroom space in which learners can try out identities and rhetorical positions, experiment with language, and articulate perspectives without fear of ridicule or penalty. First, contrastive voice modelling foregrounds how different authors may take different positions on the same issue, enabling students to see that there are multiple legitimate ways to position oneself. Second, a dialogic peer response framework provides structured opportunities for students to explain the voice they have adopted in a text, to discuss the effects that voice creates for readers, and to offer feedback on whether it effectively frames the intended message and aligns with the rhetorical demands of the task. Third, the identity-mapping activities invite students to examine their disciplinary, cultural, linguistic, and professional identities and to consider how these shape

writing choices; in doing so, students may come to recognize outsider perspectives as an intellectual resource rather than a liability.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the exclusive focus on male participants constrains insight into how gender may intersect with voice construction among Saudi L2 writers. Second, because all participants were enrolled at R1 research universities, the findings may not generalize to writers in other institutional contexts. Third, the study captures voice at a single point in time and therefore cannot speak to developmental trajectories. Finally, my positionality as a Saudi researcher may have shaped both data generation and interpretation.

Future research should recruit larger and more diverse samples, including women, undergraduates, students in non-R1 settings, and writers from additional national contexts. Studies should also more explicitly examine influences that were not fully addressed here, such as advisor expectations, disciplinary genre constraints, and audience uptake. Complementary work situated in Saudi universities could further illuminate local configurations of voice and power. Longitudinal designs, in particular, would support a process-oriented account of how L2 writer voice develops over time.

Conclusion

Although participants constructed voice in varied and complex ways, their rhetorical choices appeared to be shaped by prior experiences, professional trajectories, and disciplinary socialization. Manea's postcolonial positioning and Ali's and Saleh's critical-pedagogy orientations, suggest forms of interpellation through and resistance to dominant regimes of knowledge. More broadly, participants' identifications as Saudis, Arabs, and Muslims likely informed how they interpreted academic discourse and produced texts. Taken together, these findings underscore that voice is not a unitary construct; rather, it is constituted through interacting contextual and structural forces, including identity, lived experience, disciplinary training, and institutional conditions.

Disclosure of AI Use

The authors used Grammarly for language polishing only; all analysis, interpretation, and writing were conducted by the researchers.

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Dr. Sultan Ayed Alanazi is an Associate Professor of TESOL at the University of Tabuk. Specializing in the pedagogy of productive language skills, his research focuses on advancing instructional methods for writing and speaking. With a commitment to academic excellence, Dr. Alanazi contributes to the field by exploring innovative strategies to enhance student proficiency, bridging the gap between theoretical linguistics and practical classroom application in higher education.