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FROM STRUGGLES TO STRATEGIES: L2 DOCTORAL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC DISCOURSE SOCIALISATION INTO ACADEMIC PUBLISHING DURING CANDIDATURE

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Abstract
Although publishing during doctoral candidature is increasingly central to academic success, yet research on L2 doctoral students' writing for publication has largely focused on Anglophone contexts or examined challenges primarily at the linguistic level. Less is known about how L2 doctoral students in non-English-dominant settings navigate the combined linguistic, structural and epistemological demands of academic publishing. Addressing this gap, this qualitative case study examines how two L2 doctoral students, one Malaysian ESL student and one Algerian EFL student are socialised into publishing practices at a research-intensive university in Malaysia. Guided by second language socialisation, academic discourse socialisation and communities of practice frameworks, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal a trajectory from struggles to strategies in L2 doctoral publishing socialisation. Students initially faced linguistic difficulties in academic expression, structural challenges in navigating reviewer feedback and publication processes, and epistemological challenges in positioning their research. Over time, they developed strategies through supervisory guidance, sustained writing practices, and distributed support networks.

Keywords: academic discourse socialisation, academic writing, community of practice, publishing during candidature, second language socialisation

Introduction
Publishing during doctoral studies is increasingly recognised as a desirable component of doctoral education. Writing and publishing during candidature offers numerous benefits to doctoral students. It validates the quality and significance of their work (Shamsi & Osam, 2022) and enhances the visibility and impact of their research (Kwan, 2010). Publishing also provides opportunities to develop professional identities and build networks within the academic community (Bartkowski et al., 2015). As a result, many universities encourage or even require doctoral students to publish scholarly articles during their candidature.

At some universities, this requirement is so stringent that failure to publish can result in not being awarded the degree, reinforcing the "publish or no degree"

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mantra (Lei, 2023; Li, 2016; Shamsi & Osam, 2022). While publishing during doctoral candidature is beneficial, it also presents several challenges. As novices, students must master the complexities of academic writing, which demands clarity, coherence, and strict adherence to disciplinary, thesis, and journal standards (Kwan, 2010; Shamsi & Osam, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2021). Given that English is the primary language for many prestigious international peer-reviewed journals, proficiency in English adds another layer of difficulty, particularly for non-native speakers (Indrayadi, 2023). Additionally, the peer review process can be daunting to novice researchers, as it involves rigorous scrutiny and often requires multiple rounds of revisions (Yu & Jiang, 2020).

The publishing process is particularly challenging for second language (L2) doctoral students as it requires developing proficiency in a new language. Research on doctoral students' academic discourse socialisation has been significantly shaped by many studies (e.g., Anderson, 2021; Lei, 2023; Li, 2007; Li, 2016; Phyo et al., 2024; Sung, 2023; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Hyland, 2021). Li (2005) argued that there is insufficient research on disciplinary enculturation in non-Anglophone contexts, particularly within Asian universities. Furthermore, much of the second language socialisation research has focussed extensively on English-dominant countries and universities, with limited exploration in non-English-dominant contexts (Bankier, 2019; Friedman, 2023).

In Southeast Asia, the role of English varies across national contexts. Malaysia is one of the few countries where English is considered a second language (ESL), while others, such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia, English is generally treated as a foreign language (EFL) (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012). In Malaysia, English holds an institutionalised role in the education system, government, business and legal domains, and is widely used as a medium of instruction at tertiary levels, especially in science, technology, and research (Low, 2010). As a result, Malaysian students typically have more regular access to English, which may influence their academic literacy development compared to their EFL counterparts. In 2024, Malaysia has attracted many international students with 33, 216 new applications from China, 6917 from Bangladesh and 5556 from Indonesia (Walker, 2025). Additionally, this study provides insights into how these students often face unique challenges and employ different strategies for navigating academic publishing.

While previous studies have explored L2 doctoral publishing experiences (e.g. Indrayadi, 2023; Li, 2005, 2006, 2007), relatively little research has examined how doctoral students in universities in Southeast Asia navigate the process of publishing during candidature. Understanding this process is particularly important in contexts such as Malaysia, where doctoral students are increasingly required to publish in indexed journals prior to graduation. Therefore, this study explores how L2 ESL and EFL doctoral students become socialised into academic discourse and publishing practices during their candidature, focusing on their integration into the academic discourse community. By combining the framework of second language socialisation, academic discourse socialisation with a community of practice analysis (Duff, 2007, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991), we examine how these students navigate and integrate into the academic discourse community. Specifically, we aim to investigate the following research questions:

1. What challenges do L2 doctoral students face while socialising in the academic discourse community when publishing during candidature?
2. How do L2 doctoral students draw on strategies and support networks to overcome the challenges of writing for publication during candidature?

Publishing during candidature

A growing body of literature on doctoral studies has investigated doctoral students' publishing during candidature. This area of research is becoming prevalent in doctoral education, higher education, and applied linguistics, as many universities now mandate or strongly encourage doctoral students to publish during their studies (Bakar & Kumar, 2025). While it is essential and beneficial, publishing during doctoral candidature presents several challenges, particularly for L2 doctoral students. Kwan (2009) observed that many Asian universities require research and publications to be internationally recognised, necessitating writing in English. This requirement adds to the difficulties and complexities faced by L2 doctoral students, who must navigate not only the research process and thesis writing but also the linguistic demands of English publication. Indrayadi (2023) observed that, beyond the conventions of publishing, L2 doctoral students encounter language issues such as academic writing skills, scientific vocabulary, and coherence and cohesion in their writing. Similarly, Shamsi and Osam (2022) reported that L2 doctoral students needed help with English language misuse, including grammatical errors and vocabulary choices.

Therefore, engaging with an academic discourse community is essential for doctoral students. Lahenius (2012) emphasised that a robust academic discourse community encompasses mastery of academic writing skills and integration into a scholarly network where students feel valued and supported. Research on the socialisation of L2 doctoral students within these communities has explored various facets of writing and publishing during candidature. For example, Li's (2005, 2006, 2007) studies which documented how Chinese doctoral students (each individual case) became enculturated into disciplinary writing and publishing practices. Drawing on discourse community approach and legitimate peripheral participation, these studies highlighted how L2 doctoral students learnt the norms of academic publishing through co-authoring with supervisors, negotiating feedback from reviewers, and gradually developing their scholarly voice. Another study by Zhang and Hyland (2021) explored the role of doctoral apprenticeship, feedback communities, and the development of writing expertise among two Chinese doctoral students in Hong Kong, further highlighting the need for multidimensional scaffolding and interconnected mentorship. More recently, Phyo et al. (2024) have highlighted the development of English academic writing proficiency through socialisation, supervisory support, and practice in non-Anglophone doctoral education context in Hungary. Together, these studies emphasise the importance of language and academic discourse socialisation in doctoral writing specifically on publication during candidature but have largely focused on linguistic and rhetorical enculturation.

The present study extends this scholarship by examining how L2 doctoral students in Malaysia navigate linguistic, rhetorical, structural and epistemological challenges when writing for publication during their doctoral candidature, and how these struggles give rise to strategies that support their academic publishing

development. In doing so, this study contributes to the understanding of academic discourse socialisation in non-English-dominant contexts, particularly within Southeast Asia by illuminating how doctoral students negotiate the expectations of English-medium scholarly publishing during candidature.

Second language socialisation and academic discourse socialisation

The present study is grounded in the sociocultural framework of Second Language Socialisation (Duff, 2007) and the Community of Practice model (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). At its core, language socialisation is a theory that describes the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge as a process of learning to interact and engaging with others (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Schieffelin and Ochs emphasise that language socialisation examines how novices develop social and cultural knowledge or competence within various contexts and social experiences by interacting with experts. Ultimately, this socialisation enables novices or newcomers to acquire knowledge and participate fully in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Most studies on language socialisation focus on how native speakers of a language acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge within a specific discourse community.

Second Language Socialisation (L2S) builds on the broader framework of language socialisation by explicitly examining how individuals who are not native speakers, referred to as novices or newcomers acquire linguistic and cultural competencies needed to participate fully in a target discourse community (Duff, 2007). This subfield focuses on how these learners, who bring their diverse linguistic, cultural, and community backgrounds, navigate and adapt to new social and academic norms through explicit instruction and implicit social interactions. Duff and Anderson (2015) highlight the roles of two key participants in this socialisation process: 1) mentors or experts, such as experienced discourse community members, and 2) novices or newcomers who strive to master the community's practices and conventions. This dynamic interaction facilitates the integration of L2 learners into their academic communities, shaping their journey from peripheral to full participation.

Academic discourse socialisation (ADS), which extends the ideas of L2S theory, provides a more targeted lens to explore how both local and international students become integrated into academic communities (Burhan-Horasanlı, 2024; Kınık Gülek, 2025). Kobayashi et al. (2017) describe ADS as encompassing "the social, cognitive, and cultural processes, ideologies, and practices involved in higher education" (p. 239). This involves learning to engage meaningfully within academic contexts by acquiring the spoken, written and intellectual norms valued in these contexts. Given that English functions as the global language of academia, many L2 doctoral students face the compounded challenges of acquiring general English proficiency alongside mastering the specialised academic discourse of their disciplines. In academic writing, students are expected not only to convey their research and critical thinking but also to construct scholarly identities and manage interactions with various stakeholders in the writing process (Duff, 2010). Examining these processes through the lens of ADS is therefore relevant for understanding how L2 doctoral students learn to participate in English-medium scholarly publishing during their candidature.

Community of practice, academic discourse community, and legitimate peripheral participation

Building on the principles of Second Language Socialisation and Academic Discourse Socialisation, the concept of Community of Practice (CoP) further elucidates how L2 doctoral students integrate into academic discourse communities. A CoP is a "voluntary group of people who share a common interest or passion and come together to explore these interests and ideas, sharing and growing their practice" (Mercieca, 2017, p. 3). This concept focuses on the social dimensions of learning. Gee (1990, p. 127) describes these discourses as "ways of being in the world", signifying membership in a CoP through participation in its valued activities. This study focuses on the academic discourse community as a specific type of CoP, highlighting how L2 doctoral students navigate and contribute to these scholarly communities.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), a core concept of the CoP model, describes how novices or newcomers evolve into experienced members and eventually experts within a CoP or collaborative project (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning in this context is seen as an active process, where novices gain expertise through involvement in community-specific activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In essence, learning is viewed as participating in the community's social norms and practices, which allows novices to build competencies and understanding. To grasp LPP, it is crucial to analyse various aspects of the CoP, including member interactions, activities, language, tools, and goals, and their interconnections.

In this study, we apply the CoP framework to Second Language Socialisation to explore how doctoral students are socialised into publishing practices during their candidature. This approach allows us to investigate the factors that influence their legitimacy and involvement in research publication and the foundational learning and interactions between doctoral students, their supervisors, and other CoP members.

Method

Research site and participants

This study forms part of a broader investigation into second language socialisation in higher education in Malaysia, with a particular focus on doctoral students' experiences of writing for publication during candidature. This research was conducted at a leading public research-intensive university in Malaysia that consistently ranks highly in the QS World University Rankings. English is the primary medium of instruction, research communication, and scholarly publication at this institution, making it an appropriate site for examining academic discourse socialisation in a second-language context. Malaysia is generally characterised as an ESL context, where many Malaysians are bilingual and multilingual, using both Malay (the national language), English and their mother tongues. Thus, this multilingual environment attracts doctoral students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, making Malaysia a useful context for examining how L2 doctoral students from different language backgrounds engage with English-medium academic writing and publishing practices.

For this study, we used purposive sampling to select two doctoral students from the English language department: Zara from Algeria and Nadia from Malaysia (pseudonyms). The participants were selected as they were the only doctoral

students who were actively engaged in writing and submitting manuscripts for publication during the period of data collection. Their participation, therefore, provided an opportunity to capture real-time experiences of writing for publication during doctoral candidature. Zara is an international student studying in Malaysia and from a country where English is considered a foreign language (EFL) while Nadia is a local Malaysian student where English is considered a Second language (ESL) in Malaysia. The participants were selected from the English department where thesis writing and publications requirements are in English. At this university, doctoral candidates must publish in internationally indexed journals, such as Scopus, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), or Web of Science (WOS), before their viva and graduation.

Table 1. The demographic details of each participant.

Name	Zara	Nadia
Age	28	35
Gender	Female	Female
Nationality	Algerian	Malaysian
Year Of Doctoral Candidature	Final year	Final year
Master's degree	English (Algeria)	TESL[1](Malaysia)
Undergraduate Degree	English (Algeria)	TESL (Malaysia)
Working Experience	Taught English proficiency to private school students	Taught English proficiency to university undergraduate students

Data collection

Our research received approval from the university ethics committee, ensuring that all ethical standards and protocols were followed throughout the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases during 2023 and 2024. In 2023, the first round explored the students' academic experiences and challenges in preparing research articles for publication. At that time, Nadia had published a paper while Zara was preparing her manuscript. The second round, in 2024, focussed on the support networks that helped the students in their writing and submission process, with both having secured acceptance for their papers by then. Interviews included discussions on drafts and feedback from supervisors and reviewers, providing insights into their publication experiences. Each interview was around 60 minutes, and all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Some of the interview questions are:

1) What challenges did you face in writing for publication?
2) What strategies did you use to overcome the challenges?
3) Did you get any help during this time?

Data analysis

The data were analysed using both case analysis and cross-case analysis, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as well as thematic analysis by King and

Horrocks (2010). Initially, each transcript was independently open coded to identify segments related to the doctoral students' experiences of writing and publishing during their candidature. Although the coding process was largely inductive, it was informed by the conceptual lens of ADS and L2S, which sensitised the analysis to issues related to linguistic, rhetorical, and epistemological challenges in academic publishing. Relevant words and phrases within the transcripts were identified and grouped into preliminary categories aligned with the research questions.

Subsequently, we convened to discuss and refine our codes and categories. One of us then drafted a preliminary narrative for each participant. After completing these drafts, we met again to discuss data interpretation and conducted a cross-case analysis to identify themes, patterns and draw broader generalisations. At this stage, we also connected our findings with the study's conceptual framework, and the transcripts were standardised for clarity, but care was taken to maintain the authenticity of the students' responses. To ensure the accuracy of our interpretations, we employed member checking by sharing our findings with colleagues within our departments for feedback.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

In this section, we discuss our findings through narrative organised around the research questions, highlighting the progression from struggles to strategies as these L2 doctoral students navigate the challenges of writing for publication during their doctoral candidature. Our data, based on verbatim quotes from the doctoral students are discussed in case studies according to three themes on the challenges and the strategies they used to overcome the challenges. We also included descriptions of interactions these students had with the networks that shaped their writing for publication practices during candidature. Based on our analysis, we classified and interpreted the challenges into three themes:

1. Linguistic challenges relate to language proficiency and the ability to write in academic English such as lexical and grammatical complexity, genre conventions and misinterpretation of reviewer comments.
2. Structural challenges refer to institutional and procedural obstacles in the publishing process, such as limited mentorship, article structuring, journal selection, and opaque peer-review practices.
3. Epistemological challenges involved positioning research within disciplinary debates and developing an authoritative scholarly voice.

Zara's case

Zara began her doctoral studies in 2020 after completing her master's degree in 2019. Although she had earned both her undergraduate and master's degrees in English language in Algeria, she reflected on her ongoing struggle to match the rhetorical strength and linguistic fluency observed in writing for publication and thesis. She admitted:

> *Sometimes I wanted to write a more professional or academic style, but I don't think I have reached that stage yet…I find the language (academic language) is much stronger. There is a richness in*

> *vocabulary and style that I struggled to achieve. To be honest, it is not easy for me to write like that.*

Zara illustrated a common linguistic and identity-based challenge for L2 scholars. This finding is aligned with Hyland (2016), Ma (2020) and Phyo et al. (2024) as the students in their study indicated initial struggles with English academic writing. Zara demonstrated an emerging awareness of genre norms, and the standards of professional academic discourse yet simultaneously expressed self-doubt and perceived distance from those expectations. This reflects an early stage of acculturation into academic writing, where exposure to disciplinary norms prompts reflection but may also generate feelings of inadequacy. However, in the same interview, she also described a strategy that helped shift their experience from frustration to growing confidence. She explained:

> *I don't have this problem anymore. I mean, my academic writing has improved a lot from my bachelor's to my master's. When I started my PhD, as I mentioned, I was aware of this challenge. So, I started to practice a lot. I write every day and often get feedback and comments on my drafts. That's why I feel it has improved and become easier. Maybe the quality is not perfect, but it has become a habit to write in English and academic writing. The quantity of pages I write is so much more.*

Here, Zara identified daily writing practice as a turning point in her academic development. This finding is aligned with Sword's (2016) as daily writing practice maintains momentum. While she still questions the quality of her writing, the habit of consistent engagement in writing and getting feedback has allowed her to internalise academic discourse practices more naturally. This transition, from doubt to growing assurance underscores the role of active participation in academic practices as a vehicle for socialisation and identity formation. Through repeated practice, she is not just improving technical skills but also developing a sense of belonging within the academic community.

Furthermore, developing an awareness of genre-specific conventions in academic writing specifically for writing a research article is a critical yet often challenging process for L2 doctoral students (Bakar & Kumar, 2025). Zara described difficulty with writing introductions and especially conclusions as key components that demand rhetorical precision and genre familiarity. While the body of the text posed little difficulty, summarising key points meaningfully within the constraints of a conclusion was described as cognitively and linguistically demanding:

> *When it comes to the introduction and conclusion parts, I start wondering what should I write? How can I summarise all in 2-3 sentences which are meaningful?... It's always about the cohesion, coherence and the word choice. I feel that I cannot summarise. I feel everything is important.*

This struggle reflects a common challenge for L2 writers who are still internalising academic rhetorical structure and the discursive expectations of their disciplines (Phyo et al., 2024). Zara identified two key strategies for addressing these difficulties: seeking supervisor support and engaging in model-based reading. With her supervisor's guidance on basic academic structures, she gained foundational skills. She said, "My supervisor assisted me with basic academic writing from the structure of an academic paragraph to thesis writing and for publication". In parallel, she began to examine published academic papers as models, stating, "I try to read as much as possible to see how people organise their ideas or summarise their conclusions…and then I try apply them into my writing". These strategies illustrate how Zara actively engages in academic discourse socialisation by drawing on both interpersonal and textual resources. This finding is in accord with Hyland's (2016) study which indicates that L2 doctoral students will refer to previous studies and replicate the writing models as well as seek supervisor's help.

Besides linguistic challenges, L2 doctoral students often encounter challenges in interpreting and responding to structural feedback during the peer review process (Yu & Jiang, 2020). Zara described a moment of initial discouragement when faced with extensive reviewer comments, noting "the paper was not rejected but it was returned with numerous comments… I felt disheartened and confused, questioning why the reviewers had interpreted my work that way." This reaction illustrates a common early-stage difficulty in academic socialisation which is grappling with the genre-specific expectations of peer-reviewed writing and managing the emotional impact of critique (Yang, 2023). However, rather than disengaging, Zara re-approached the feedback multiple times gradually realising that clarity and explicitness were crucial. She reflected, "after reviewing the comments a second and third time, I realised that not everyone might grasp my intended message, so I needed to be as clear as possible". This critical reflection marks an important point in Zara's socialisation into academic discourse, as it demonstrates a shift toward reader-awareness and a willingness to revise based on external perspectives. Nonetheless, some reviewer comments remained opaque despite repeated readings. In this instance, Zara relied on supervisory support to decode and respond to unclear feedback. She noted "I reached out to my supervisor…she was able to explain the reviewers' comments and guide me on necessary revisions". Here, the supervisor acts as a key facilitator in Zara's learning process, embodying the role of a more knowledgeable other in her CoP. Zara's response reflects legitimate peripheral participation. She is actively engaging with expert feedback but still relying on guided interpretation.

Another significant aspect of Zara's challenges in the writing for publication process is constructing the literature review and articulating the theoretical framework. Zara explicitly identified these components as ongoing obstacles in their academic writing development, particularly in relation to conceptual clarity and rhetorical organisation. She explained:

> *The part of literature review and a part of theoretical framework…these two things…I couldn't till now solve that problem… It's not only about how to transfer the idea to words, it's actually more about how to relate the ideas with my research.*

This reflects an epistemological and genre-related difficulty, where the challenge is not merely linguistic but also cognitive such as grappling with how to situate research within existing knowledge and justify theoretical choices. Such challenges align with the broader findings in L2 writing scholarship in which students struggle with moves such as identifying research gaps, positioning arguments and aligning theory with methodology (e.g., Cheng, 2008; Chen & Li, 2019). In response to the epistemological challenge, Zara employed self-directed learning strategies, such as watching academic writing videos or attending short online courses, particularly during less intensive periods. She said, "I try to read books or some articles… and take short courses about academic writing… I directly go to watch a course or video on YouTube". These acts of informal learning reflect an emerging agency and self-regulation, contributing to Zara's epistemological development and gradual integration into academic practice.

When asked about other individuals who supported her during the writing and publication process, Zara's socialisation into academic publishing was shaped by broader support networks involving family, peers and academic staff. As she shared:

> *The primary support has come from my supervisor, who consistently reviewed and provided feedback on my work, guiding me through my doctoral journey. She also helped and guided me from searching for a suitable journal until the paper was accepted for publication. Second, my father, an academic professor in a different field, has also been a valuable resource…Occasionally, I seek feedback from lecturers at the university, particularly those in the English department. I gather advice from various sources to improve my writing.*

Zara's explanation reflects the layered nature of support, demonstrating how she drew on both institutional and informal resources. The supervisor played a central role, offering regular guidance. This is consistent with the function of an expert member in a CoP (Wenger, 1998), facilitating gradual integration into the discourse community. Simultaneously, her father's experience in the academic context illustrates how language socialisation can occur outside formal academic settings (Bankier, 2022), especially through trusted personal networks.

Zara further described her struggle with initiating her first draft and how she navigated this challenge:

> *I recall struggling with where to start and how to proceed with the first draft of my article… I contacted my friends for help drafting and reviewing paragraphs… ultimately, the significant progress on my paper was driven by my supervisor's support and discussions with my father.*

This experience highlights how L2 doctoral students often construct a constellation of support that spans institutional, familial, and peer-based relationships. Such networks contribute not only to linguistic and rhetorical development but also to the shaping of an academic identity (Curry & Lillis, 2017).

Nadia's case

Like Zara, Nadia also embarked on her doctoral journey in 2020, bringing her background as an English teacher who taught English proficiency to undergraduate students at the university. From the beginning, Nadia distinguished herself through her enthusiasm and independence in research and writing. Her active participation in various research projects led by lecturers at the university kept her engaged and refined her academic writing skills to meet the demands of doctoral-level scholarship. When asked about her development in academic writing, Nadia said that she started learning during her undergraduate study and during her master's, she started to take extra academic writing courses. She also indicated that during the time she was teaching as a language instructor, she taught academic writing skills to undergraduate students at the university. Thus, these experiences have helped her to form a solid foundation in academic writing especially on the linguistic aspects as she has no problem in writing her research ideas using appropriate academic and disciplinary language.

However, when asked specifically about writing for publication during her PhD candidature, Nadia indicated some structural and epistemological challenges she faced, despite her proactive approach and experiences, the transition from thesis writing to publishing presented its challenges. Nadia noted:

> *My supervisor encouraged me to start writing and publishing early in my candidature. She asked me to prepare a systematic literature review of my research. However, while I was working on the paper, she was away for a few weeks, and I could not reach her for guidance on writing the paper or addressing the reviewers' comments. This posed a significant challenge for me. I am very grateful that the paper was ultimately accepted for publication.*

Nadia's narrative highlights a structural challenge in her initial attempt at writing for publication, particularly the dependency on timely supervisory guidance. While early publication experience can foster academic socialisation into publication, the absence of support at a critical stage (drafting and revision) disrupted Nadia's ability to navigate genre expectations and reviewer feedback. It also suggests limited institutional scaffolding beyond the supervisor, which is a known issue in L2 doctoral education (Li & Flowerdew, 2007). Nadia continued:

> *I used only one database in my review, but the reviewers requested that I include additional databases. I was eager to complete the task and focus on my thesis. However, I needed my supervisor's advice on addressing the reviewers' comments: Should I add more databases or justify why I chose not to include them?*

Here, the challenge extends to the epistemological level where Nadia was unsure how to justify methodological choices in the paper, particularly in response to reviewers' comments. This reflects the struggle to develop epistemic authority (Hyland, 2002), which is often under-developed in L2 doctoral students. The dilemma between satisfying reviewers' expectations and progressing with the thesis also illustrates tensions in managing academic workload and publication

requirement during candidature. Nadia further explained that she overcame this challenge by patiently waiting for her supervisor to return to the university and had a discussion with her. Nadia said, "We discussed and my supervisor assisted me on how to attend to the reviewer's comment and revise the paper". This illustrates a support seeking strategy and mentor-mediated resolution of reviewer's comments grounded in Nadia's recognition of the supervisor's role as an expert mentor in the academic publishing process. Rather than attempting to resolve the issue alone, she relied on relational support and timely intervention from a more experienced member of the academic community.

Nadia shared another incident that happened. She explained:

> *There was one time where I wrote another paper and submitted to X journal. The paper returned with only editorial correction and got accepted for publication. I was excited and shared the news with my supervisor. She was surprised and quickly checked the status of the journal, and we found out that the journal is not an index journal, and it is potentially a predatory journal. I almost paid the journal to publish my paper. I felt relief I didn't do it, and I spoke to my supervisor before doing it. I learnt my lesson here.*

This excerpt highlights another structural and epistemological challenge often encountered by L2 doctoral students. Nadia's experience reveals her initial lack of awareness regarding predatory journals, and how fast editorial acceptance can be misleading. Her decision to consult her supervisor before making any payment became a critical turning point. This instance reflects the importance of expert-novice interaction (Duff, 2007). The supervisor, as an experienced member of the publishing community, not only prevented a potentially costly mistake but also facilitated Nadia's growing epistemological awareness.

Following her supervisor's advice, she tried to submit this paper, as well as other papers to reputable journals. Expecting that her papers would be accepted and published, Nadia was disappointed to learn that many of her papers were rejected by multiple journals. Additionally, at this moment, as she was considered as a final year student who had fulfilled the publication requirement for her thesis submission. Thus, she received limited supervisory support for publication purposes. This was due to the supervisor's workload, so Nadia had to rely more heavily on reviewers' feedback. She indicated:

> *The journey has been challenging, mainly as I aimed to publish my research in reputable journals. But my papers faced multiple rejections. There has yet to be an update from the editor, and the paper still needs to be published. My supervisor has many doctoral students to oversee now; I do not want to burden her. So, I used the detailed feedback from the reviewers to revise my work and submit to different journals…the reviewers' comments were constructive, and I found that they provided more detailed feedback.*

Nadia adopted a resilient and proactive approach by revising the manuscripts based on detailed reviewers' comments and resubmitting to other journals. This

response reflects Nadia's perception that the in-depth feedback from reviewers played a developmental role in her integration into the academic community, positioning her as a legitimate peripheral participant. The detailed input offered by reviewers provided the intellectual guidance she needed, compensating for the limited support available from her supervisor due to her other commitments. This experience facilitated her development as a researcher and supported her growing independence and resilience in navigating the publication process during her doctoral journey.

Nadia also highlighted the significant emotional support she received from her fellow doctoral colleagues, departmental lecturers, and her family. She expressed her gratitude for the camaraderie and motivation provided by her peers, noting:

> *I am very grateful for the support of my friends who are also pursuing their doctoral degrees. We often have informal writing sessions together, which helps. I also rely on Dr Y from the department; she is my go-to lecturer for advice. I feel comfortable discussing issues with her; whenever I feel down, she always makes time for an impromptu meeting. Additionally, my family has been a great source of support, encouraging and making the journey feel less lonely.*

This support network helped alleviate the isolation often felt during doctoral studies and provided Nadia with a reliable foundation of encouragement and guidance, reinforcing the importance of a supportive community in academic success.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on second-language socialisation in academic publishing by highlighting the multifaceted socialisation processes experienced by L2 doctoral students, Zara and Nadia, during their candidature. This study also broadens the scope by examining students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thereby providing additional perspectives on the academic socialisation of L2 doctoral students from a Malaysian context.

L2 doctoral challenges and strategies in dealing with publication during candidature

The findings of this study indicate that L2 doctoral students experienced multiple challenges in writing an English journal article during their candidature and adopted multi-layered strategies across several domains reported in the findings section. We summarise our findings on these aspects in Table 2.

Table 2. L2 doctoral challenges and strategies in dealing with publication during candidature

Theme	Participant	Challenge	Strategy to overcome challenge
Linguistic	Zara	● Difficulty summarising ideas and selecting appropriate academic vocabulary ● Struggled with introduction and conclusion writing	● Learnt from supervisor ● Read published articles to learn structure and language use ● Observed how authors summarise and organised ideas ● Developed academic writing through daily writing practice
	Nadia	● Did not encounter problem on linguistic aspects	● Developed a strong academic writing knowledge prior to enrolling PhD
Structural	Zara	● Found reviewers' comments disheartening and confusing	● Re-read comments ● Sought help from supervisor to understand and implement suggestion
	Nadia	● Lack of immediate supervisor guidance when paper was under review ● Unsure how to respond to reviewers' comments ● nearly submitted to a predatory journal due to unfamiliarity with publishing standards	● Waited to consult supervisor upon her return ● Discussed reviewers' comments together and revised accordingly ● Consulted supervisor before making article processing fee ● Learnt to verify journal credibility with guidance
Epistemological	Zara	● Difficulty selecting and applying theoretical framework and	● Sought resources (books, articles, videos, courses) ● Discussed framework fit with supervisor

Theme	Participant	Challenge	Strategy to overcome challenge
		narrowing the literature	
	Nadia	● Needed to build understanding of academic discourse and personal academic voice in publishing	● Learnt from reviewers' detailed comments from rejected papers

L2 doctoral students socialising into communities of academic publishing practice

The findings of this study reveal that L2 doctoral students in Malaysia navigate the publishing process by engaging in a range of strategies that reflect their gradual integration into academic communities of practice. From a CoP perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), learning to publish is not merely an individual cognitive process but also a socially situated one, shaped by participation, interaction and identity construction within academic contexts. We discuss this aspect at the linguistic, structural and epistemological stages.

At the linguistic alignment and academic development stage, it is apparent that EFL students often struggle with academic writing due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom. This study is in line with previous studies (e.g., Bakar & Kumar, 2025; Hyland, 2016; Ma, 2020; Phyo et al., 2024) and highlights that these students face challenges in organising ideas, paraphrasing, using suitable academic vocabulary and genre which are essential for developing a strong academic voice. In contrast, ESL students benefit from an environment where English is more prevalent in daily life and education. This exposure facilitates better fluency and confidence in academic writing, as they are more accustomed to English language use in various contexts. Both Zara and Nadia highlight their reliance on strong supervisory support, peer networks and self-directed learning. In such an environment, as mentioned by Zara and Nadia, doctoral students must recognise their own writing weaknesses and seek support not only from supervisors but also other sources, such as journal articles reviewers, faculty and university writing support services, fellow PhD students, lecturers and digital tools.

At the structural navigation through mentor networks stage, structural challenges were also evident in both cases, though shaped by their different contexts. Zara found reviewer feedback discouraging and at times confusing. Over time, she re-read comments to clarify meaning and sought her supervisor's guidance in interpreting reviewers' expectations. Nadia faced a different set of challenges, including nearly submitting to a predatory journal but she avoided this mistake by consulting her supervisor before paying publication fees. These examples underscore the importance of supervisory mentorship and institutional guidance in navigating the publishing system. Both cases show how doctoral students move toward more central participation in academic communities by learning to navigate institutional processes with the support of mentors.

At the epistemological alignment and identity formation stage, epistemological challenges related to disciplinary positioning and scholarly identity were central to both participants' experiences. Zara struggled with selecting and applying appropriate theoretical frameworks and narrowing down her literature

review to identify a clear research gap. These difficulties stemmed partly from limited exposure to disciplinary debates in her earlier academic training. She turned to self-directed learning, such as reading books, articles, and attending short courses and videos. She also relied on her supervisor to check the relevance of her research. Nadia on the other hand, needed to develop her academic voice and align her work with the conventions of her discipline. Her strategies included learning from reviewer feedback and reflecting on how arguments were constructed. This process enabled her to see herself as a legitimate contributor to her field. Both trajectories demonstrate that academic discourse socialisation is not only about acquiring publishing skills but also about constructing an academic identity, echoing Wenger's (1998) notion that identity is a form of learning shaped through recognition and participation in a community of practice.

Figure 1 encapsulated the community of practice model of L2 doctoral students' (Zara and Nadia) academic publishing trajectories. The model illustrates how these students initially encountered linguistic, structural and epistemological challenges when attempting to write for publication during their candidature. The struggles or challenges were mediated by strategic actions and interactions with community members. Over time, these strategic practices enable the students to move from peripheral participation towards more central participation in the academic publishing community, contributing to the development of their academic identities as emerging scholars.

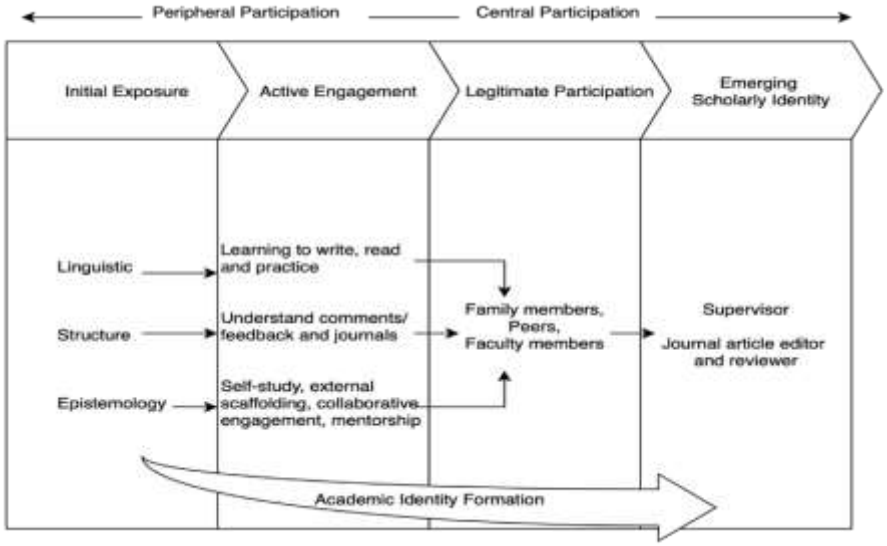

Figure 1. L2 doctoral students' trajectories into academic publishing in community of practice

Conclusion

In this study, we examined the publishing trajectories of two L2 ESL and EFL doctoral students studying in Malaysia, focusing on the linguistic, structural and epistemological challenges they faced during candidature and the strategies they employed to overcome them. By drawing on L2S, ADS and CoP, the findings illustrate that writing for publication is not simply an individual linguistic task, but a deeply socialised process shaped by mentorship, feedback, institutional structure and students' own agency.

The students navigated linguistic difficulties such as grammar, vocabulary, and genre conventions, as well as structural barriers like unclear reviewer feedback and risks of predatory publishing. They also confronted epistemological challenges in positioning their research within disciplinary discourses and developing a confident scholarly voice. Their strategies, such as daily writing practice, reading model texts, engaging with digital resources, co-authoring with supervisors, and drawing support from peers and family demonstrate the layered ways students move from peripheral to more central participation in academic publishing communities.

The findings reinforce the idea that epistemic authority and academic identity are gradually constructed through iterative cycles of writing, feedback and recognition. Importantly, this study extends prior research by situating doctoral students publishing experiences in a non-Anglophone, Southeast Asia context, where ESL and EFL learners face comparable but distinct challenges and opportunities. By comparing these two trajectories, this study highlights the interplay between individual persistence and community scaffolding in shaping students' pathways to publication.

We acknowledge that this study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single university. Future research should broaden the scope to include ESL and EFL students across diverse international contexts. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for stronger institutional, supervisory and peer-based support systems to help L2 doctoral students engage more confidently and productively with the global publishing community.

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