Finding their Voices: The Impact of Explicit Instruction on Second Language Students' Authorial Voice Construction in Argumentative Writing

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Abstract

Authorial voice, crucial for academic writing, reflects a writer's identity and engagement with readers. However, second-language (L2) writing instruction often prioritizes coherence over fostering this voice. This mixed-methods study explored the impact of explicit authorial voice instruction on 74 Saudi female undergraduate students' argumentative writing. Divided into experimental and control groups, the experimental group received voice instruction, while the control group continued with the standard curriculum. Pre and posttests along with focus group interviews were used for data collection. Results showed significant improvement in the presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, and writer-reader engagement in the experimental group's writing compared to the control. Notably, the most significant improvement occurred in the first dimension. Students reported an enhanced understanding and use of their unique voices, leading to improved and more identity-reflective writing. These findings highlight the importance of integrating authorial voice instruction within L2 academic writing curricula

Keywords: Authorial voice, L2 academic writing, mixed-methods approach.

الملخص

يُعدّ الصوت التأليفي عنصراً جوهرياً في الكتابة الأكاديمية، فهو يعكس هوية الكاتب وتفاعله مع القارئ. وعلى الرغم من ذلك فإن تعليم الكتابة باللغة الثانية يركز على معايير تماسك النص، وليس الصوت. لذلك تكشف هذه الدراسة ذات المنهجية المختلطة عن أثر تدريس الصوت التأليفي على كتابة ٧٤ طالبة سعودية للنص الجدلي. وقسمت الطالبات إلى مجموعتين تجريبية وضابطة، حيث تلقت المجموعة التجريبية تدريس الصوت، بينما المجموعة الضابطة دُرست وفق المنهج التقليدي. وجمعت البيانات من خلال الاختبارات القبلية والبعدية والمقابلات الجماعية. ولقد أظهرت النتائج أن تدريس الصوت حسن على نحو ملحوظ وضوح الأفكار وطريقة العرض وارتباط الكاتب بالقارئ في كتابة طالبات المجموعة التجريبية مقارنةً بالمجموعة الضابطة. والجدير بالذكر أن التحسن الأبرز حدث في البعد الصوتي الأول. وأشارت الطالبات إلى فهمهن واستخدامهن للصوت، مما أدى إلى تحسن كتاباتهن وجعلها تعكس هوياتهن على وجه أفضل. لذلك تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أهمية إدراج تدريس التعبير الصوتي في مناهج الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الثانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصوت التأليفي، الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الثانية، المنهج البحثي المختلط.

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1.Introduction

Argumentative writing is a cornerstone genre in academic discourse. This writing genre is described as a social practice of presenting a clear stance on a specific issue justified by compelling evidence, which can take various forms, such as research findings, expert opinions, and logical reasoning (Hyland, 2003). However, composing effective argumentative texts in academic contexts extends beyond merely presenting evidence. It necessitates adherence to specific norms established by the academic discourse community. According to academic writing norms, a 'good' argumentative text should demonstrate coherence, critical engagement with sources, and a structured progression of ideas, ensuring that each element of the argument is interlinked and substantiated (Toulmin, 2003). Effective argumentative texts should reflect the writer's ability to articulate a claim and address different perspectives, thereby engaging in a dialogue with their audience (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010).

However, argumentative writing is not only about communicating ideas logically and persuasively but also about the writer's self-representation. Hyland (2003) articulated that writers use linguistic and rhetorical resources to forge credible self-representation while complying with the established norms of the academic discourse community. As Matsuda (2015) and Canagarajah (2015) asserted, identity construction within written discourse is a discursive negotiation among the writer, the text, and the reader, all mediated by academic writing norms. Thus, identity in an argumentative text is a complex social construct woven through the interplay of different aspects of writing (Silva, 1990; Hyland, 2008). In this regard, understanding the essence of identity in written discourse necessitates an analytical lens to unravel the layers of a writer's identity embedded within a text. One of the essential concepts that has been used to explore identity representations in written texts is *voice*, which has been discussed and defined from different theoretical perspectives. It is considered an essential marker of writing quality (Elbow, 2007; Stewart, 1992).

Amidst the myriad interpretations of voice within academic discourse, Ivanič (1998) proposed a seminal framework for deconstructing the construction of voice in written texts. This framework delineates three interconnected dimensions of voice: autobiographical, discoursal, and authorial. The first dimension encapsulates the writer's life history, infusing the text with a personal dimension. The second reflects the writer's social and cultural positioning, connecting their work to norms and ideologies. The last pertains to the writer's knowledge creation and claiming ownership of the written content. The present study focuses particularly on Ivanič's third dimension, the authorial voice, to explore the level of authority and presence L2 writers invest in their argumentative texts.

Indeed, the concept of authorial voice has gained considerable attention in L2 writing. A plethora of research has examined the manifestation of authorial voice in L2 writers' texts, providing valuable insights into the complexities of L2 writing. However, the available literature reveals notable gaps that warrant further exploration. Notably, the existing research has focused on L2 writers' constructing authorial voice across various writing genres, such as research articles (e.g., Lorés-Sanz, 2011; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007), with relatively limited research on the manifestation of authorial voice in argumentative writing. This gap is further compounded by the predominant focus on L2 writers within Western contexts (e.g., Canagarajah, 2015; Zhao, 2013), neglecting the unique experiences of L2 writers in non-Western educational settings. More importantly, research on the teachability of authorial voice, crucial for supporting L2 writers, has not been extensively studied. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of work by exploring the effect of explicit authorial voice instruction on constructing undergraduate L2 students' voices in their argumentative writing.

1.1 Research questions

The research questions guiding the present study were:

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1- How does explicit authorial voice instruction affect the expression of voice in L2 students' argumentative writing?

2- How do the dimensions of authorial voice (presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, or writer-reader presence) vary before and after explicit authorial voice instruction in L2 argumentative writing?

3- How do L2 students perceive the role of authorial voice instruction in their argumentative writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualization of authorial voice

Authorial voice has been considered a complex and slippery construct. It is not surprising, then, to see various theoretical conceptualizations and interpretations of it in the literature. A review of the available literature shows that the conceptualizations of authorial voice in writing stem from three different theoretical movements. The first is an inherently individual expressivist perspective, which views authorial voice as a unique individual trait that reflects the writer's authentic self in a text. For example, Elbow (1981) viewed authorial voice as the rhetorical capacity that "captures the sounds of the individual on the page" (p. 287). Stewart (1992) described authorial voice as "the fundamental quality of good writing" (p. 283). That is, the authorial voice encompasses the writer's authenticity and style, which are expressed through their deliberate use of specific language features and rhetorical strategies in their texts. Sperling and Appleman (2011) asserted that the individualistic perspective depicted voice as a static, coherent, and autonomous construct. This perspective suggests that the authorial voice can simply be identified as either present or absent in the writing.

However, the concept of voice imbued with the individualism ideology has been problematized by scholars, arguing that writers are situated within a complex web of social, cultural, and historical relations (Bowden, 1999). Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the second perspective emphasizes that sociocultural factors inevitably influence voice, making it more than just an individual attribute (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). The sociocultural view regards the authorial voice as the writer's representation of their sociocultural worlds, and its emergence is shaped and informed by the writer's community and the discoursal norms. For example, Hyland (2003) argued that sociocultural contexts shape writers' authorial voice by choosing specific linguistic and rhetorical features while subscribing to certain textual norms and aligning their work with other authors. In this regard, writers often deploy different voices for different rhetorical contexts (Ivanič & Camps, 2001), and sometimes their voices, as Sperling and Appleman (2011) put it, are "overshadowed by other voices" (p. 74).

The debate surrounding the authorial voice as a representation of individual features or a reflection of social factors has been reconciled through that dialogic perspective, inspired by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism theory. This theory proposes that all languages and meanings emerge from a dialogue between people, rejecting the binary view of voice as purely individual or social. Instead, it posits that voice inherently incorporates individual traits and social contexts (Matsuda, 2015; Prior, 2001). That is, a writer's voice is not created in isolation but through continuous interaction with previous texts, reader expectations, and the broader discursive community. This ongoing interplay shapes the voice, making it a product of both personal expression and collective discourse. Echoing this dialogic view, Matsuda (2001) described authorial voice as "the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available, yet ever-changing repertoires" (p. 40). This expanded conceptualization of authorial voice, recognizing the intertwined nature of individual and social elements, has gained attention in literature, especially in the L2 writing context.

2.2 Authorial voice and second language writing

Despite the numerous efforts to explore the essence and attributes of authorial voice in L1 writing, its significance in L2 writing remains overlooked. The rationale behind neglecting voice in L2 writing stemmed from some concerns raised by two perspectives on voice: individualists and socio-culturalists. From the individualistic view, some argued (e.g., Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003) that the complex interplay between

the native cultural norms and the new linguistic conventions creates tension for students to meet the L2 writing expectation and thus hinders the cultivation of their authorial voice. In addition, others ascribed to sociocultural perspectives (e.g., Stapleton, 2002) emphasized the importance of acquiring the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language as foundational to later expressing voice in writing. These skeptical perspectives affected how voice was evaluated in L2 students' writings. For example, Matsuda and Jeffery (2012) found that the assessment rubrics of standardized tests (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, and SAT) inadequately incorporated voice, although it was a crucial criterion in 50% of state rubrics and valued by teachers. In a similar vein, Zhao (2013) argued that while the existing writing rubrics considered voice as an essential assessment element, it was either holistically evaluated according to the reader's impression, such as absent/present, or as an embedded element within another category on the evaluative rubric (p. 203).

In response to the difficulties of incorporating the authorial voice into practice, Hyland (2005) proposed an interactional framework that examines voice in academic writing. Given that voice is a dialogic accomplishment, Hyland's (2008) model examines voice as an interaction between writers and texts. Thus, Hyland's voice model considers both the individual and social aspects of authorial voice construction. His model includes the stance dimension, which captures the writer's individual aspect of voice, and the engagement dimension, which reflects how the writer interacts with the audience and broader discourse community. In L2 writing research, Hyland's (2008) voice model has been extensively used to examine how L2 writers construct their authorial voice (e.g., Afifi, 2014; Escobar & Fernández, 2017). This body of research has underscored the importance and presence of L2 writers' authorial voices across various genres. However, with the notable exception of Yoon's (2017) study, the authorial voice remains largely unexplored in the argumentative genre.

Recognizing the value of authorial voice in argumentative writing, Zhao (2013) refined Hyland's (2008) model to focus specifically on the voice features most relevant to L2 writers composing this genre. Zhao's (2013) three-dimensional (ideational, affective, and presence) analytic voice framework was adopted by a few researchers to explore the nature of the authorial voice in L2 writers' argumentative texts. For example, Zhao (2017) employed the analytic voice rubric (Zhao, 2013) to explore the relationship between the authorial voice and TOEFL iBT argumentative essay scores in 200 timed L2 essays. The results revealed moderately positive correlations between each voice dimension and the essay scores. Also, Zabihi, Mehrani-Rad, and Khodi (2019) employed Zhao's (2013) authorial voice framework in their study, in which they analyzed 129 writings of L2 Iranian students to explore the relationship between their authorial voice strength and their performance in their argumentative essay. The researchers found that students who struggled to project a strong voice tended to produce lower-to-average-quality writing, while more advanced writers typically demonstrated a stronger voice in their work. The researcher concluded that the results agreed with the findings that L2 learners from collectivist cultures would face more difficulty in writing with a strong voice. If the writer's cultural background shapes their authorial voice, it raises the question of how this voice manifests in collaborative writing settings. In this regard, Zabihi and Bayan (2020) conducted a study to investigate if students' collaboration in producing a single argumentative text would affect the authorial voice strength of the text compared to situations where texts are composed independently. Using Zhao's (2013) authoritative voice framework, the researchers analyzed 218 argumentative texts, of which 130 were written individually and 88 were written in pairs. Zabihi and Bayan's (2020) findings were in line with the ideas of the sociocultural theory that collaborative writing has provided additional scaffolding for students, ultimately leading to pairs performing better than individual students across all aspects of authorial voice.

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Another line of researchers utilized Zhao's (2013) analytical, authoritative voice rubric to examine the teachability of voice. For instance, Fogal (2019) examined the impact of a three-week writing course on authorial voice construction for seven Japanese university students studying how to write the independent writing task of the TOEFL iBT. The finding revealed that the instruction promoted participants' understanding of authorial voice, which positively affected the quality of their writing. While participants

in Fogal's (2019) study were identified as L2 students preparing for university admission or employment in North America, Farsani, Abdollahzadeh, and Hashemi (2023) conducted their study in a non-western context to examine the effectiveness of instruction in enhancing 27 MA students' authorial voice. Similar to Fogal (2019), Farsani et al. (2023) found that the authorial voice pedagogy effectively fostered the students' authorial voice and ultimately enhanced the quality of their argumentative writing.

The current body of research provides valuable insights into L2 learners' development of authorial voice in argumentative writing through frameworks such as Zhao's (2013) model. However, there seems to be a notable scarcity of empirical studies investigating authorial voice in argumentative writing among L2 undergraduate students. This lack of attention is further amplified by under-researching the Saudi context, where cultural and educational systems likely influence how students develop their voices. Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by examining the effects of explicit authorial voice instruction on the expression of voice in Saudi undergraduate students' argumentative writing.

3.Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the effects of explicit instruction in authorial voice on L2 Saudi students' voice development in their argumentative writing. According to Creswell (2009), a mixed-methods approach includes collecting quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two datasets, and drawing specific findings to clarify the research question. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' authorial voice development from different perspectives that might not be captured through an exclusively quantitative or qualitative research design.

3.2 Context and sample

The participants recruited for this study were 79 undergraduate female students majoring in English at a public university in Saudi Arabia. They enrolled in a compulsory three-credit writing course called Academic Writing. Their ages ranged between 21 and 22 years old. The academic writing course was offered in two sections, with 41 and 38 students enrolled in each section, respectively. Each section received one session of instruction per week for one semester (i.e., almost 16 sessions). The course curriculum mandates the composition of three essays of at least five paragraphs across different genres (i.e., argument, narrative, and critique).

The study employed convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007) to choose the participants. This nonrandom sampling approach was appropriate for this study due to the university's registration system, which precluded any reassignment of students and thus limited the researcher's ability to allocate the participants randomly to different groups. Also, this sampling technique was applied because of the easy accessibility of the participants in a particular place, their availability at the time of conducting the study, and their willingness to participate in the present study. Therefore, the researcher selected 74 participants from the 79 students recruited for this study, as two withdrew from the course, one declined to be part of the study, and two did not submit their posttest. For ethical considerations, all the participants were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed that their participation in the study or withdrawal would not affect their results in the course. The students who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form. The two pre-existing course

sections were randomly assigned as the control and experimental groups. While the control group (N=37) received standard instruction on argumentative writing without any specialized intervention, the experimental group (N=37) was subjected to explicit authorial voice instruction in argumentative writing. This selection process was underpinned by assessing participants' homogeneity across both sections in terms of students' academic writing experiences and proficiency levels.

3.3 Data collection methods

Both groups completed a 90-minute writing task in class as a pre and posttest at the beginning and end of the course, respectively. To ensure participants could engage with the tasks without being hindered by unfamiliar topics, the researcher carefully selected the writing topics based on their prior knowledge. The writing topics were about using video games in education (pretest) and preserving forests (posttest). Before initiating the intervention, participants were required to complete an online questionnaire through the survey tool available on the Blackboard course management system, the university's educational platform. This questionnaire was designed to gather data on participants' demographic background, prior experience with academic writing, knowledge of argumentative writing, and previous experiences with an authorial voice in argument writing. The collected information provided crucial insights for the inclusion procedures.

This study used focus group interviews to capture in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions after implementing the instructional intervention. Smithson (2008) affirmed that one of the distinctive features of focus groups is their capacity to generate rich data based on group interaction that would not emerge in one-on-one interviews. After the posttest, four focus group interview sessions were conducted, each involving five participants. These interviews were divided into two parts to collect specific types of information. The first part focused on participants' rhetorical moves and voice features in their posttest writings. The second part explored the participants' perspectives on the pedagogical strategies to enhance their authorial voice in argumentative writing. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 minutes and was voice-recorded.

3.4 Data collection procedure

The data collection process expanded over six weeks. All participants completed the information questionnaire during the first week before embarking on the intervention. Then, the participants took the pretest (argumentative writing task 1). During the intervention sessions, which lasted for four weeks (one session per week for around three hours), the instructor/researcher focused on teaching argumentative essay construction as presented in the assigned textbook for both groups. The participants in the experimental group were explicitly taught how to construct their voice in writing according to Zhao's (2013) analytical authorial voice framework, whereas the control group received no instruction on authorial voice. At the end of the intervention, participants took the posttest (argumentative writing task 2), which examined their authorial voice construction. Two days after the posttest, the focus group interviews were conducted with the experimental group's participants.

3.5 Data analysis methods

All the pretest and posttest written essays were anonymized and scored using Zhao's (2013) authorial voice model to evaluate the voice quality in the participants' argumentative essays. Zhao's (2013) authorial voice rubric included the following key elements: presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, and writer-reader presence. The essays were scored by the researcher and an independent rater (a doctoral student in applied linguistics) who was trained to use Zhao's (2013) rubric. To investigate the differences between students' pre and posttest writing performances regarding the three dimensions of authorial voice (the presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, and writer-reader presence), the Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test were applied since the data did not have a normal distribution in addition to a small sample size.

Qualitative data from focus group interviews was transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes related to students' perceptions of voice instruction. The analysis of the interview data went through a multi-step process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The initial step involved transcribing the interviews verbatim. This is followed by repeated readings and listening sessions to recordings, allowing the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of the content. Next, in the open coding stage, the researcher identified the keywords, phrases, and ideas across all transcripts. Subsequently, the researcher

refined and grouped the identified codes into specific categories based on their characteristics and relationships. Axial coding then explores the interplay between these categories and their subcategories. Finally, these categories were refined into broader themes, representing significant aspects of the data.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Although the scoring of essays was conducted independently by the researcher and a rater, several discussion sessions were held to ensure consistency and minimize any potential discrepancies in evaluation. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the assigned scores from the raters were subjected to Cohen's Kappa's inter-rater reliability test. The pretest scoring revealed an inter-rater reliability of 0.87 for voice expression and an overall essay quality assessment of 0.91, indicating an acceptable level of agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Similarly, the posttest scoring showed an acceptable level of agreement between the raters for voice expression (0.83) and overall essay quality (0.94). Additionally, the researcher and rater, a professor of discourse analysis, independently coded the focus group interviews. To check the reliability of the coding process, both coders engaged in several discussion sessions to validate the identified codes and emerging themes. The discussions yielded an agreement of 95% regarding the codes and 85% regarding the themes, which indicated very good qualitative reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that member checks increase the validity of the findings of qualitative research. Therefore, the transcribed interviews were shared with the participants from whom the data was solicited to ensure that their voices were accurately captured.

4. Results

4.1 The effects of explicit authorial voice instruction on L2 argumentative writing

This section addresses the first question of the study: How does explicit authorial voice instruction affect the expression of voice in L2 students' argumentative writing?

To ensure a fair comparison, the study began with a preliminary analysis to establish baseline equivalence in authorial voice expression between the control and experimental groups. This step was crucial for minimizing the influence of pre-existing group differences and isolating the effect of the intervention. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to identify the normality of the data (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Normality Tests for Pretest Authorial Voice Scores*

	group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	Experimental group	.208	37	.000	.890	37	.002
	Control group	.178	37	.005	.883	37	.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction							

As shown in Table 1, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of authorial voice pretest scores for both the experimental group (Kolmogorov-Smirnov: p =

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.000; Shapiro-Wilk: experimental group p = .002) and the control group (Kolmogorov-Smirnov: p = .005; Shapiro-Wilk: p = .001) deviated significantly from normality.

Given the non-normal distribution of data, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed as the appropriate non-parametric test to compare the pretest scores between the groups. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and Mann-Whitney U test of the pretest scores for both groups.

Table 2 *Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Two Groups on the Pretest*

	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z-test	P-value (Asymp. Sig)
Control Group	37	4.25	1.09	36.53	1351.50			
Experimental Group	37	4.45	1.28	38.47	1423.50			
Test Statistic						648.500	-0.402	0.687

Table 2 shows similar average scores for both groups, with the control group (N = 37) averaging 4.25 (SD = 1.09) and the experimental group (N= 37) averaging 4.45 (SD = 1.28). This suggests a relatively equivalent baseline level of authorial voice expression prior to the instruction. Additionally, the mean rank for the control group was 36.53, with a sum of ranks of 1351.50. The experimental group had a mean rank of 38.47 and a sum of ranks of 1423.50. Upon subjecting these data to the Mann-Whitney U test, a U statistic of 648.500 was obtained, with an accompanying Z-value of -0.402. P-value of 0.687. Since the obtained P-value exceeded the established alpha level of 0.05, the results suggest a lack of statistically significant differences in authorial voice expression between the control and experimental groups at the pre-intervention stage. This initial equivalence suggested a comparable baseline level of authorial voice expression across both groups prior to the intervention.

After completing the intervention, the next step was to investigate the impact of the authorial voice instruction on participants' ability to articulate their voices in argumentative writing. A post-writing test was administered to participants in the control and experimental groups. Similar to the pretest scores, the normality of authorial voice posttest scores for both the control and experimental groups was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests (see Table 3).

Table 3 *Normality Tests for Posttest Authorial Voice Scores*

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Posttest	Experimental group	.191	37	.002	.940	37	.047
	Control group	.171	37	.008	.879	37	.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction							

As shown in the Table 3, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of posttest scores for both the experimental group (Kolmogorov-Smirnov: p = .000; Shapiro-Wilk: p = .002)

and the control group (Kolmogorov-Smirnov: p = .005; Shapiro-Wilk: p = .001) deviated significantly from normality. Given the non-normal distribution of the data, the Mann-Whitney U test, a non-parametric test, was employed to compare the authorial voice scores between the control and experimental groups in the posttest. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 4 *Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Two Groups on the Posttest*

	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z-test	P-value (Asymp. Sig)
Control Group	37	5.41	1.29	19.54	723.00			
Experimental group	37	10.29	1.52	55.46	2052.00			
Test Statistic						20.000	-7.249	.000

Table 4 reveals that the control group (N=37) had a mean authorial voice score of 5.41 (SD=1.29), while the experimental group (N=37) displayed a significantly higher average score of 10.29 (SD=1.52). Additionally, the control group had a mean rank of 19.54 and a sum of ranks of 723.00, whereas the experimental group had a mean rank of 55.46 and a sum of ranks of 2052.00. These results suggested that the instruction potentially led to a higher level of authorial voice expression in the experimental group.

Applying the Mann-Whitney U test to these posttest scores revealed a U statistic of 20.000 alongside a Z-value of -7.249. The critical juncture of this analysis is underscored by the p-value, which registers at a high significant level of .000. This statistically insignificant figure transcends the conventional alpha threshold (p < .05), unquestionably indicating a profound and statistically significant difference in the posttest authorial voice scores between the control and experimental groups.

4.2 The effects of explicit authorial voice instruction on the dimensions of voice.

This section answers the second question of the study: How do the dimensions of authorial voice (presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, or writer-reader presence) vary before and after explicit authorial voice instruction in L2 argumentative writing?

The observed statistically significant difference in overall authorial voice scores between the control and experimental groups, as shown in Table 4, necessitated a further investigation into the specific dimensions most responsive to the authorial voice instruction employed with the participants in the experimental cohort. To identify which dimensions of authorial voice—namely, presence and clarity of ideas, manner of presentation, and writer-reader presence—demonstrated the greatest improvement, a series of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were conducted. The following sections present the results related to each dimension of authorial voice.

4.2.1 Presence and clarity of idea

The analysis of the presence and clarity of ideas dimension within the experimental group yielded insightful results. As shown in Table 3, the mean score for this dimension demonstrated a notable increase

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from 1.56 (SD = 0.64) in the pretest to 4.10 (SD = 0.69) in the posttest. This substantial improvement suggested that the authorial voice instruction effectively improved the participants' ability to express their ideas with greater clarity and presence.

Table 5 Pre-Post Tests Comparison of Authorial Voice (Presence and clarity of idea) in the Experimental Group Using Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test

Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Z-test	P-value
Pretest	1.56	0.64		
Posttest	4.10	0.69		
Test Statistic			-5.37	.000

The application of the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test further strengthens this conclusion, revealing a statistically significant difference (Z-test = -5.37, p-value = .000). This finding confirmed that the experimental group demonstrably improved their ability to articulate ideas with greater presence and clarity.

4.2.2 Manner of presentation

A careful examination of the manner of presentation dimension within authorial voice among participants revealed significant post-intervention advancements. As can be seen in Table 4, the mean score for this aspect exhibited a notable increase, rising from 1.43 (SD = 0.64) in the pretest to 3.29 (SD = 0.87) in the posttest. This statistically significant improvement suggests a substantial enhancement in the experimental group's ability to structure and deliver their written content effectively. Next, the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was employed to ensure analytical rigor. It yielded a Z-statistic of -5.14 and a p-value of .000. Notably, the p-value, which was below the standard alpha level of .05, underscored the critical role of the authorial voice instruction in enhancing the participants' presentation style domain

Table 6 Pre-Post Tests Comparison of Authorial Voice (Manner of Presentation) in the Experimental Group Using Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test

| Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Z-test	P-value
Pretest	1.43	.64		
Posttest	3.29	.87		
Test Statistic			-5.14	.000

4.2.3 Writer-reader presence

Examining the writer-reader presence dimension of authorial voice within the experimental group revealed compelling evidence of post-intervention enhancements. As Table 5 shows the mean score for this aspect exhibited a significant increase, rising from 1.45 (SD = 0.55) in the pretest to 2.89 (SD = 0.80) in the posttest. These results suggested that the experimental group enhanced their capacity to cultivate a dynamic interaction with readers through their writing.

Table 7 Pre-Post Tests Comparison of Authorial Voice (Writer-Reader Presence) in the Experimental Group Using Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test

Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Z-test	P-value
Pretest	1.45	.55		
Posttest	2.89	.80		
Test Statistic			-4.87	.000

To ensure robust statistical analysis, the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was employed and yielded a Z-statistic of -4.87. Notably, the p-value (.000) was far exceeding the conventional alpha level of .05, affirming the effectiveness of the instruction in fostering a profound writer-reader connection. Broadly speaking, the comparative analysis of pretest and posttest scores revealed statistically significant differences, highlighting the instructional intervention's efficacy in enhancing various dimensions of authorial voice among the participants. Given these observed improvements, it becomes imperative to examine which specific dimension of authorial voice was most profoundly influenced by the instruction employed. Figure 1 provides a comparative illustration of mean score improvements across the experimental group's three dimensions of authorial voice.

Figure 1 *Improvement in Authorial Voice Dimensions (Experimental Group)*
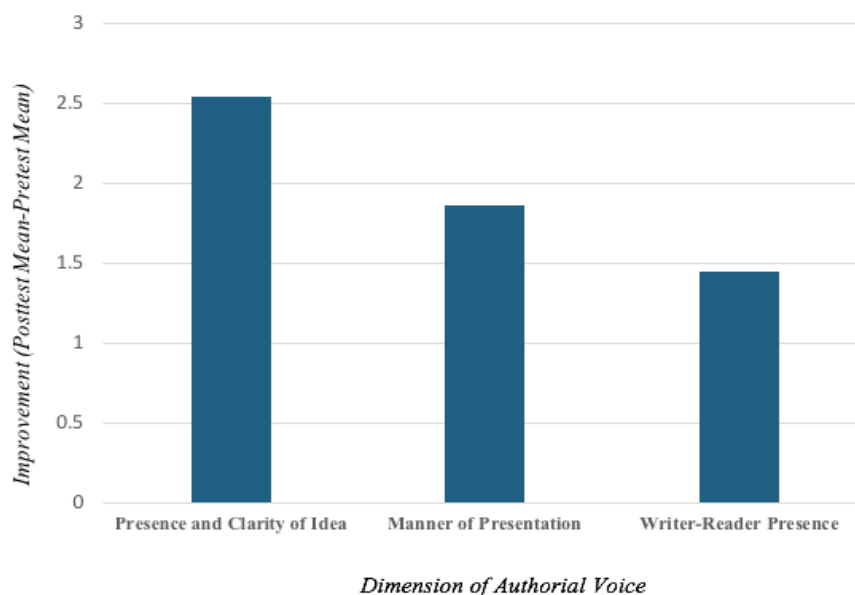
As illustrated in Figure 1, the most notable improvement occurred in the dimension of presence and clarity of ideas, with a mean score increase of 2.54 points. The manner of presentation dimension followed closely, showing a 1.86 mean rise. Finally, the writer-reader presence dimension exhibited the smallest increase (1.44 points) but still indicated a meaningful enhancement in fostering writer-reader engagement

4.3 Participants' perceptions of authorial voice instruction in argumentative writing

In addition to the quantitative analysis exploring the effectiveness of authorial voice instruction, the present study explored qualitatively the third research question: How do L2 students perceive the role of

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authorial voice instruction in their argumentative writing? The analysis of interview data revealed three primary themes, including: (1) developing authorial voice skills, (2) putting knowledge into practice, and (3) overcoming challenges and finding support. In the following sections, I present these themes with illustrative examples from the participants' interview data.

4.3.1 Developing authorial voice skills

This theme highlights the participants' reactions to and evaluations of their initial exposure to the notion of authorial voice. Several participants expressed initial confusion or limited knowledge regarding the authorial voice concept. The following excerpts from participants' interviews illustrate this idea.

> S1 "*First, I was confused about what authorial voice is. The teacher gave us examples and I understood that writing is not just about grammar but how you present yourself in your essay.*" (Interview, Dec., 2023).
> S2 "*I didn't know what authorial voice before. The lessons were amazing; we read many texts, and I liked how each writer sounded different. It was like knowing people through their writing.*" (Interview, Dec., 2023)
> S3 "*The idea of authorial voice was not familiar to me, but the teacher clarified it and we read and analyzed texts in ways I hadn't considered before, focusing on how each author's style supported their arguments.*" (Interview, Dec., 2023)

The students in above excerpts confirmed that they needed more knowledge about the concepts of authorial voice before the intervention. This finding particularly asserts the results of the pretest, which showed that the participants had baseline levels of authorial voice expression. Interestingly, the instruction addressed this confusion by employing engaging activities (e.g., "we read and analyzed texts"). Students' reflections underscored the instructional success in moving beyond the mere mechanics of writing (e.g., "writing is not just about grammar") to emphasize the writers' voices in their texts (e.g., knowing people through their writing). These shared experiences suggest that the instruction effectively introduced the concept of authorial voice and provided students with a foundation for further exploration.

There is a significant shift in students' perceptions regarding the value of authorial voice in writing. Several students expressed that they used to believe that academic writing necessitated a formal and impersonal tone. For example, a student articulated, "*I always thought that my writing had to be formal and impersonal. Learning about authorial voice showed me that my personal style is important. I mean I have to be myself*" (S19-Interview, Dec., 2023). Similarly, another student stated, "*Before, I didn't think my voice in writing was important. Now, I see how using my voice can make my essays stand out. It's about sharing my viewpoint, not just answering a question*" (S24- Interview, Dec., 2023). While these participants explicitly mentioned that learning about authorial voice challenged their prior assumptions about formality, they also emphasized that using their own voice can enhance their writing (e.g., "make my essays stand out"). This collective recognition suggested that the instruction empowered participants to move beyond the traditional perspectives, emphasizing an impersonal style in academic writing but expressing their unique voice in their writings.

4.3.2 Putting knowledge into practice

This theme addresses the complex effects of the instruction on students' writing practices, particularly the changes in their current argumentative writing and the expected incorporation of authorial voice in their future writings. In terms of changes in their writing, several students articulated a series of strategic adjustments made to their writing processes in response to their recent understanding of authorial voice. For example, a student described a change in her introductory paragraph and setting the tone through personal perspectives when she said, "*I've changed how I start my essays. Instead of jumping straight into the argument, I now try to introduce my perspective in a way that sets the tone for the whole piece.*" (S4-

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Interview, Dec., 2023). Similarly, another student noted a shift in focus from solely grammar to engaging writing when she said, *"Before, I focused a lot on grammar. Now, I think more about how to make my writing interesting. It's challenging but rewarding"* (S5- Interview, Dec., 2023). This suggests a move beyond a purely mechanics-based approach towards a more holistic understanding of effective communication.

Furthermore, students described experimenting with structure and incorporating personal ideas to enhance their argument and voice. For instance, a student said, "*I started trying different structures in my writing to support my arguments and my voice. It's like finding a new way to communicate.*" (S6- Interview, Dec., 2023). Another student articulated, "*I used to write in a way as my teacher wanted. Now, I try to include my ideas and feelings and this makes my writing more personal.*" (S7- Interview, Dec., 2023). While these students shared the belief that authorial voice is a way to express individuality, some students underlined the importance of reader engagement in articulating voice. For example, one student stated, "*Learning about authorial voice taught me to consider the reader's ideas. I now write with the intention of connecting with my audience*" (S8- Interview, Dec., 2023).

Regarding students expected long-term development, most students expressed a desire to continue using the learned concept beyond the immediate context of the course. For example, a student explicitly expressed the broader applicability of authorial voice beyond academic writing, emphasizing its value in various communication contexts when she said, "*I believe this instruction will influence my writing in the future. It's not just about academic writing; it's about expressing myself in any situation.*" (S9- Interview, Dec., 2023). Another student echoed this perspective, stating, "*I plan to continue practicing this in my writing. It's something that will make my writing stand out, even in professional settings*" (S11- Interview, Dec., 2023). More importantly, students highlighted a shift in their perception of writing, viewing it as an act of individual expression and their future composition as a reflection of their unique voices. For example, a student expressed, "*Understanding authorial voice has changed how I view writing. I think my future writings will reflect who I am. I will make them more meaningful and personal*" (S12- Interview, Dec., 2023). Indeed, these shared perspectives highlight a crucial outcome of the instruction: empowering students to move beyond focusing on technical aspects of writing and towards a more strategic and audience-oriented approach.

4.3.3 Overcoming challenges and finding support

This theme captures students' reflections on the challenges they encountered throughout the instructional process and suggestions for instructional improvement. Regarding the challenges, some students articulated difficulties in integrating their unique voice into specific aspects of their argumentative writing. For instance, a student expressed her struggle in infusing her personal opinion into the thesis statement as she said, "*Making my thesis statement reflect my own voice was hard. At first, it sounded like everyone else's. But, with practice and feedback, I learned how to put my opinions more strongly, making it truly mine*" (S1- Interview, Dec., 2023). Similarly, a student faced challenges in maintaining authorial voice while presenting counter-arguments. She articulated, "*I struggled with writing counterarguments without losing my authorial voice. It felt like I was just listing different opinions. My teacher suggested adding my reactions to these views and this helped me keep my voice.*" (S3- Interview, Dec., 2023). One student noted, "*balancing between a formal structure and my personal voice in argumentative essays was challenging. Peer review sessions helped most and showed me it's possible to be both structured and personal*" (S4- Interview, Dec., 2023). Most students agreed that feedback from the teacher or peers were helpful in overcoming such challenges.

However, in terms of instructional enhancements, students offered valuable insights into refining the learning experience which mainly focused on offering through and constructive feedback. For example, a student suggested, "*explaining the feedback I get from the teacher on voice can help to understand when I*

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successfully expressed my voice or when I get lost" (S7- Interview, Dec., 2023). Likewise, another student called for "*more group discussions about our writing could help. Sharing our experiences about writing authorial voices and the techniques for solving problems can make writing less stressful.*" (S8- Interview, Dec., 2023). Another student recommended, "*make the peer review groups collaborate between each other and to enrich the discussion and to share how to fix our problems.*" (S8- Interview, Dec., 2023). In fact, students' suggestions indicate that they value targeted feedback and opportunities for collaborative learning to further enhance their understanding and application of authorial voice principles.

5. Discussion

This mixed-methods study explored whether explicit instruction in authorial voice could enhance voice clarity in L2 Saudi students' argumentative texts compared to their peers receiving standard writing instruction. The results, derived from a rigorous comparative analysis between control and experimental groups, underscore a notable enhancement in the experimental group's ability to articulate their authorial voice post-instruction, with mean scores elevating from 4.45 to 10.29, a statistically significant improvement ($Z = -7.249$, $p < .000$) not observed in the control group. This finding supports the effectiveness of teaching authorial voice in L2 argumentative writing, offering data-driven confirmation of the teachability of voice through an appropriate pedagogy (Matsuda, 2001; Zhao, 2014). Remarkably, this finding aligns with the work of Farsani et al. (2023) and Fogal (2019), who reported similar positive effects of the instruction on L2 learners' voice development in writing. These researchers indicated that explicit instruction helped students incorporate elements like stance, tone, and persuasive language, consequently enhancing the overall voice within their written arguments. Conversely, this finding provides a counterpoint to Zabihi et al.'s (2019) study, which indicated a minimal impact of instruction on strengthening voice in students' argumentations, highlighting the potential efficacy of authorial voice instruction within the broader spectrum of L2 writing pedagogy. Put simply, the results of this study support Leki's (2003) argument that writing is a complex activity that cannot be taught as a single skill. Instead, it should be broken down into distinct writing components, with each writing course emphasizing specific areas.

Moreover, the findings showed noteworthy enhancements across all three dimensions of authorial voice (Zhao, 2013) within the experimental group, following the instruction. The most considerable improvement occurred in the presence and clarity of ideas, followed by improvements in the manner of presentation, and, finally, in writer-reader presence. This finding partially aligned with the work of Farsani et al. (2023), which reported a relatively balanced development across all dimensions of authorial voice, suggesting that the treatment applied was uniformly effective. However, Farsani et al. (2023) found that the instruction had an equal effect on all three dimensions of authorial voice. In contrast, this study revealed a distinct impact, with the dimension of 'presence and clarity of ideas' showing the most notable improvement after receiving the instruction. This finding was supported by the participants' reflections highlighting a shift in their understanding of argumentative writing, moving beyond a formal and impersonal approach towards acknowledging the value of incorporating their voices. These reflections indicated students' expressivist understanding of the voice as authorial presence and clarity of ideas.

Interestingly, the present study deviates from the perpetuating perspective about L2 writers from non-Western cultures, which argues that students' cultural values prevent them from articulating their voices (Elbow, 2007; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Also, there has been an argument in the literature that the lack of individual voice in argumentative writings among L2 writers was associated with the idea that non-western students, particularly Arabs, often write from a knowledge-telling model, in which they prefer to follow the instructions presented by their teachers or the in textbooks (Shukri, 2014). The result of this study aligns with Matsuda's (2001) argument that L2 students' can articulate their unique individual voice in writing when provided with effective authorial voice instruction. It is important to note that while the interview data did not directly assess which specific dimension demonstrated the most significant development, students' reflections emphasized aspects, such as incorporating personal perspectives, structuring arguments to support their voice, composing engaging introductions, and considering audience

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engagement, suggested a focus on the clarity of ideas and the manner of presentation, and the writer-reader presence, respectively. These reflections align with the quantitative findings presented earlier in the study.

Nevertheless, the qualitative data revealed that L2 students encountered specific difficulties in expressing personal opinion and maintaining their unique voice, especially when constructing thesis statements and presenting counter-arguments. These challenges highlight the complex balance required between personal expression and adherence to academic norms (Hyland, 2008). For instance, a challenge related to composing

a thesis statement that accurately represents a student's unique voice without sounding generic, as well as incorporating counter-arguments without undermining a personal stance. These reflections indicate that while students made strides in understanding and applying authorial voice, mastering its integration in structurally and rhetorically complex parts of academic writing presents a steep learning curve. The need for more constructive feedback (Ellis, 2009) was underscored as another challenge, with students valuing teacher and peer insights for overcoming such difficulties of personal voice expression within the academic writing context.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of explicit authorial voice instruction on L2 Saudi students' argumentative writing, focusing on the expression of authorial voice, the variation in its dimensions before and after instruction, and the students' perceptions of this instructional approach. The results revealed that explicit instruction significantly enhanced the overall expression of authorial voice, with the most notable improvement observed in the dimension of presence and clarity of ideas. Additionally, students' reflections highlighted a transformative shift in understanding the role of personal style in academic writing, emphasizing the value of integrating one's unique voice into argumentative texts. By providing clear positive impacts of focused instruction on authorial voice, the present study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective strategies for enhancing voice expression in L2 argumentative writing (Fogal, 2019; Farsani et al., 2023; Zhao, 2014). The study underscores the importance of pedagogical approaches that specifically address this nuanced component of argumentative writing in L2 contexts (Hyland, 2003). While this study yielded promising results, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. The study involved a relatively small sample size (N= 74, with 37 participants in each group), who were Saudi female students. This limitation might restrict the applicability of the findings to larger populations across diverse L2 writing contexts. In addition, the absence of a longitudinal perspective from the study's design limited its capacity to assess the long-lasting effects of explicit instruction on authorial voice in L2 argumentative writing.

6.1 Recommendations

These limitations suggest avenues for further inquiry and pedagogical implications. Future research could explore the effectiveness of authorial voice instruction with larger L2 student populations from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, including students' L1 backgrounds as a variable could offer valuable insights into the influence of native language writing conventions on L2 students' emerging authorial voice. Also, exploring the effects of such instruction on male students or mixed-gender groups could provide a more nuanced understanding of its applicability and effectiveness. Future research could investigate the potential gender-based differences in the development of authorial voice due to explicit instruction. Longitudinal studies tracking student progress over time would also provide a richer picture of the lasting impact of explicit authorial voice instruction.

Pedagogically, educators are encouraged to integrate explicit authorial voice instruction into L2 writing curricula, focusing on developing students' ability to articulate their ideas with clarity and personal style. Furthermore, providing feedback to enhance authorial voice and encouraging reflective practices about personal voice in writing can further support students' development as expressive L2 writers. Moreover, utilizing assessment tools such as the voice rubric used in this study can effectively capture students' authorial voice development and provide valuable feedback for both instructors and students.

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د. نجلاء الحربي، أستاذ مشارك في (تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية) في (قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها) بـ(كلية اللغات والعلوم الإنسانية) في جامعة القصيم (المملكة العربية السعودية). حاصلة على درجة الدكتوراه في تعلم اللغة الثانية من جامعة أنديانا في بنسلفينيا عام 2019. تدور اهتماماتها البحثية حول اللسانيات الاجتماعية، وتحديدًا ما يتعلق بهوية المتعلمين وأفكارهم وتوجهاتهم اللغوية.

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