VARIATIONS IN WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT AS ACADEMIC WRITERS AMONG FIRST-YEAR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Research on academic writer development has focused exclusively on the writing output and other sources of doctoral student professional development. Nevertheless, variations in understanding ongoing development remain unclear given that academic writers involve first-year doctoral students. Hence, the study investigated the ways of understanding first-year doctoral student development as academic writers. A qualitative case study was conducted on four first-year doctoral students during their doctoral research proposal writing process. A case study analysis was conducted on the findings of understanding academic writer development in four ways and represented by four categories: (i) becoming self-assured as an academic writer, (ii) becoming acknowledged as an academic writer, (iii) becoming more productive as an academic writer, and (iv) becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer. The four ways of understanding academic writer development could be linked to the participants' embracing and expanding academic awareness. Specifically, the development represented by later categories includes the earlier categories of academic awareness. Moreover, the later categories represent increasing complexity in academic awareness and different academic writer development aspects. The findings could guide writers such as first-year doctoral students in their development as academic writers.

Keywords*:* Academic writer; academic writer development; academic writing; doctoral students; ways of understanding

1. Introduction

The ongoing development of academic writers is challenging for most students (Hyland, 2013). Furthermore, first-year doctoral students encounter difficulty understanding their development as academic writers through their progress as doctoral students. Multiple sources of doctoral students' professional development frequently outline the importance of ongoing participation

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in academic activities to improve their knowledge and skills but the ways to understand or think about their development remain unclear (Rudd, Nerad, Morrison & Picciano, 2008; Sharmini & Spronken-Smith, 2020; Webster-Wright, 2009). Addressing the various ways to understand first-year doctoral students' development as academic writers could aid them by encouraging them to question, analyse, and interpret experiences which often reflect considerable variation in the outlook of the nature of development.

The aspect of understanding in the current study is considered an approach to connecting and advancing students' learning. The perspective is crucial as the ability to understand personal development plays a major role in increasing students' ability to comprehend academic texts, exercising critical thinking in daily life through their academic writing, and progressing from complex thinking to conceptual thinking (Coffin et al., 2005, Hyland, 2010, 2015, 2019). Writing academically becomes essential in a climate that increasingly emphasises academic writing and publications (Cremin & Locke, 2016; Hyland, 2016a, 2016b; Kamler & Thomson, 2014).

Hyland (2019) mentioned that writing for academic purposes plays a decisive role in accepting or rejecting the written communication delivered to the wider academic community. Additionally, the development of academic writers among first-year doctoral students would involve a negotiation process. The process is presumably a non-linear progression for students, hence each student's way of understanding an event is singular and not pre-defined. Accordingly, one may detect the developmental process by investigating the variation in first- year doctoral students' collective methods of understanding their development as academic writers. Although the prospect of development as academic writers among graduate students raises conflict and stress, little empirical research highlighted issues of ongoing academic development.

The academic writing literature tends to focus mainly on the output of writing (Alotaibi, 2019; Biber & Finegan, 1989; Crismore, 1989; Dobakhti & Hassan, 2017; Halliday, 1994; Hyland, 1998, 1999, 2018; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Martin, 2000; Musa, Hussin & Ho, 2019; White, 2003) and other sources of professional development for doctoral students (Enders, 2004; Solmon, 2009). Therefore, discussion and investigation of development as academic writers remain primarily limited to the research training literature as part of postgraduate studies and postdoctoral research. Issues of ongoing development as academic writers among doctoral students are rarely addressed. Limited studies guide writers such as first-year doctoral students in their development as academic writers. Consequently, the ways of understanding doctoral students' development as academic writers remain vague.

The study attempted to apply a more holistic approach towards academic development and emphasise investigating academic writer development from the first-year doctoral students' perspective. The study excluded a narrow perspective in examining the first-year doctoral students' experiences of their academic writer development. Accordingly, the ways of experiencing academic writer development should reveal the experiences of being a doctoral student in the current higher learning institutions. The research area has only recently developed and become topical, driven by the widespread demands on academic writing skills in higher education and recognition of the significance of constructing a specific identity acknowledged and accepted within the academic community (Hyland, 2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2019).

As teachers of writing, the researchers recognised the need for discussion and investigation of academic writer development where first-year doctoral students struggle to understand their development as academic writers. Moreover, they believed that development as academic writers is restricted to one way of understanding. Thus, the study examined two aspects: first, to fill the gap in the progression of the research field on ways of understanding first-year doctoral students' development along with their doctoral studies progress. Second, to offer a developmental focus to the body of literature by exploring variations in ways of understanding doctoral students' development as academic writers. Nevertheless, the study does not aim to reveal and promote doctoral students' activities but to investigate the underlying meanings of academic writers' development. The main question addressed in the study is related to the ways of understanding first-year doctoral students' development as academic writers.

2. Methodology

2.1. The Study

A qualitative case study design was employed from an interpretative research perspective. Study data were based on a one-year qualitative study related to the complexities of constructing an academic writer identity (Lo, Othman & Lim, 2020). Interpretative case studies allow different ways of understanding a phenomenon to understand better the variations in awareness of different aspects of the phenomenon within the population. Data were gathered from four first-year doctoral students at the stage of preparing a full doctoral research proposal. The doctoral students were from various study areas in education and with varying working experience levels. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews that focused on exploring the variation in ways of understanding or thinking about first-year doctoral students' development as academic writers. The information was compiled as variations in ways of understanding and thinking, not the students' activities in their development as academic writers.

The study emphasised the distinction between the two aspects as the same activity can be understood differently. For example, although all four first-year doctoral students discussed academic conferences and workshops as their training and professional development, their intentions in undertaking the activities and their realisation of the possible academic developmental outcomes varied considerably. The interviews produced four different ways of understanding development as an academic writer. Every participant was interviewed four times with two follow-up interviews approximately one month apart. The semi-structured interviews highlighted what developing and becoming an academic writer meant to the students, what they were trying to achieve, and how they achieved it.

Unstructured questions were used in the follow-up interviews that included questions, such as "could you share with me more on this?", "could you explain this further?", "could you give me an example on this?", and "what do you mean by this?". The follow-up interviews were to encourage further elaboration of the topic and identify the meaning that participants associated with the keywords used. Each recorded interview lasted approximately an hour and was transcribed immediately. Data were analysed using inductive coding, which involved repeated transcript readings in detecting similarities and differences, key ideas, and relationships to and from each transcript. Themes and sub-themes emerged and the analysis continued with active thinking and attention to the data between each theme and sub-theme to form logical connections until a consistent set of categories was produced.

2.2. The Participants

The study involved four first-year doctoral students across four areas in education at an established Malaysian institution. Nora and John are in their late 30s. Nora mainly identifies herself as a novice researcher who struggles to understand research and how to write academic arguments in her doctoral research proposal. She began her career in her mid-20s as an English teacher and was a language officer in her 30s before becoming a full-time doctoral student. John was a lecturer before pursuing his doctoral studies. He saw himself as a research enthusiast and an English as a Second Language (ESL) writer who struggles to write academically. Lee is a doctoral student in her mid-30s who saw herself as an inexperienced qualitative researcher and struggled to read qualitative research articles. She was a school counsellor before becoming a private university counsellor. Additionally, Sue is in her early 30s and was an English Literature teacher at an international school before becoming a lecturer. She also engaged in creative writing and identified herself as a doctoral student who struggles to write in the academic world.

2.3. Data collection

The study conducted four semi-structured interviews with two follow-up interviews approximately one month apart. The data collection began in March 2019 and was completed at the end of July 2019. The first interview elicited the self-perception of academic writers. The second was related to the ways of understanding the participants' development as academic writers during first-year doctoral studies. The third was regarding their value and meaning of development as academic writers. The fourth interview aimed to obtain the participants' insights on the academic writer development process while writing their doctoral research proposal. The two follow-up interviews were conducted at the end of April and July 2019 after comparing the participants' interview data. The follow-ups further verified the interviews that reflected the participants' development experience as an academic writer without proposing any new elements that the participants did not previously voice.

2.4. Data analysis

The study followed Saldana's (2015) basic data analysis principles on coding, pattern development, categorisation, and analysis, which include seven steps: (1) data organisation, (2) immersion in the research data, (3) emergence of categories and descriptive themes, (4) data coding, (5) data interpretation, (6) uncovering ambiguities and alternative interpretations, and (7) writing on the expected results. The subsequent section discusses the analytic strategy used for the study in terms of thematic analysis based on the participants' interview data.

2.4.1 Analytic Strategy

The transcribed interview data were analysed using thematic analysis that included organising and familiarising with the data, identifying common descriptions, and seeking potential themes that answer the research question. The researchers continually review and refine the themes when identifying the common description and seeking potential themes before defining the common description, sub-themes, and naming the key themes. The study identified four key themes and 24 subthemes (see Appendix A for a more detailed matrix of critical themes and sub-themes). The 24 sub-themes were developed inductively by examining the common description of the transcripts, which was guided by three main interview questions designed for a larger study that included the current study.

 The three questions are (i) what does development as an academic writer mean to you? (ii) what are you trying to achieve in the process of writing the doctoral research proposal? And (iii) does the process of writing the doctoral research proposal prepare you to develop as an academic writer? Quotations were referenced as pseudonyms and were presented as excerpts from verbatim transcripts. Each sub-theme was accompanied by evidence in the form of the participants' excerpts. Moreover, the excerpts with intervening passages were removed with brevity.

 The step of removing intervening passages was performed carefully without changing the meaning of the phrases. The four key themes were identified by reviewing the sub-themes, which were grouped and related to the ways of understanding development as academic writers. Summarily, development as academic writers extended beyond one way of understanding. The themes were developed interpretively to explain the variations in understanding the development of academic writers based on participants' understanding.

3. Findings

The analysis findings revealed four different ways of understanding development as an academic writer, which was represented by four categories: (i) becoming self-assured as an academic writer, (ii) becoming acknowledged as an academic writer, (iii) becoming more productive as an academic writer, and (iv) becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer. A set of verbatim excerpts from the participants' interview data is detailed below to describe and illustrate each category.

Category 1: Becoming self-assured as an academic writer
The first category focuses on the participants' sense of self-assurance, which is a sense of self-confidence in one's research direction. Research direction refers to identifying a researchable title and framework for the study and writing a solid statement of the issue based on sound methodological design. The category involves acquiring research and academic writing skills and becoming familiar with seeking reliable sources, reading from reputable journals, comprehending academic texts, and writing persuasive academic arguments with credible evidence. The following verbatim excerpts demonstrate the main aspects of development under the category:

> **John**: I came up with a research topic and now writing the problem statement. My supervisor said, the problem is somewhere in the problem statement, but it is not clear and straightforward. In a way, it's hidden. So, I need to fix my writing. After few rounds of writing, I am more assured now because my supervisor says ok you are on the right track. It's like I am more confident to write, move to the next step and sort of like know what to do next in my research.

> **Nora**: When I first started, I was very keen and know what I wanted to do. This [new PhD title] research topic is suggested by someone to me. I know it is appropriate for my field of study but I don't really know much or have much interest in it. Even after, she passed me some reading materials, I still don't know what to write. Maybe I am just not so into that topic. So, in some ways, I feel like I don't know how to research, go about it, where to start writing, or what to write about.

The excerpts suggest that self-assurance as an academic writer is more relevant for doctoral students in the early stages of doctoral research proposal writing due to various reasons: the students might not be familiar with the process and genre of writing an academic or research paper. Thus, the development requires first-year doctoral students to be aware and critical of their academic research direction.

Category 2: Becoming acknowledged as an academic writer
The second category extends beyond Category 1, which emphasises participants' sense of belief in their competence as academic writers. The development involves peer and supervisor recognition within the academic community. Moreover, the category entails becoming part of the academic community, building a reputation in the university, and developing ideas with peers, supervisors, or other academics. The following verbatim excerpts demonstrate the key aspects of development under the category:

> **Sue**: Getting ourself known by peers and supervisors is like establishing ourself, I mean to have our academic work in the field, and writing skills being acknowledged is like the beginning. First, we start from peers and supervisors, make sure our work can be aligned and accepted. I mean, it doesn't mean our work must be the same as others in

order to be accepted, but we have to do a decent job for our research and academic writing.

The understanding of development under the second category involves acknowledgement of academic performance from others within the academic community and the ongoing accumulation of subject-matter knowledge, academic writing skills, and research work quality. The development is associated with the need to continuously engage in research with more opportunities to communicate at international conferences. For example:

> **Lee**: I think I should have tried to make contact with other academics through seminar or conferences held outside university like international conferences but I didn't, you know. Maybe I can find people with similar interest or individuals who are established in my field of study. Then, I can attend their presentation or talk, follow their work because I think it can help me to re-think about my work and how my work can be together or putting myself out there as a colleague of theirs. At the same time, I need to get established also like publish work in my line of research, both main and sub-areas in quality journal to get people recognise me.

The development as academic writers shared in Lee's excerpt seemed more complicated than Sue's concerning external recognition and opportunities to communicate at the international conference, which require hard work and long-term thinking with intentional consideration. The complexity is also marked by the emphasis on exploring more research areas in the chosen discipline. The development values the significant amount of research work conducted in the field with different perspectives and ways of understanding, including the ability to make new interpretations of the ideas created and invested in Category 1. Hence, development under Category 2 requires an inquisitive mind and a willingness to seek knowledge.

The second category did not reflect the participants' desire to be recognised by experts in the wider academic community. Nonetheless, the participants may extend their desire to be acknowledged by experts in a particular study area at a later stage of their doctoral studies. Generally, such an extension of desire requires first-year doctoral students to possess profound knowledge in the field, academic writing skills, and research experience through literacy practices and education that requires time to develop.

Embracing and expanding academic awareness between Categories 1 and 2
The focus in previous Category 1 is on becoming self-assured. In Category 2, the development as an academic writer is experienced more of an external change in terms of recognition as an academic writer. Nevertheless, the focus in Category 2 does not exclude the emphasis on becoming self-assured under Category 1. Contrarily, the development of becoming self-assured is part of academic writers' overall development under Category 2. How these foci become embraced and expanded in Category 2 is presented by the following verbatim excerpts:

> **John**: I think there is no restriction when it comes to acknowledgement. Maybe this restriction comes from ourselves. I mean initially I feel like I can't do this but after some time, I feel confident with my abilities that I can do this [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 1]. And when I feel that way, I have less problem to get input from other people. I think we need to be confident with our work and abilities. We also need to learn to think and see things beyond surface and try publish our work to let other people know [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 2].

Category 1 development is considered awareness where development as academic writers has an obvious developmental endpoint. For instance, first-year doctoral students continue to operate at this developed level with no further development anticipated. Category 2 is when an academic writer becomes acknowledged and accepted in their respective research field. The outcome of development as an academic writer concerns external acknowledgements and self-assurance of one's competence as an academic writer.

Category 3: Becoming more productive as an academic writer
The third category describes output, which is a quantitative increase in research productivity. For example, first-year doctoral students can write logical academic arguments with accurate textual choices, secure research funding, and increase the writing of their doctoral dissertation and publications. Under the third category, increased research productivity indicates an increased output of time and effort to engage in literacy practice. Meanwhile, the development perspective may involve reduced monitoring conditions from significant individuals such as doctoral supervisors. The following verbatim excerpts present the primary aspects of development for Category 3:

> **Sue**: I plan to spend more time to write my research proposal. Like consistent every week, how many days, I really sit down to read [academic] journal articles, think about my area of research, and write my proposal. I am actually going second year [of doctorate studies] soon, so I need to think about the publications also, the article writing thing. I think it's really important that I start putting more effort like using the academic language, form [academic] arguments like what my supervisor always says. Only this way, I can move forward, progress, and be more productive.

> **John**: My sv [supervisor] mention to me before, if possible, try to apply and get research funding or grant because it is like the first step where people see some promising results or impact from our Ph.D. research work. She [supervisor] say more valuable and like a stepping stone for Ph.D. student in a way especially if plan to become [an] academic after Ph.D.

Based on Sue and John's verbatim excerpts above, the examples of development described under Category 3 include productivity adjustments that are marked by the amount of research work published. Unlike the previous categories, the accumulation of research work could potentially continue for an unlimited or unspecified time.

Embracing and expanding academic awareness between Category 1 to 3
The development described under this category represents a significant expansion that includes academic awareness of becoming self-assured (Category 1) and acknowledged (Category 2) as an academic writer. This form of embracing and expanding academic awareness is depicted in the following verbatim excerpts:

> **Nora**: I am not sure what I want in my research. Undecided in a way. And then, not sure which one is going to be more suitable for me and also beneficial for me in long run. Like will it be useful for my goals and important for the path I take on later [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 1].

> **Lee**: My sv [supervisor] always say it is ok to work on and publish the not so famous area of research at the moment. What is more important, is the level of curiosity and different interpretation we are able to make because after all, we need new ways of understanding and that also means an open lane for me to take up if I do well and work on it for some time. Actually, not really understand and sure what she [supervisor] means. But one thing I understand what she [supervisor] says is to have more of my research work put out there. So, in a way, my writing needs to be good and appropriate for academic context [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 2].

This development category involves understanding academic writer development with an increased productivity rate that encapsulates research output. This category is a continual process and potentially endless, thus may be more complex than the previous ones as it includes an impact beyond oneself. For instance, first-year doctoral students need to communicate ideas and relay information that involves careful choice of words, organisation, and rhetorical structure in written form within the academic community. The outcome of academic writer development is to increase research productivity. Essentially, the category does not devalue the significance of continuous improvement but embraces the aspect of resilience to become better academic writers.

Category 4: Becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer
Becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer extends from increased research productivity under the previous category, including focusing on in-depth thinking. In-depth thinking involves understanding the different perspectives that simplistic thinkers usually find challenging to comprehend. The changes in development encourage first-year doctoral students to delve into the essence of an issue, gain more consciousness of the thought processes, enhance their capacity to conduct research and increase their ability to resolve issues. Summarily, the focus of academic writer development extends beyond performing activities commonly and involves performing similar activities differently in a better way. The following verbatim excerpts present the key aspects of development under this category:

> **Lee**: I mean I feel like I have improved in some ways like the way I look at things in my research because of my supervisors' guidance, I am more able to like identify the important research issues in my field and maybe this can help me to become better at researching and writing my Ph.D. research proposal. Maybe I can do more and make small contributions to my area of investigation for my Ph.D. study.

> **Nora**: To read constantly and keep up with the literature in my area is not an easy task. It's like need to keep on searching, reading, and find again what other scholars are doing, repeat the process again, and again. It is demanding but in order to develop, I think I have no choice, I can't escape from doing all these. I have to continue to research in my area and checking or revising what I am doing.

Based on the verbatim excerpts above, the category represents the most complex understanding of the development of academic writers. The category emphasises the demonstration of in-depth thinking and the accumulation of disciplinary and linguistic knowledge that produces the development of different perspectives and ways of understanding. Nonetheless, the other development as academic writers described in previous categories was not neglected. Instead, the category highlights differences from the earlier categories but is more complex and inclusive of the previous ones.

Embracing and expanding academic awareness between Category 1 to 4
The category represents the most complex understanding of developing as an academic writer based on the participants' comments. The four different ways of understanding the development of academic writers are linked with the participants' ability to embrace and expand academic awareness. Hence, understanding development represented by later categories includes academic awareness from the earlier categories. The later categories represent increasing complexity in academic awareness of the different aspects of academic writer development. For instance:

> **John**: I will be in my second-year next semester. So, I try to think about publication possibilities in specific journals because sv [supervisor] encourage. I feel like if I start thinking that I must publish 1 article next year, then maybe I am more goal oriented and focus [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 3]. I mean with specific journal as the target, I hope can become more confident with my work and like my work slowly being acknowledged by others [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 1 and 2].

> **Sue**: In the beginning of my Ph.D. study, I don't think anyone will be able to say if I am doing critical thinking or seeing things differently. I mean, not even myself but now, I do feel like I am more reflective about what I am doing and writing. Not just simply writing whatever I assume it is [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 4]. I think I also slowly become more willing to put in more effort to read and try to see what different journal articles are trying to say but it takes a long time for me to pick up things or to understand the author's intention. I mean I still find it hard to say that I am confident with my work [illustrating the academic awareness described in category 1 and 2].

The development category is an understanding of becoming a more competent academic writer. The aspect includes advancing one's disciplinary and linguistic knowledge and enhancing the abilities to understand and comprehend their experiences. Thus, the category is similar to Category 3 but differs from Categories 1 and 2 as development is continuous and potentially timeless. The outcome of academic writer development under the final category is to become a deep thinker.

4. Discussion

Different ways of thinking and understanding academic writer development exist based on the participant comments in the article. The empirical study presented considerable variation in ways of understanding academic writer development. All participants regarded development as a continual process while writing their doctoral research proposal. Thus, development continues until a threshold point of self-confidence and competence (Category 1) or acknowledgement and acceptance (Category 2) as an academic writer has been given. The idea of recognition, acknowledgement, and acceptance reflects that when one has acquired the ability to analyse experiences by comprehending their experience and linking them with new experiences, their thinking evolves and enables them to apply the experience in other research work. Looking at multiple perspectives raises fresh thinking can emerge and improves the formation of creative connections between ideas and their disciplinary cultures (Hyland, 2016a, 2016b).

   The focal point in Categories 1 and 2 remain apparent in Category 3 but focuses on increasing research productivity through publications or an accumulation of research work. The main aim of becoming more productive is to learn how to do more with minimal guidance and network strategically within the academic community. The development holds specifically onto

the quantity of research work published. The development aspect also concerns where all participants experience self-doubt and fear of writing for publications with a specific readership prospect. Therefore, first-year doctoral students must quickly learn the academic writing conventions, develop subject-matter knowledge, and know how to adapt themselves to better communicate with others in academics (Hyland, 2012a; 2012b; 2015).

The mixture of the focal point in the first three categories is apparent in Category 4 but demands more in-depth thinking and ongoing academic literacy development. The in-depth thinking and ongoing academic literacy development could deepen and improve first-year doctoral students' critical and creative thinking skills (Hyland, 2016a, 2016b). For instance, when first-year doctoral students discuss real-world issues or interpret an issue from multiple angles, they tend to make meaning in a complex world with creative perspectives that transform the familiar way of thinking. Subsequently, the way of thinking about academic writer development could align with ongoing growth and potentially endless progress. Thus, ongoing growth and progress remain crucial in developing deep thinkers but attention must be paid to shifting beyond performing activities conventionally to performing more of the same thing differently in a better way.

Based on the four variations, the understanding of development as an academic writer is not directly tied to the length or year of doctoral studies but instead progress as a doctoral student. The findings also indicated that first-year doctoral students' progress tends to be influenced by their literacy practices. Hence, development as academic writers cannot be regarded as a simple developmental continuum from the first to the final year of doctoral students' perspectives. Similarly, no specific way of thinking exists concerning academic writer development that is limited to new or more senior doctoral students given that each perspective was described by first-year doctoral students.

Although the range of variation in understanding is consistent with common themes discovered in all participants, each category does not exist in isolation. The four different ways of understanding academic writer development are linked with increasing complexity based on participants' embracing and expanding academic awareness. The present findings suggest that academic writer development involves considerable variation in ways of thinking and understanding, including first-year doctoral students embracing and expanding academic awareness to produce research and writing of value to their study field.

The first three categories emphasised academic work performance with a varying focus on capability, competency, and credibility while the last three categories highlighted academic knowledge with various focuses on breadth and depth of disciplinary and linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, the findings suggested that each participant holds a different view of their development as an academic writer. Therefore, academic writer development could aid the first-year doctoral students' understanding of their growth and progress in their studies.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study attempted to share first-year doctoral students' ways of understanding their development as academic writers. The participants' responses to a critical reflective level of their experiences illuminate the four different ways of thinking and understanding development as an academic writer. The four different ways include (i) becoming self-assured as an academic writer, (ii) becoming acknowledged as an academic writer, (iii) becoming more productive as an academic writer, and (iv) becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer. Identifying the variations provides a more extensive understanding of personal learning, which is critical for doctoral students to develop an academic mindset. The four variations could be extended further in future studies to foster development. Additionally, understanding personal development can gradually guide doctoral students to progress to the next level individually and collectively.

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Appendix A. Matrix of Main Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Becoming self-assured as an academic writer

Description	Sub-themes/Excerpts
Gaining confidence when writing about one's chosen research topic	**Gained confidence and became more involved in writing** 'My supervisor said, the problem is somewhere in the problem statement, but it is not clear and straightforward… After few rounds of writing, I am more confident now because my supervisor says ok…I am more willing to write.' (John)
Setting realistic goals and expectation in the process of writing the doctoral research proposal	**Realistic goal setting and achieving them** 'I want to ensure that what I plan to research and like write my Ph.D. proposal is something that is doable and making sure that seminar 1 at the end of my first year is achievable.' (Sue)
Write as a member of a discipline that the members of the academic community acknowledged	**Writing need to appeal to and address intended audience** 'I know that I need to write in ways that my sv [supervisor] say yes, and interesting to people especially in my field, curriculum.' (John)
Having a clear objective, direction, and research plans	**Clear academic communication between PhD student and supervisors** 'I feel confident with what I want to do. I think I am on the right track especially after…rounds of supervision and she said ok, you are good to move on from here.' (Lee)
Possess motivational traits to work hard	**Motivation and commitment** 'I don't want to give up now even though my supervisor commented that she expected more from Ph.D. students. Also, at times, I don't feel like I belong here … but anyhow, I want to keep trying.' (Nora)
Talking about revising drafts to create logical flow and crafting academic arguments	**Logical flow in writing and present compelling academic arguments** 'I still remember my first few drafts, forget the number but I know my writing was not good. There was no flow, like she [supervisor] said, it's everywhere but I am so happy that I persisted to revise my drafts and…rethink the argument I put forward...' (Lee)

Theme 2: Becoming acknowledged as an academic writer

Description	Sub-themes/Excerpts
Seeing supervision sessions as a place of negotiation and construction for both knowledge and identity	**Negotiation between expectations and interpretations** 'He [supervisor] is aware and know that my master background is not in this field but every time I share about my opinion during supervision, he [supervisor] accept both my weakness and strength. He will try to guide me to make alignment and see how I can best present my ideas that is accepted here.' (Sue)
Talking about the process of supervision and writing the doctoral research proposal	**Appreciation by supervisors** 'She [supervisor] took the time to read my work like quite fast, efficient if you ask me. Then, she [supervisor] guide me on how to make it better. I feel like being appreciated for all that I do and this make me more open about my research work with her.' (John)

Aspire to become part of the academic community and building reputation in university	**Development and initial validation by peers and supervisors** 'Getting ourself known by peers and supervisors is like establishing ourself, I mean to have our academic work, knowledge, and writing skills being acknowledged is like the beginning.' (Sue)
Making an effort to become members of the academic community	**Aspire to push further** 'I know I am not there yet, but for me, it's okay because that just motivate me to work harder. I will try my best to push further.' (Lee)
Talking about being valued as member/part of the doctorate community in the university	**Peer support to improve well-being and research outcomes** 'When we discuss about research in the Ph.D. room, my [Ph.D.] friends never blame me if I don't know about something or if I said something that's not so right or correct. They always encourage me to become better and they not only give good comments. They also give me constructive ones.' (Nora)
Interested to connect with other academics especially in her chosen field of study	**Importance of international perspectives** 'I think I should have tried to make contact with other academics through seminar or conferences held outside university like international conferences but I didn't, you know. Maybe I can find people with similar interest or individuals who are established in my field of study.' (Lee)

Theme 3: Becoming more productive as an academic writer

Description	Sub-themes/Excerpts
Reading more academic materials Writing more for the doctoral research proposal Having a vision to seed innovation through application of grant and research funding	**Invested to increased scholarly productivity** 'I think it's really important that I start putting more effort like using academic language, form [academic] arguments like what my supervisor says. Only this way, I can move forward, progress, and be more productive.' (Sue) **Interested to contribute to projects of national significance** '…try to apply and get research funding or grant because it is like the first step where people here… see some promising results or impact from our Ph.D. research work.' (John)
Seeing the value of reading and writing academically The goal to succeed at an academic task is put into action deliberately	**Value in the academic tasks** '… I think I see a bigger picture now of how writing is more than an academic task. It's more like a communication tool that can help me share my knowledge in this field to more people. Writing is not just useful in university; we need writing everywhere.' (Nora) **Staying engaged in doctoral studies** 'last time, I am more reluctant to read actually and the materials she [supervisor] send me I didn't…and deadlines overdue sometimes because I have other commitments too. But now, I feel something is different, I am more willing to spent…time to engaged with academic activities.' (Lee)
The role of intellectual curiosity in learning Open-mindedness by taking into account all of the available information and points of view	**Fostering curiosity in learning** 'My sv [supervisor] always say it is ok to work on and publish the not so famous area of research at the moment. What is more important is…take a curious mind to look beneath the surface and discover the new possibilities.' (Lee)

Positive supervisor feedback can transform the process of writing a doctoral research proposal into a rewarding experience	**Positive supervisor feedback makes learning more rewarding** 'When I get positive feedback from my supervisor, I think the process of writing the Ph.D. research proposal is worth it. All the struggles that I went through, the tears and countless times of revising the drafts, it is all worth it. It is really rewarding.' (John)

Theme 4: Becoming a deep thinker as an academic writer

Description	Sub-themes/Excerpts
Making informed decisions about a course of action to resolve issue in doctoral studies	**Involvement in major decisions** 'I remember how I told my sv [supervisor] when I first started that I want to use this particular methodology and her [supervisor] responses were neither ok or no. She [supervisor] just mentioned she is not really a number person.' (John)
Sharing how effective reading is more important than aiming for hundreds of articles in the process of writing the doctoral research proposal	**Seeking to change the focus from numbers to quality** 'I don't think I need to read hundreds or thousands of articles. I need to know how to choose good articles and thesis to read. Like she [supervisor] said, quality is more important than quantity.' (Nora)
Talking about the importance of gaining a better understanding of the nature of the Ph.D. process	**Deep and meaningful learning process** 'Rather than jump right in to solve with the one solution that come to my mind. I need to try to extend my idea, make connections between prior knowledge and experiences, and try to connect it to what I am learning now.' (Lee)
Talking about a processing phase where thinking and learning take place	**Reflective thinking process** 'Writing my Ph.D. proposal, submitting, returning, re-writing, revising, and so on is a time-consuming process. But, once I've gotten the hang of it, I try to reflect, think about what she [supervisor] said, what I read and all the new information I have.' (John)
Bringing up how academic communication conventions differ across disciplines	**Learning to think and write in a discipline** 'I notice the kind of word or style of writing is different here. So, I am learning to adjust my style of writing to suit the leadership education. I think for most of the time, I need to learn how to think like one too before I write.' (Sue)
Talking about the need to have a deep and active engagement with the academic texts	**Learning to develop critical academic reading abilities** 'Every article… related to my Ph.D. that I read, I note what is the main idea. I need to try read slowly, not skimming but make more connections with the article I am reading like the structure and avoid rewriting them. This is hard.' (Lee)