



A Contribution to the Decolonising the Mind Project: Student and Teacher Perspectives on Authorial Voice in Adolescent Multilingual Writers

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Received: 20 December 2024 / Accepted: 15 March 2026
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Abstract

Recent research underscores the significance of developing a strong, sustained authorial voice in multilingual adolescent writers (Blackman in *Int Edu J* 16(4):1, 2017; Pasqua in *English Australia* 52(3): 31–35, 2017; as reported by Schepen (Kimmerle’s *Intercultural Philosophy and Beyond: The Ongoing Quest for Epistemic Justice*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2022); Strausz in *Crit Stud Secur* 10(3): 144–156, 2022). The unique experiences and cultural capital of multilingual high school students have the potential to enrich and transform teaching practices, moving to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment, where authorial voices of marginalised students come through strongly and freely in their writing (Blackman in *Int Edu J* 16(4):1, 2017; Little in *English Australia* 57(1):15–27, 2022). However, research on authorial voice in the writing of adolescents, especially multilingual high school students, is scarce. This paper aims to bridge this gap and reports on intermediate findings from a longitudinal qualitative study, examining multilingual adolescents’ voice in academic writing, as they transition from a High School Preparation intensive English program to high schools in Australia. More specifically, the paper presents a contextual analysis of the student-composed texts, exploring the participants’ perspectives on authorial voice in academic writing. Findings from semi-structured interviews with the students and their teachers have important implications for curriculum design and teaching in Australian high school writing classrooms with the increasingly diverse student populations.

Keywords Authorial voice · Writer’s voice · Author’s voice · Multilingual writers · Perspectives on voice · High school writing · Post-colonialism · Decolonisation

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Introduction

Authorial voice has been reported to be an integral part of successful writing across different domains and written discourses, including academic writing in high school contexts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2018; Jou, 2019; Lehman & Anderson, 2021; Lehman & Sułkowski, 2021; Llosa et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2022; Zhao & Liu, 2021; Zhao & Wu, 2022).

Under the Australian Curriculum, high school students are required to develop and sustain an effective, impactful authorial voice across different writing genres (ACARA, 2018, ACEEN069, ACEEN034, ACELT1815; ACEEE039). However, recent research highlights a range of challenges that inhibit the effective use of authorial voice in academic high school writing (Estens & Curwood, 2020; Frawley, 2014; Green et al., 2023; Jogie, 2015; Pasqua, 2017). These challenges include the need for high school students to balance their unique individual voices and adhere to the strict conventions of academic writing (Cremin & Baker, 2010; McGraw & Mason, 2021; Myhill et al., 2023; Pasqua, 2017). They also include the limited opportunities for authorial voice to be nurtured, which often results in formulaic writing, especially in high-stakes examinations, which can lead to a lack of meaningful learning for adolescent writers (Frawley, 2014; Shand & Konza, 2016; Pasqua, 2017).

These challenges take on added significance in Australian high school contexts, where increasingly diverse classrooms amplify the need to support multilingual writers in developing a strong and sustained authorial voice (Little & Aglinskias, 2022; McGraw & Mason, 2021; Myhill et al., 2023). As the multilingual students' cultural capital is often suppressed, distorted, and misrepresented in the Western-centric, power-elite anglophone settings, they can find it even more challenging to engage in meaningful learning, and, as a result, can feel increasingly alienated (Spivak, 1988; Weaven & Clifford, 2015; Zipin, 2009). In this context, nurturing authorial voice in multilingual writers is not just about developing academic skills. It is also an important step towards what Wa Thiong'o (2019) calls decolonising the mind — a complex process of dismantling colonial legacies in culture and language (Fanon et al., 2001).

However, research into writing pedagogy in high school contexts pays limited attention to the crucial concept of authorial voice. Little is known also about how successful multilingual students are at meeting voice-related curriculum outcomes, what they learn about voice, and how they apply it in their writing. Similarly, literature provides little insight into the teachers' perspectives on voice or their expectations for its use in multilingual students' writing.

This study aims to bridge this gap by examining authorial voice of multilingual adolescents in academic writing. Specifically, this paper focuses on the contextual analysis phase of a larger longitudinal study on authorial voice in multilingual adolescent writers. The contextual analysis through semi-structured interviews examines the perspectives of student and teacher participants on voice in academic writing in high schools (HS) and a High School Preparation (HSP) program — an intensive English course for multilingual adolescents wishing to enter Australian high schools. Beyond its empirical focus, the study is also positioned within the broader post-colonial paradigm and, more specifically, within the decolonising the mind project, exam-

ining how dominant curriculum structures and pedagogical practices may enable or constrain multilingual authorial voices in writing.

More specifically, this paper reports on the intermediate findings from a longitudinal study that consists of three phases: (1) preliminary descriptive statistical analysis of the frequencies of authorial voice markers in student texts (Mhilli, 2020), (2) contextual analysis of participant perspectives on authorial voice, and (3) in-depth textual analysis of evaluative texts: argumentative essays and text responses.

Building on the preliminary analysis, which revealed a downward trend in the use of voice markers as the students transitioned between educational settings (Mhilli, 2020), this paper aims to shed light on the socio-discoursal contexts where multilingual adolescent writers expressed their authorial voice. The contexts are explored by analysing the student and teacher perspectives on authorial voice in writing in HSP and HS. To achieve this goal, the paper aims to answer two research questions guiding the contextual analysis: (1) What are the students' perspectives on voice in academic writing in HSP and HS? (2) What are the teachers' perspectives on voice in academic writing in HSP and HS?

Literature Review

Authorial Voice Across Shifting Epistemic Paradigms

Scholarly literature on voice in writing indicates that authorial voice is a complex notion that has been defined differently over the past half a century. Taking a diachronic perspective, some scholars have traced the shift from individual to socio-discoursal to a dialogic view of authorial voice in writing (Matsuda, 2015; Mhilli, 2023; Tardy, 2012).

The shift to the dialogic view of authorial voice is crucial as it echoes the broader shift within the epistemological paradigms from modernity to structuralism to post-structuralism, and post-colonialism.

The current post-colonial epistemological paradigm builds upon post-structuralist thought to continue challenging Western dominance and Eurocentrism. It focuses on the cultural, social, and political consequences of colonialism and knowledge production, moving beyond territorial decolonisation toward the decolonisation of the mind — an ongoing project aimed at dismantling the colonial grip on cultures and languages (Fanon et al., 2001), and at liberating unique non-Western authorial voices from Western dominance in cultural, social and discoursal spheres (Blackman, 2017; Breckman & Gordon, 2019; Said, 1977; Spivak, 1988; Wa Thiong'o, 2019). Within the post-colonial paradigm, authorial voice—viewed as a dialogue between individual qualities and socio-discoursal conventions—is not merely a personal style of writing but a contested space shaped by power, representation, and colonial legacy (Bhabha, 2004; Fanon et al., 2001; Said, 1977; Spivak, 1988; Wa Thiong'o, 2019).

In line with post-colonial theory, this study adopts a dialogic view of voice, acknowledging the interplay between individual and social dimensions. It also adopts Mhilli's (2023) definition of authorial voice as identity of the writer reflected in text. By attending to both individual-social dialogism of voice and bridging the notions of

author's voice and identity, the study conceptualises authorial voice as a site where multilingual students negotiate their cultural identities through textual voice within the socio-discoursal and cultural contexts of Western anglophone societies, such as Australia.

Authorial Voice and the Dialogue of Cultures

The dialogic perspective, however, encompasses more than just individual and social aspects of voice. This perspective, inspired by Bakhtin's view of dialogue as a pervasive concept penetrating all human existence and communication, is indeed broad and multifaceted. In his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin states that to be human means to communicate dialogically (Bakhtin, 1984). According to Bakhtin, the purpose of this omnipresent dialogue is to keep systems, including the system of human language and communication, in balance (Bakhtin, 1984; Boguslavskaya, 2011).

Thus, dialogism of voice exists not only on the level of the individual versus social dichotomy. It also expands to the dialogue of cultures, which is particularly evident in the context of Western colonialism, between the power-elite culture and the cultures of others. This dynamic is illustrated by influential works in post-colonial theory, such as Spivak's (1988) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Said's (1977) *Orientalism*, which shed light on the bias and hypocrisy of Western colonialism. More specifically, these seminal works point out that while the equal and unbiased dialogue of cultures is purported in Western countries, the power-elite discourses simultaneously create a non-Western narrative on behalf of non-Westerners and in so doing destroy the genuine voices of non-Western cultures (Maggio, 2007; Said, 1977; Spivak, 1988). Spivak, for instance, argues that European intellectuals have taken a paternalising position with an assumption that they know the non-Western and its exact place in the world (Maggio, 2007).

Thus, in the context of the dialogue of cultures and decolonisation of the mind, authorial voice can play a crucial role in mediating intercultural negotiations. Here, voice is not simply a textual manifestation of the writer, but also a site where cultural meanings meet, clash and engage in ongoing power struggles. Whether subdued by dominant discourses or resisting them, authorial voice actively participates in this cultural dialogue. Essentially, in written discourse, the dialogue of cultures unfolds through authorial voices that writers bring to their texts, revealing both the possibilities for genuine exchange or enduring inequalities that determine who is heard, how and on whose terms.

Authorial Voice and Australian High School Writing

The Australian Curriculum's assertion of the importance of authorial voice in writing is supported by recent research suggesting that the formative adolescent years are a crucial time for the development of unique individual voice; that is a voice that is perceived in a piece of writing as a distinct style helping to distinguish one writer from another (Tardy, 2012; Mhilli, 2023). As teenagers undergo both physical and cognitive changes, they are learning to perform a balancing act of finding themselves

as authors. This process involves forging functional social connections while striving to maintain an independent authorial voice (Pasqua, 2017). Thus, adolescence marks a crucial stage in mastering authorial voice, essential for conveying authenticity, engaging readers, and creating unique, impactful writing (Pasqua, 2017).

Challenges arise, however, when students need to express their unique authorial voices and simultaneously adhere to the discursual conventions of high school writing. Some research suggests that the school system's discursual conventions suppress authorial agency and voice in writing (Cremin & Baker, 2010). One proposed solution advocates for sacrificing social and discursual conventions and prioritising writing for the self as an author over writing for the system (Pasqua, 2017). While this solution appears to be theoretically sound, it is challenging to implement in practice (Frawley, 2014). What is more, the incongruence between the need for individual voice and meeting discursual expectations is further complicated by the pressures of high-stakes tests, such as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination, a standardised test administered in NSW, Australia, at the end of secondary education and used as a determinant for university admission (NESA, 2024). In HSC English writing, the formulaic structures and discursual conventions fail to value authorial identity, effectively stifling students' unique voices (McGraw & Mason, 2021; Myhill et al., 2023; Pasqua, 2017).

However, despite the evident prevalence of rigid discursual conventions over authorial voice in high school writing, the HSC markers note that effective authorial voice differentiates writing samples across grades. The HSC markers explicitly state that a strong sustained authorial voice is a distinct characteristic of higher-scoring responses (Dove, 2018). Effective authorial voice, in the HSC marker's comments, is not only a path to success but also an area for improvement, and high school students need to master this complex notion to be able to successfully create and sustain a convincing voice in their writing (Dove, 2018).

The realities of English classrooms, however, provide few opportunities for the teachers to nurture their students' voice in writing. Frawley (2014), for example, points out that preparation for the HSC English examination inevitably results in tight schedules, restricted pedagogical strategies and, as a result, opting for predictable conventional formulaic writing. It has been acknowledged that high school students need to both adhere to genre conventions and use their unique authorial voice effectively to succeed in academic writing. However, this can only occur if students are granted the space and time to explore and express their authorial identities through textual voice (Shand & Konza, 2016; Pasqua, 2017).

Authorial Voice in Multilingual Students' Writing

Recent research acknowledges the increasingly diverse cohorts of students in Australian high schools and the need for an equitable curriculum. It underlines the importance of channelling the multilingual students' funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart, 2023) and potential cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2018) into their writing via strong authorial voices (Gee, 1990; Medvetz & Sallaz, 2018; Shand & Konza, 2016). On the other hand, research also indicates that multilingual students' cultural capital is suppressed by the cultural capital of the Western-centric power-elite anglophone major-

ity (May, 2014; Spivak, 1988; Weaven & Clifford, 2015; Zipin, 2009). Consequently, the power-elite cultural capital in the school curricula alienates cultures of others, effectively silencing the voices of multilingual writers.

The issue is not inherently Australian but rather a global phenomenon in which the power-elite curricula ignore the cultural knowledge and experiences of multilingual students and, in so doing, perpetuate deficit models of thinking by positioning students from other cultural backgrounds as lacking the dominant power-elite culture (Canagarajah, 2024; Menghini, 2017; Pasqua, 2017; Weaven & Clifford, 2015; Zipin, 2009). To address this deficit thinking, research suggests that student writers should be given agency and an opportunity to express their unique individual voice, tapping into their personal lives and unique ways of expressing themselves in writing (Pasqua, 2017; Weaven & Clifford, 2015).

This suppression of authorial voice affects both monolingual and multilingual cohorts, as high-stakes tests and outcome-driven writing instruction promotes and perpetuates prejudice, bias, and partiality (Pasqua, 2017). Specifically, the HSC English genre of text response, a persuasive genre requiring authorial voice to evaluate literary texts (Mhilli, 2020; Rose, 2013), is ostensibly presented as cultivating independent thinking. However, this façade conceals a stark reality that the students are often coerced into adopting predetermined perspectives and regurgitating clichéd arguments (McGraw & Mason, 2021). Consequently, HSC students are conditioned to parrot predetermined stances and conform to academic writing conventions, rather than developing a compelling personal voice in their writing (McGraw & Mason, 2021).

Building on these concerns, Little and Aglinkas (2022) argue that the Western anglophone perspective infuses the subject of English with a political agenda to perpetuate the myth of a multicultural society. In reality, they contend, opportunities for students to engage with diverse texts, or multicultural literature that reflects community cultures from the non-dominant non-power-elite force, are extremely limited (Little & Anglinkas, 2022).

The disingenuousness of the Western-centric Australian Curriculum is evident, for instance, in the choice of so-called prescribed texts for the subject of English. For example, texts written by purportedly culturally diverse authors, such as Li-Cunxin's *Mao's Dancer: From the Poorhouse to the Palace* or Ahn Do's *The Happiest Refugee*, exhibit an Orientalist view (Said, 1977). Both Australian authors, Li-Cunxin and Ahn Do, provide limited insights into the Chinese or Vietnamese language or culture, instead adopting a political and paternalistic tone that reinforces the colonial superiority of Western societies over the writers' cultures of origin (Davis, 2006; Dickin, 2022; Park, 2014; Wang, 2024).

Overall, multilingual students have the potential to bring their unique cultural and linguistic experiences through their authentic, uninhibited voices into their writing. However, these opportunities are limited by the systemic structures underpinning the Australian high school writing curriculum and instruction, which are overpowered by Western-centric, anglophone discursual conventions and entrenched cultural dominance.

Conceptual and Terminological Framework

This study approaches authorial voice through Bakhtinian dialogism and post-colonial critique of Western epistemic dominance over the cultural and linguistic capital of non-Western writers (Bakhtin, 1984; Brooks, 2015; Canagarajah, 2020, 2024; Fanon et al., 2001; May, 2014; Schepen, 2022; Strausz, 2022; Wa Thiong'o, 2019). Thus, in this study, Non-Western writers are seen from a position of strength, as autonomous, culturally grounded, and committed-to-their-heritage individuals, rather than from a position of weakness as colonised, assimilated, or aspiring to be assimilated into the power-elite culture and language. The word *Western*, on the other hand, refers to dominant cultural, linguistic, and epistemic power elites shaped by European colonial history and maintained in anglophone settler colonies, such as New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America.

These combined perspectives inform the way this study seeks to contribute to the discussion of the dialogic nature of authorial voice as a reflection of writer's identity in text, which is explored across levels of individual versus social, and dominant versus marginalised. Thus, authorial voice in this study is viewed as a site where multilingual writers' identities resist or comply with dominant discoursal, social, and cultural expectations.

Aligned with post-colonial scholarship, the study also adopts terminology that avoids the linguistic colonial hierarchies embedded in labels for English language proficiency. The study challenges the term *English as an Additional Language or Dialect* suggested in the Australian Curriculum as a purportedly inclusive alternative to the term *English as a Second Language*. The shift from *second* to *additional* does not change the fact that English remains the point of reference when naming multilingual groups, essentially perpetuating colonial dominance and linguistic imperialism. Thus, the study uses the term *multilingual* in relation to writers, speakers or students in place of outdated colonial terms such as *non-native*, *English as a Second Language*, *English as an Additional Language or Dialect*, or *L2* (Cheng et al., 2021). As *multilingual* means knowing more than one language, the term has the potential to empower and revalorise language users. Correspondingly, the term *monolingual* is used instead of labels such as *native*, *English as a First Language*, or *L1*, traditionally associated with the only correct, and essentially unattainable level of language proficiency.

Thus, alongside its specific empirical aims related to contextual analysis of authorial voice in multilingual students' writing, the study also pursues transformational goals related to decolonisation. The study aims to shed light on how authorial voice is fostered or constrained in Australian high school writing classrooms. It seeks to uncover if multilingual students in Australia are learning in culturally and linguistically safe spaces where they are encouraged to share their unique cultural experiences and linguistic richness through assertive authorial voices. The study also seeks to challenge the perpetuation of colonial legacies and deficit thinking, contributing — however incrementally — to ongoing efforts towards the decolonising the mind project.

Method

Research Design

The explorative and interpretive nature of the research questions posed in the study determined the choice of qualitative methodology. In general, qualitative research approaches the world with an interpretive and naturalistic lens to study phenomena in their naturalistic settings, attempting to make sense of the phenomena and interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Using this interpretive and naturalistic approach, the contextual analysis aims to explore the complex phenomenon of authorial voice and to interpret this phenomenon through the participants' perspectives.

Settings

International students intending to enrol in high schools in Australia usually first go through HSP programs. These intensive English programs enrol teenagers aged 13 to 18. They are designed for students who need to improve their English proficiency and gain familiarity with the Australian educational context. HSP programs teach the language and study skills necessary for participation in high school learning in Australia, including some subject-specific content related to the key learning areas such as English, Mathematics, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education, Science, and Human Society and its Environment (International House [IH], 2024; The International Education Special College, 2024). HSP programs work in collaboration with a range of schools in major cities in Australia, jointly tracking the progress of international students in terms of their English language proficiency and skills needed to join their peers in high schools (IH, 2024).

With the main focus on the development of English language skills, HSP programs aim to bridge the gap between the high school systems in the students' home countries and the destination high schools in Australia. In terms of writing instruction, HSP programs implement an eclectic approach to developing writing mechanics and grammar and simultaneously focus on the students composing essential high school genres, including persuasive texts (Mhilli, 2020; Yousif, 2023). On successful completion of an HSP program intensive English course, the multilingual students join one of the designated high schools and are expected to join classes (IH, 2024), demonstrating adequate language skills, particularly in writing as the main medium for assessments (English Teachers Association NSW, 2024; Gallagher, 2023).

Participants

At the moment of the first stage of data collection, the six multilingual participants had been learning English for at least 6 months in Australia and between 5 and 11 years in mainland China (See Appendix A, Table A1).

The six student participants, aged between 15 and 16, were enrolled in the same HSP program in Sydney, Australia. They were in the HSP class for Lower-Intermediate – Upper-Intermediate level of English proficiency according to the American

Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scales used in the program (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2024). Lower-Intermediate – Upper Intermediate levels correspond to Levels 3 to 5 of the ESL Scales used in high schools in NSW, Australia (NESA, 2024). All of the student participants were accepted to join Year 10 in their destination high schools.

The same students were followed from HSP to HS and the second stage of data collection took place in two years, when the participants were in their respective high schools. At the time of the second stage of data collection, all the participants were in different high schools with two of them, Aaron and Anthony, in the final term of Year 10 and four, Daniel, Felicity, Kate and Leo, in the first term of Year 12, preparing for the final high school examination, HSC.

The HSP teacher participants were interviewed immediately after the student participants. All the HSP teachers were at least four-year trained high school teachers with majors in English and English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). The recruitment of HS teacher participants took place two years later after the student participants signed consent to participate in the second stage of the study. All the high school teachers were EAL/D-trained teachers who worked with the student participants in class or during individual sessions. All in all, four HSP and six HS teachers were recruited.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured student and teacher interviews were conducted at two points during the students' transitions from HSP to HS to trace the shifts in the participants' perspectives on authorial voice in academic writing. The format of a semi-structured interview allowed the flexibility to explore emerging concepts and themes (Bryman, 2016; Hartley & Chesworth, 2000). The interview scripts were coded for analysis with codes developed after the initial reading stage depending on the emerging motifs. Then, the categories of codes were further refined, regrouped, and rewritten to capture the main recurring themes.

The method of thematic analysis (TA) was employed to analyse the interview data, utilising a hybrid approach that combined deductive and inductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). As the interviews with both student and teacher participants were semi-structured, in the initial stages of coding, the themes were partially determined by the interview questions (See Appendix A, Table A2). The deductive coding added to the coding reliability, ensuring the consistency and quality of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2017). However, considering the semi-structured nature of the interviews, some themes identified in TA were newly emerging. This inductive coding constituted an organic and flexible process, requiring detailed engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Squires, 2023). This was followed by further theme development, where the themes were refined according to the theme pattern formation, ensuring that the themes painted a coherent and relevant to the current study picture of the interview data. In the process, after careful examination, some codes were combined into more meaningful patterns (See Appendix A, Figure A1 for the thematic map resulting from the TA of the interviews in this study).

In addition, as the interview analysis aimed to unpack the participants' perspectives on voice, in the initial stage of the TA, the coding was done semantically (e.g., the code: Voice as a Concept). As Terry et al. (2017) point out semantic coding builds codes around what participants say, emulating their meanings. The semantic or descriptive coding helped to shed light on the participants' perspectives. However, as the researcher immersed themselves in the interview data, the TA developed towards the latent orientation (e.g., code: Authorial Voice in the Australian Curriculum). As the more interpretive latent codes go beyond participant-expressed meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017), it was possible to identify underlying patterns of themes in the interview data.

Results

Student Perspectives

The analysis of the student interviews in HSP and HS revealed three main common themes that emerged from the interviews: “voice as a concept”, “projecting voice in writing: to be heard or not to be heard?”, and “learning about voice in writing”. The findings of the interview analysis are presented below in three sub-sections corresponding to the themes that emerged. In each section, the student participants' perspectives on voice in HSP and HS are compared.

Voice as a Concept

In both HSP and HS, when answering the question, “What do you think voice in writing is?”, all the student participants defined voice in writing as an expression of individual qualities of the author, such as authorial opinion, personal beliefs, ideas and the overall unique personality of the author.

The main difference between HSP and HS was that in HSP the students saw voice as the writer's opinion:

In argumentative essay we must have our voice, our personal opinion (Daniel, HSP Interview)//I think the voice in my writing is my opinion. And in my opinion, I can say whatever I want (Felicity, HSP Interview)//[I use voice to] express my opinion (Leo, HSP Interview)//To show my own opinion about something; and I hope people can change the side (Kate, HSP Interview).

As the students progressed from HSP to HS, they seemed to become more aware of the complexity of the notion of authorial voice as they provided several different definitions of voice. For instance, one participant embraced a few different conceptualisations of voice rather than just the view of voice as the author's opinion. He related authorial voice to the author's perspectives, demeanour, and individuality of the author shaped by their biographical context:

I think voice is a thing that can convey someone's ideas, attitude or it can reflect on someone's personality of the author. And through the voice, we can understand maybe personal background of the author. (Daniel, HS Interview).

Similarly, another participant equated authorial voice with the writer's position and intended discussion points:

[Voice is] how to show others our argument. I just think voice is also equals to opinions or things we want to discuss. (Felicity, HS Interview).

Some of the participants defined voice very broadly, making tentative suggestions that equated voice to the choice of language and the message to the reader:

Maybe it is the language of the text, maybe it is something you want to tell to the readers like maybe something, your personal thoughts. (Leo, HS Interview).

Thus, the students' perception of voice in HSP appears narrower, associated primarily with the author's opinion. As they progressed to HS, they seemed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of authorial voice.

To be Heard or Not to be Heard?

When answering the question "Do you want your voice in writing to be 'heard'?", the students showed a growing realisation of the contextual nature of authorial voice as they transitioned to HS.

In HSP, the student participants articulated an unequivocal desire for their voice to be heard:

Yes, definitely. In an argumentative essay, I want my voice to be heard and I want my voice to be strong, like a bit forceful." (Daniel, HSP Interview)//Yes. Because I want to prove what I'm thinking is right and make everyone else agree with me. (Felicity, HSP interview)//Yes. The reason I write something down I want others to admit this. (Kate, HSP interview).

In contrast, in their HS interviews, the student participants pointed out that the projection of their voice should be attuned to either the genre or the topic:

If it is an academic essay, I always hide myself. I would not like to be distinguished from others. It's a very formal text type. If I am writing just a story, I can adopt my personal experiences to describe the setting, the characters in the story. And they will know that this is somewhere related to my personal experiences. (Daniel, HS Interview)//I think I was more suggestive. Because this topic I think is really complicated such as human experiences. There are a lot of human experiences. It is hard to say in a direct way. You need to provide different perspectives. (Kate, HS Interview)//I think it depends on what you write about. If it is some topic you want others to know then you use language in your

writing to let others know. So if it is like that, I would like reader to really hear my voice. (Aaron, HS Interview).

One of the participants linked the lack of voice in her writing to the irrelevance of the topic to her personal experiences. She mentioned that the topic of refugees in one of the texts she is responding to is not something she can share her opinion about based on her personal experiences:

Because this is discovery and we talk about refugees. Because for the refugees their lives will be most serious problem so I think I can't write with my own experience... express my opinion. (Felicity, HS Interview).

Another participant pointed out that he acted with authorial agency and projected his voice when he had time. However, during the time-restricted examinations, he would opt for the formulaic discourse conventions rather than his unique original voice:

Sometimes with assessments if I have time to play around, I may use some very attractive introduction to grab the audience's attention. But under exam conditions, it is maybe a little bit more difficult to play with that, so I will always do it in a conventional way. (Daniel, HS Interview).

Overall, the student participants' view on projecting voice in their writing shifted. In HSP, the students expressed a strong desire for their authorial voice to be heard as a primary means of communicating their viewpoints. As they gained experience navigating the complexities of high school writing, such as time constraints or irrelevance of content to their personal experiences and interests, the students began to demonstrate an emerging awareness of the tension between their authorial individuality and the constraints of academic genres, discourse conventions and curriculum-prescribed content.

Learning About Voice in Writing

In both settings, the participants' responses to the question "Did you study voice in writing?" indicated a lack of explicit teaching of voice or a lack of a clear understanding of the concept. All the participants in their HSP interviews stated that they had not been taught what authorial voice is or how to use it in writing:

No. I don't remember. (Aaron, HSP interview)//No. (Daniel and Leo, HSP interviews)//No. I think I've heard of it. No, I did not study it. (Anthony, HSP interview)

However, one of the participants, in HSP, mentioned recommendations that their writing instructors made in relation to the use of first-person pronouns:

I don't think [so]. I just say 'we' because the teacher said I shouldn't use something that's too personal in an essay. (Kate, HSP Interview).

In HS, the participants' answers varied. Some participants said that they did not study what authorial voice in writing is:

Not really. (Kate, HS Interview)//No, actually. We just write what we want. You express what you want to say. You put in your writing as much as you can. And it all become a voice. But we don't actually learn how to express voice in your writing. (Aaron, HS Interview)//They have mentioned about voice, but I don't think they have taught us. (Leo, HS Interview).

Others mentioned that they studied authorial voice but seemed to conflate the concepts of voice and tone:

Yes. We did study voice in last module which we studied in Year 11. It's called Human Society, I think. We analysed different types of texts like feature articles, like interviews, even a CV. And we analysed all the techniques: the voice, the tone, the author's purpose. In that module, we studied voice. The thing that confuses me what the difference between the tone and the voice is. I think the voice is the overall, the personality of the writer, but the tone can fluctuate in the essay. It can be objective tone, subjective tone, but the background voice stays the same. (Daniel, HS Interview)//Is it similar with the tone? ... Tone is emotion and the emphasis. You add in on the sentence when write. And gives the reader more powerful and more forceful idea. We learned tones in poetry. And in a. essay you can use tone. For example, if I say, 'This is my idea'. (Anthony, HS Interview).

In both HSP and HS, the student interviews indicated a lack of learning about the concept of authorial voice and its application in academic discourse. In HS, when voice was taught, the students showed a lack of understanding of the concept and its relationship with the concept of tone. Overall, the students' responses in both HSP and HS indicate that there appears to be a lack of pedagogical focus on a clear explanation of the complex concept of voice or its application in writing.

Teacher Perspectives

The analysis of the HSP and HS teacher interviews revealed three main themes: "voice as a concept", "teaching voice in writing: to teach or not to teach?" and "authorial voice in the Australian Curriculum". The findings below are presented according to these themes. It should be also noted that unlike the students' perspectives on voice where the same participants were compared across the two settings, the teachers in the HSP and HS settings were different. Thus, the comparison of the teachers' perspectives in HSP and HS is made more broadly.

Voice as a Concept

When explaining the concept of voice in writing, both HSP and HS teachers referred to voice as an expression of authorial individuality rather than a notion determined

by the discursual conventions of the academic genre, as they referred to voice as a distinct writing style:

[T]hat concept of the style of your writing as well. So, every student will have a unique style or approach. (Ms F, HS teacher),

something recognisable:

[V]oice is like your fingerprint, it is like DNA, a part of you. I can recognise a student's voice even if I did not see their handwriting ... That's what makes us individuals. (Ms K, HS teacher)//Writer's voice is something that helps identify the author and say like I know who wrote it. (Ms B, HSP teacher),

as well as distinguishing personal linguistic fingerprint that allows the reader to verify the originality of the text:

Writer's voice is any sort of language that suggests it was written by them rather than taken from somewhere. (Mr A, HSP teacher)//Perhaps an individual style or choice of language which they have developed. (Mr M, HSP teacher).

Thus, both HSP and HS teachers viewed authorial voice through the individual lens. They perceived voice as expression of authorial uniqueness and individuality which are recognisable as a distinct writing style.

To teach or not to teach?

HS and HSP teachers demonstrated a lack of consensus when it comes to the teaching of voice and the importance of this concept for multilingual students. Some of the teachers claimed that voice is beyond their students' reach, while others insisted that voice should be explicitly taught to multilingual students.

In both settings, some teachers did not expect their students to incorporate voice into their writing based on the assumption that multilingual students are unable to understand the complex concept:

I think it is a bit too early. I mean it is ideal, but ... I think it is too early for them. Not at this stage. ... I think it is too complex for them at this stage. (Ms A, HS teacher)//For ESL [English as a Second Language] writing, it is a hard concept for them, like... weaker students to understand. ... We haven't really discussed this. (Ms F, HS teacher),

or because multilingual students lack linguistic or syntactic accuracy:

Perhaps, we teach... we concentrate a lot on accuracy and the use of certain language structures and grammatical features. This focus on basic skills may prevent the students from creating their own voice or finding their own voice. (Mr M, HSP interview)//I think until the foundation is there, the ability to create

sentences that are not necessarily accurate but intelligible despite their errors and they are effective... If you can't do that, voice is not an issue yet. (Mr S, HSP interview).

In contrast, other HSP and HS teachers insisted on the importance of raising the multilingual students' awareness of voice and development of original authorial voice in writing:

At this level, it's important for kids to develop writer's voice and not just regurgitate. (Mr A, an HSP teacher);

in addition, another HS teacher emphasised the importance of allocating enough time to teach voice in writing explicitly:

I would suggest that it is crucial for teachers to find time to explicitly talk about what is voice and give them the vocabulary to describe how they can determine what the voice is. ... I would strongly suggest that everyone would have a strong voice particularly in persuasive but also in discursive writing. (Ms D, a HS teacher).

There was a marked lack of consensus among both HSP and HS teachers about the need to teach authorial voice in writing. Some teachers suggested that voice should be taught to multilingual students explicitly and touch upon an issue of finding time in their busy schedules for high school students to develop, explore and learn how to express their authorial voice in writing. Other teachers insisted that multilingual students need to focus on perfecting their grammar, lexis and syntax before they can start to use or even comprehend such a complex concept as it is simply beyond their grasp.

Authorial Voice in the Australian Curriculum

While HSP teachers did not touch upon the topic of the HSP or HS curricula, the HS teachers referred to the requirements of the curriculum they were teaching and the need for the students to meet the requirements in terms of expressing their authorial voice. As with their differing opinions about the teaching of voice, the HS teachers did not appear to share the same understanding of the curriculum. Some teachers mentioned that expressing authorial voice in writing is not required in the English course:

It's not something I explicitly taught them. Like they do have awareness of modalities, but it hasn't necessarily been a requirement in their course. (Ms F, a HS teacher).

Others insisted that it is a requirement of the curriculum:

But I think it is also good for students to be able to speak in their own voice because in the ESL curriculum that's required. (Ms K, a HS teacher).

Some teachers demonstrated a stronger awareness of the requirements regarding authorial voice in HSC, which all of the student participants in the study were working towards at the time of HS interviews. One teacher provided a very clear explanation of how crucial it is for the students to be able to demonstrate a powerful, distinct voice to achieve the highest grade in the HSC exam, Band 6. The teacher emphasised that it is only those students who can convey their unique original perspective utilising a powerful authorial voice will stand out and have a chance to get the top band:

Absolutely, we are trying to develop articulate writers that have a strong authorial voice because the sophistication and skill for this really distinguishes them as the top students, as Band 6 [the top Band in the HSC examination] and those students who capture their own unique take on texts, synthesising their ideas, means that they are distinguishing themselves from the rest. (Ms D, a HS teacher).

Another teacher indicated that multilingual students lack confidence in their authorial voice when it comes to the part of the HSC examination where they have to project their voice to express their perspectives, evaluate prescribed texts and compose text responses:

With the Paper Two [part of the HSP English examination] you need to have the ability to express your own beliefs but it is very interesting ...I don't know why...but they really doubt their own beliefs and they think 'Oh, I can't include that', or 'Oh, it is a very personal thing'. They lack that confidence to articulate their ideas at times. (Ms B, a HS teacher).

Thus, there is a notable discrepancy in the teachers' understanding of the HSC course requirements regarding authorial voice. Some teachers maintain that voice is not a requirement at all. Other teachers state that the presence of a sustained strong authorial voice differentiates between grades and express their concern about the lack of confidence in multilingual students to express their voice in writing.

Discussion

The results of the contextual analysis of the students' writing reveal how multilingual students and their teachers conceptualise authorial voice. They also show how understandings of voice shift across educational settings, and how instructional expectations shape the ways voice is encouraged, constrained, or silenced in writing.

Engaging a post-colonial lens, this section highlights how authorial voice is negotiated in unequal power relations, curriculum structures and dominant epistemologies. The discussion therefore extends the interpretation of participants' perspectives beyond their implications for writing pedagogy in order to consider what these per-

spectives reveal about decolonisation, multiculturalism and epistemic justice in academic high school writing.

Voice as a Concept

The results highlight the complexities and challenges surrounding the conceptual understanding and application of authorial voice in high school writing. The comparison of the participants' perspectives on authorial voice in HSP and HS revealed that the teachers in both settings perceived voice as an expression of authorial individuality and uniqueness in writing. This view of voice aligns with what research defines as individual authorial voice or unique writing style that allows the reader to recognise who composed the text (Tardy, 2012; Mhilli, 2023).

In contrast, the students' perception of voice shifts as they transition between the settings. In HSP, it appears narrower, associated primarily with the author's opinion. As they progress to HS, the students start to demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of authorial voice and its contextuality. More specifically, the students demonstrate a clear awareness of the dialectic relationships between their individual unique voice and the socio-discoursal conventions they need to adhere to. This perspective aligns with high school writing pedagogy research, which highlights the challenges high school students face when negotiating their individual authorial voice within the constraints of discoursal conventions (Crewin & Baker, 2010; Pasqua, 2017). Research also indicates that during their formative adolescent years, crucial for developing authorial individuality, the formulaic high school writing and academic discourse conventions can suppress and stifle their unique individual voices (McGraw & Mason, 2021; Myhill et al., 2023; Pasqua, 2017). Thus, the participants' increasing awareness of the complexity of the concept of voice and the tension between their authorial individuality and the academic discourse conventions is crucial, as it highlights the students' growing potential to navigate the challenges of high school writing.

In addition, research clearly indicates that multilingual students bring rich cultural knowledge, alternative epistemologies, and non-dominant narrative resources that have the potential to render the dialogue of cultures epistemically enriching, pedagogically egalitarian, and socially transformative (Maggio, 2007; Matsuda, 2015; Mhilli, 2023; Said, 1977; Spivak, 1988). In practice, however, the findings indicate that such dialogic potential is routinely foreclosed due to the rigid discoursal conventions and curriculum that favour power-elite anglophone majority.

The main tension lies in the narrow conceptualisation of voice, especially by the teachers who see voice through individual lens of personal style or a recognisable textual fingerprint without a corresponding recognition of the socio-discoursal conditions that shape, constrain or silence it. Students, in contrast, speaking from lived experiences, show a shift in understanding of the complexities of voice due to constraints of genre conventions, irrelevance of prescribed texts and pressure to produce formulaic writing — all of the aspects imposed by the dominant culture. As a result, students experience voice as something they possess but cannot fully exercise, revealing how dialogic engagement at both the individual – social and intercultural levels is structurally limited within the contemporary high school writing in Australia.

Projecting Voice in Writing

The students' perspectives on how they project their authorial voice in writing also shift as they transition from HSP and HS. In HSP, the students were dedicated to strong authorial voice as a means of effective communication. In HS, they have become more tentative and appeared to have grasped the complex and nuanced nature of voice.

The participants also touched upon some important issues raised in recent literature. For instance, some students mentioned the importance of having enough time to think about and project their voice effectively. Some of the HS teachers also pointed out the need for their colleagues to find time to teach authorial voice. The need for sufficient time pointed out by both student and teacher participants is echoed in the research literature that highlights the importance of time to nurture and develop authorial voice within the time constraints of the classroom, especially when it comes to preparation for high-stakes examinations (Frawley, 2014; Pasqua, 2017; Shand & Konza, 2016).

In their HS interviews, some students also touched on another issue raised in recent literature. The issue relates to the lack of relevance of the Australian curriculum content, such as prescribed texts in English, to the multilingual students' personal experiences. The irrelevance of the texts, the students are expected to respond to, inevitably leads to a lack of motivation and meaningful learning. As a result, the students resort to regurgitating formulaic clichés instead of sharing their authentic experiences via authentic voice (McGraw & Mason, 2021; Pasqua, 2017).

The disconnect between the curriculum content and the cultures, languages and personal experiences of multilingual students can be also one of the factors contributing to the lack of confidence they display when encouraged to project their voice in writing, as attested by their HS teachers. This finding is in line with previous research into authorial identity and voice in multilingual academic writers, as some researchers have further critiqued the Western-centric curriculum for failing to provide multilingual students with genuine opportunities to engage with texts from their own cultures or languages. Instead, the students are exposed to the Western narrative that "westsplains" the students' own cultures from a condescending and patronising position, providing the pre-determined and politically infused answers, effectively silencing their multilingual and multicultural voices (Dickin, 2022; Little & Aglinskias, 2022; Wang, 2024).

Learning About Voice in Writing

In both HSP and HS, the student interviews indicated a lack of learning about the concept of authorial voice and its application in academic discourse. When the learning did happen, the students were still struggling to differentiate between voice and similar concepts such as tone in writing. This finding is consistent with the findings of the teacher interview analysis that indicated a lack of consensus among the teachers in both settings as to whether authorial voice should be taught to multilingual students as a concept and in terms of its application in writing.

In addition, some of the teachers in both HSP and HS exhibited deficit thinking, overlooking multilingual students' potential to express their original voices. This approach can silence the students, denying them an opportunity to share their unique personal experiences, cultures, and languages, perpetuating epistemic injustice in academic writing (Kidd, 2017; Little & Anglinkas, 2022, Weaven & Clifford, 2015). Thus, the tensions evident in the teachers' perspectives further illuminate the epistemic dynamics at play in high school writing classrooms. Positioning voice as developmentally premature or subordinate to linguistic accuracy, teachers are effectively acting as epistemic gatekeepers, determining when, how and for whom voice is deemed appropriate. The deficit assumptions about the multilingual students' readiness to have voice contribute to epistemic injustice by pre-emptively limiting students' access to higher-order meaning making and authentic expression of their culturally and linguistically rich identities.

Conclusion

This paper reports on the findings of the intermediate part of a three-part study on authorial voice in high school writing. The paper presents a contextual analysis of the interviews with the student and teacher participants in two settings, HSP and HS, exploring the participants' perspectives on authorial voice in writing. The findings have implications for high school writing pedagogy, particularly for the teachers of multilingual students.

The paper highlights the need for explicit teaching of authorial voice, acknowledging the complexities and challenges associated with teaching this concept. Some of the complexities discussed in this study pertain to the dialogic nature of authorial voice, comprising the interplay of the unique individual authorial qualities and discursual conventions of writing genres. Some of the challenges that the students and teachers encounter relate to the time constraints and tight schedules of the high school settings that allow few opportunities for the students to explore and develop their original authorial voice. Other challenges relate to the lack of relevance of the curriculum content to the students' experiences and the deficit thinking that some of the teachers subscribe to, particularly in relation to multilingual students and their ability to have a voice.

Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the more inclusive and meaningful curriculum and teaching practices that provide multilingual students with opportunities to engage with their own cultures and critique Western power-elite ideologies. It can be also suggested that the teachers need to be supported in developing a clear understanding of the curriculum outcomes and the HSC marking criteria when it comes to such important and complex notions as authorial voice to ensure equitable opportunities for all students to achieve the highest scores in high-stakes examinations.

Research into writing pedagogies in Australian high schools suggests that it is essential to provide the students with sufficient time to develop and project their original individual voices and compose powerful, engaging, and impactful writing via a range of specific strategies (Shand & Konza, 2016). First, the teachers need to prioritise their students' writing for the self, connecting with personal unique

Table 1 Demographic information about the student participants

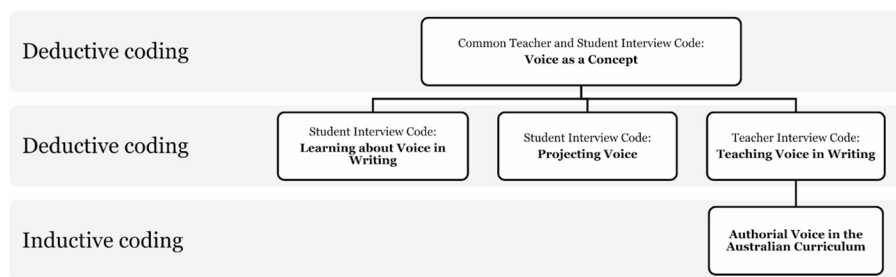
Name	Country of origin/Mother tongue	Gender	Age		Year at school		Have been studying English for (years)		
Context			HSP	HS	HSP	HS	HSP	HS	
Daniel	China/Mandarin Chinese	Male	16	18	Going into Y 10	Y 12	10	12	
Felicity	China/Mandarin Chinese	Female	16	18	Going into Y 10	Y 12	9	11	
Kate	China/Mandarin Chinese	Female	16	18	Going into Y10	Y 12	9	11	
Aaron	China/Mandarin Chinese	Male	15	17	Going into Y10	Y 11	7	9	
Leo	China/Mandarin Chinese	Male	16	18	Going into Y10	Y 12	5	7	
Anthony	China/Mandarin Chinese	Male	15	17	Going into Y10	Y 11	9	11	

experiences even if it means ignoring discursual conventions (Pasqua, 2017). It is especially important for multilingual students who need to be supported to channel their unique cultural and linguistic capital into their writing (Canagarajah, 2020; Canagarajah, 2020; May, 2014; Menghini, 2017; Shand & Konza, 2016; Weaven & Clifford, 2015; Zipin, 2009). Recent research also recommends that it is essential to support the dialogue of cultures within a more flexible and responsive curriculum and teaching practices that value the cultures of multilingual students. More dynamic and inclusive curriculum and teaching has a potential to contribute to decolonisation through mutually enriching exchange of knowledge between the culture of the West and the cultures of others (Blackman, 2017; Brooks, 2015; Nigar et al., 2024; Schepen, 2022; Strausz, 2022).

Overall, the results of the contextual analysis presented in this paper offer insights into the student and teacher perspectives on authorial voice in adolescent multilingual writers. The next stage of this longitudinal study will build on these findings and continue with an in-depth textual analysis of evaluative writing composed by student participants in the two settings, HSP and HS. The final part of the longitudinal study will aim to shed further light on the changes in the authorial voice of the student participants in transition from a preparation program to high school settings.

Table 2 Interview Questions and Corresponding Themes

	Interview Questions	Themes
Student Interviews	We all have voice when we speak, do you think you have a voice in your writing?	Voice as a Concept
	What do you think voice in writing is?	
	Do you want your voice to be ‘heard’? Why?	
	Did you study what voice is and how to use voice in writing before?	
	What exactly did you study about voice?	
Teacher Interviews	What is writer’s voice in your understanding?	Learning about Authorial Voice in Writing
	Do you think your students should be aware of the concept of writer’s voice?	
	How important for your students to be able to project a sustained, confident, clear voice in their writing?	
	What expectations do you have regarding the students’ voice in their writing?	

**Fig. 1** The Thematic Map

Appendix A

See Tables 1 and 2.

See Figure 1.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions. The study received no funding.

Declarations

Conflict of interest I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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