

**The Narrative Identity Construction of Three Multilingual Students at  
an American-Style University in the UAE:  
An Examination of Motivational, Ideological, Attitudinal, and  
Sociocultural Factors that Impact Writer Identity in Academic English**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores how multilingual students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as academic writers in English. I use a case-study approach on three first-year writing students by examining written journal responses, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews about their past, present, and imagined-future experiences as writers. The study uses multiple theoretical frameworks to examine the writing motivations, linguistic ideologies, attitudinal beliefs, and sociocultural influences surrounding English as an academic discourse that are specific to the UAE, with particular focus on how English as the medium of instruction impacts writer identity and narrative identity construction in multilingual students.

The study reveals that the participants' motivations as academic writers were impacted by their investments in English rather than their sole abilities as academic writers. Thus, English as the primary language of instruction in the UAE plays a significant role when understanding writer identity in the region. The study also reveals the challenges that can arise when educational practices in the UAE demand mastery of academic discourse in English without considering the potential impact on multilingual students' perceptions of their English-language abilities. This was highlighted when the participants encountered difficulties common to all academic writers, such as gatekeeping practices, formulaic teaching methods, and standard-language correctness, yet their English-language abilities were perceived to be the cause, either by themselves or their teachers, rather than the overall challenges of mastering an academic discourse. By having the participants construct their writer identities in narrative form, their unique experiences can offer important perspectives on the ways in which English impacts writer identity in multilingual students in the UAE.

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## CHAPTER 1

### CONTEXT

#### 1.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter in the voices of my participants whose experiences with academic discourse in English form the basis of my research on writer identity in the United Arab Emirates (UAE):

**Dana:** *I wasn't sure how she managed to tear down the first piece I truly composed with honesty. I poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great. ... I felt hurt. Her comments made me feel that none of my writings would ever be good enough.*

**Mumin:** *I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in high school, especially in English, and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic and formulaic approach they followed.*

**Prashant:** *At first I thought that my teacher liked my project very much but when I read it in class, I was ashamed of myself. ... why did the teacher give me the project and even if she did why did she tell me to read it out loud. After that, everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class.*

#### 1.2 Rationale of the Study

These experiences are not uncommon. Throughout my years teaching first-year composition at an American-style university in the UAE, I have asked my students to reflect on their experiences as academic writers. Overwhelmingly, their narratives depicted a classroom situation, usually in secondary school, in which they faced difficulties with their teachers, essay assignments, or the norms of academic discourse. The role of English, as the medium of instruction in the UAE (Dahan, 2015; Al-Issa, 2017), was also a crucial element within these stories, and

its linguistic value in students' classrooms was often situated among the many challenges brought to light regarding academic discourse and its impact on writer identity. In fact, I discovered that my students' motivations as academic writers, based on intrinsic and extrinsic influences in their lives, were much more complex and significant to their investments in English rather than their sole abilities as academic writers (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). While academic writing is particularly challenging for students overall (Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Hagood, 2014), it presents an additional layer of difficulty for students who come from a diverse background of languages, as it conforms to an 'institutionalized literacy' based on the conventional norms of English (Hyland, 2013; Fairclough, 2014). Even though English is the primary language of instruction in the UAE (Dahan, 2015; Al-Issa, 2017), with most university students attending private English-medium schools throughout their entire educations (Troudi & Jendli, 2011), it is often learned as a second language that dramatically differs from what students use at home.

Numerous studies that focus on literacy practices in the UAE discuss the difficulties students face speaking Arabic, or other languages, at home and then having to transition to an English-speaking context at school (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Solloway, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). When students' home languages are different than what they are learning in school, they might not have sufficient access to the literacy support or academic language to acquire the writing norms deemed necessary for the institutional expectations of their English-medium schools (Seymour, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). However, the status of English in the region overrides such concerns (Kirk, 2010; Al-Issa, 2017), and multilingual students in the UAE are increasingly expected to master English as an academic discourse without considering the potential impact on their investments in the English language. Moreover, when they do encounter difficulties common to academic writers in general, even those considered native-English speakers, I believe their English-language abilities are perceived to be the driving reason for their difficulties, either by themselves or their teachers, rather than the overall challenges of mastering an academic discourse.

This study therefore focuses on the writing motivations, linguistic ideologies, attitudinal beliefs, and sociocultural influences surrounding English as an academic discourse that are specific to the UAE, which I believe impact multilingual students' writer identities and investments in English in particular ways (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). These motivations are missing from the literature on academic writing in the Gulf region and could potentially uncover new insights into the challenges and dynamics that students in the UAE experience as writers in English-medium secondary schools and American-style universities. This study also focuses on narrative identity construction by using written narratives (journal responses) as "storied texts" with multilingual students writing in English (Bruner, 1987, p. 14). Specifically, I was curious about how students perceive their subjective writing experiences and construct their narrative identities as writers based on English as an academic discourse.

Narratives about writing allow for a better understanding of what students consider significant about their discursive experiences and how they construct meaning about themselves as writers (Pomerantz & Kearney, 2012). I believe narratives about students' subjective writing experiences in English can support current literature on academic discourse in the UAE, which often reflects the perspectives and concerns of writing teachers rather than students themselves. As Solloway (2016) points out about research in the region, "There is a relative paucity of data on the views of tertiary-level students towards a range of issues related to English" (p. 176), which I hope to address in my study on writer identity. Therefore, my focus is not on the 'quality' of the participants' narratives, nor on the 'correctness' of their academic performance, but rather on how they experienced their identities as writers and constructed their identities in narrative form based on past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the classroom.

### **1.3 Context of the Study**

The context in which this research takes place, an American-style university in the UAE, will be referred to as Gulf American University (GAU) throughout the study

for the sake of anonymity. GAU is an independent institution, accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and the language of instruction is English. Although public universities in the UAE teach in English, their curriculum is still guided by the Ministry of Education, which means that their courses are not in line with GAU's American model of higher education. Specifically, GAU follows a general liberal arts program that requires a series of academic writing courses regardless of students' majors. This American-style writing program, which will be discussed in more detail in the Background chapter, is a distinguishing factor of the university.

GAU is chosen by students and their families for its American curriculum and prestige as a western-accredited university (Dahan, 2015). As of fall 2017, there were nearly 6,000 students enrolled from over 80 nationalities, with the majority coming from MENA (Middle East North Africa) countries and South Asia. Most GAU students were raised in the UAE and come from a variety of secondary schools throughout the region. While some were previously educated in Arabic-medium government schools, the majority were educated in private English-medium schools with American or British curriculums (Ronesi, 2011). Other students in the UAE come from national schools, which offer curriculum specific to various homelands, such as India, but the medium of instruction is commonly English (Vora, 2013). Foreign students, who are mostly from the MENA region, attended private English-medium schools in their home countries before transferring to universities such as GAU (Dakhli & Ketata, 2015). Therefore, the students at GAU are largely multilingual and tend to use English on a daily basis beyond the university; thus, their English-language skills are considered very advanced compared to other students in the region who attend government schools and public universities (Dahan, 2015).

At the same time, many students enter my first-year composition course (WRI 101) with prior writing experiences that have shaped their investments in English, often in challenging and complex ways, as evident by small-scale studies I have conducted in my own classroom at GAU (Sperrazza, 2016; Sperrazza & Raddawi,

2016; Sperrazza, 2018). These issues will be discussed in more detail in chapters 5-7 when I analyze the participants' subjective writing experiences and perceptions of themselves as academic writers in English.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

I believe this study has uncovered new knowledge about the complexity of academic discourse in English and its impact on writer identity in the UAE. Specifically, it highlights how motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural issues surrounding academic discourse in English, which are prevalent in this region, impact identity construction in the writing classroom. These issues are significant to explore since English is the primary language of instruction in the UAE; thus, multilingual students' perceptions of themselves as academic writers are being shaped by English on a continual basis throughout their educations. To date, there are very few studies in the region that have examined the impact of academic English on writer identity from a student perspective. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there are very few studies that examine the impact of academic discourse in English on students' perceptions of their English-language abilities.

This study is also significant because it reveals the challenges that can arise when educational practices demand mastery of academic discourse in English without considering the potential impact on multilingual students' investments in the English language. The influx of English-medium universities worldwide, which are increasingly expecting multilinguals to write with the same academic fluency as native-English speakers (Hyland, 2013; Miller & Pessoa, 2017), signifies the need for more studies on writer identity that research the impact of academic English on students' perceptions of their English-language abilities. By having the participants construct their writer identities in narrative form, their unique experiences can offer important perspectives on the ways in which English impacts writer identity in the UAE that could potentially inform educational research beyond the Gulf region.

Additionally, there is a major gap in literature on using narratives to explore writer identity construction in the UAE. In fact, my belief is that the perspectives and interests of writing students in the region are rarely heard as most studies (Al Khairy, 2013; Solloway, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017) investigate academic writing through the lens of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL); as a cultural challenge that arises from teaching English in an Arab country (Raddawi, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Hudson, 2013; Ahmed, 2018); or as an endangerment to the Arabic language based on the spread of global English (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017). While these are, indeed, significant issues to explore, especially since English is the primary language of instruction in the UAE (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Solloway, 2016), they do not address the particular discursive needs of students in this region that can only surface, I believe, when they 'write about writing.' Therefore, I believe my own study offers new insight into the complexity of students' writer identities and narrative identity constructions within a Gulf context, including their internal and external motivations as academic writers in English (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions that guide this study are:

- 1) How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*
- 2) How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*
- 3) How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes toward writing?*
- 4) How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*
- 5) How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*



To understand how the participants constructed their narrative identities as writers, I needed to use more than one theoretical framework. First, to explore the participants' motivational strategies as writers, I used Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory. This helped me understand how the participants' motivations, based on their learner, expected, and imagined identities, impacted the construction of their writer identities.

To investigate the participants' ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English, I used Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) to highlight how writers 'invest' in particular language practices based on their access to agency within the target language. This theory assisted my understanding of the ideological beliefs that impacted the participants' agentive attitudes toward academic discourse in English, genre structures, and writing beliefs.

To explore how sociocultural influences position the participants, I used Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice to analyze how discursive practices in educational contexts position multilingual students in English. This helped me understand how positioning by teachers, family, and the participants themselves, impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

Finally, to understand how narrative motives impact the construction of writer identity, I used Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, Higgins' (1987) theory of self-discrepancy, and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible-selves theory, which are each grounded in one's perception of the self in relation to others. This helped me understand the external and internal factors that motivated the participants to present their 'ought-to' selves and 'ideal' selves according to a particular narrative format, as well as envision their 'future' possible selves based upon extrinsic expectations found in their narrative formats. I also used McAdams' life story model (1985, 1993, 1996), which highlights how narratives about writing are reflective of a

much larger story arc that is grounded in both ‘master’ and ‘little’ narratives of success. This offered me insight into how the participants constructed their narrative identities as ‘successful’ academic writers in English.

## **1.6 Structure of the Study**

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. Chapter One presents the rationale of the study and a brief context of the university where the study takes place. I also discuss the significance of the study by highlighting how there is a major gap in literature throughout the region on using narratives to explore students’ perceptions of their writer identities and English-language abilities. Finally, I provide the research questions that guide this study with a brief explanation of the frameworks used to answer each question.

Chapter Two provides background information to the study that highlights issues regarding the history of English and academic writing in the UAE. This includes the expansion of English in the UAE; ‘public’ education in Arabic versus ‘private’ education in English; and English as the primary language of instruction in the UAE. I also discuss the prevalence of western-style universities in the UAE, which relates to GAU, the American-style university where this study takes place. Then, I discuss academic writing in English at GAU and the specific requirements of WRI 101, the first-year composition course that I teach.

Chapter Three provides a literature review where I draw on several frameworks that address academic discourse in English, writer identity, and narrative identity construction. First, I present Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as informed by Markus and Nurius’ (1986) possible-selves theory and Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy theory, as well as Covington’s (1984, 1997) self-worth theory to explore motivational strategies that writers use in the classroom. I also examine ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English by presenting Norton’s (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) theory of social identity. Then, I explore Davies and Harré’s (1990) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice to analyze how discursive practices and

sociocultural contexts position students as academic writers in English. Last, I discuss narrative motives that impact the construction of writer identity by presenting Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, as well as McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model, to explore narrative identity construction.

Chapter Four introduces the research paradigm and provides a critique of the methodology used in this study. I give an account of the research paradigm, the research design, and my decision for choosing the participants. Then, I provide a description of the methodology chosen to collect the data and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, I discuss how I conducted the thematic analysis followed by a consideration of ethical implications and limitations to the study.

Chapter Five through Chapter Seven present data from the three case studies. In each chapter, I examine how the participants of the study construct their writer identities based on motivational strategies in the classroom; ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English; and sociocultural influences in their lives that positioned them as writers and impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

Chapter Eight discusses narrative motives that may have influenced how the participants constructed their writer identities based on my own presence as their teacher-researcher. It also examines the narrative motives used by the participants to construct their narrative identities as writers within the past-present-future stages of their story arcs based on 'master' and 'little' narratives of success.

Chapter Nine outlines six specific themes based on the findings and how they relate to the research questions that guide this study. This is followed by a discussion of the themes as well as a discussion of the implications.

Chapter Ten concludes with a discussion about contributions to knowledge; limitations of the study; and recommendations for future research.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

I provided the rationale of the study by stating how the status of English in the UAE influences multilingual students to master academic discourse in English without considering the potential impact on their investments in the English language. Then, I provided the context by describing the American-style university where the study takes place. Next, I highlighted how motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural issues surrounding academic discourse in English, which are prevalent in this region, impact identity construction in the writing classroom. I also specified that these issues are significant to explore since multilingual students' perceptions of themselves as academic writers are being shaped by English on a continual basis as it is the primary language of instruction in the UAE. Last, I provided the research questions that guide this study followed by a brief description of the ten chapters that structure the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the participants of the study and places them within the linguistic context of the UAE, a country that has linked its economic development and educational sector with English. I then compare the difference between a 'public' Arabic education versus a 'private' English education by highlighting how the status of English has influenced parents to enroll their children in either private English-medium schools or private 'national' schools where the medium of instruction is commonly English. I further explore the significance of western-style universities in the UAE, which also relates to GAU, the university in which this study takes place. Finally, I discuss academic writing in English at GAU, which includes the requirements of WRI 101, the first-year composition course that I taught during the time of the study.

#### **2.2 The Participants**

The three participants of the study have attended private English-medium schools at various stages in their lives within the UAE or greater MENA region before attending GAU. They represent a particular group of 'privileged' students whose parents can afford the high cost of private education in English and tuition at an American-style university, and therefore, are not illustrative of all students in the region.

The first participant, Dana, attended private, international schools in Dubai with native English-speaking teachers since the age of four. As a Jordanian student raised in the UAE, she reflects how Arab parents predominantly choose to send their children to private English-medium schools so as to acquire English fluency and better their chances of attending a prestigious western-style university, such as GAU (Seymour, 2016; Al-Issa, 2017).

The second participant, Mumin, attended a private English-medium secondary school in Sudan since the age of 14 before his family moved to the UAE so he could attend GAU. While Mumin was not raised in the UAE, it should be noted that parents in the MENA region who can afford to enroll their children in private English-medium schools tend to send them to western-style universities in the UAE (Dakhli & Ketata, 2015). Therefore, Mumin reflects the significance of an English-based education to parents from the MENA region and the UAE's role as a provider of higher education to foreign students from MENA countries, such as Sudan (Kirk, 2010).

The third participant, Prashant, attended a private 'national' Indian school in Ras al-Khaima (an emirate in the UAE) since the age of seven in which the language of instruction was English. As an Indian student raised in the UAE, Prashant reflects the differing national groups living in the UAE whose parents want their children to study a curriculum from their specific homeland but also acquire English fluency for acceptance into English-medium universities (Vora, 2013).

### **2.3 Expansion of English in the UAE**

Before its creation as the United Arab Emirates in 1971, the UAE was known as the Trucial States, a collection of separate sheikhdoms extending along the Arabian Gulf, which consisted of Bedouin tribes, traders, and pearl divers. It remained under British rule for a century and half until it united into what we now know as the seven emirates of the UAE: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Umm al-Qaiwain. Since its formation, the UAE has been developing at dizzying speeds. After the discovery of oil in the late 1950s, the influx of 'petro-dollars' has transformed the desert landscape into a metropolis of skyscrapers and five-star hotels, with a thriving tourist industry, and one of the highest standards of living in the world (Hopkyns, 2014). In order to propel itself forward in terms of modernization and innovation, the UAE has relied on English as the global language of business and commerce (Al-Issa, 2017). A steady flow of foreigners arrive to fill the available positions generated by the UAE's desire to rapidly modernize and compete on a global level. Workers from mainly South Asia

are imported for construction and retail work while those from other Arab nations and western countries are chosen to work in the fields of business, medicine, and education (Findlow, 2006).

The country now consists of over 200 nationalities, with roughly 100 different languages spoken (Dahan, 2015), and an ever-growing expatriate community that outnumbers the Emirati 'locals' who make up 10 percent of the working population (Badry, 2011). While the foreign workforce in the country is estimated at 90 percent, nearly 66 percent speak a language other than Arabic (Al-Khoury, 2010). Although Arabic is spoken by Emiratis and other resident Arabs, there is no official requirement for the large percentage of non-Arabic-speaking foreigners to learn it (Dahan, 2015). Therefore, while Arabic is the official language of the UAE, "English has a de facto *lingua franca* status" (Randall & Samimi, 2010, p. 45) since it functions as the linguistic common-ground for the varied, multicultural mix of people that embody the country. This, combined with the country's ambitions as a global leader, are the driving forces behind the expansion of English in the UAE, and the ever-growing desire for English instruction in schools throughout the country (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011).

#### **2.4 English as the Primary Language of Instruction in the UAE**

Before its unification, the Trucial States did not have a well-developed educational system of its own. At first, only boys attended school where they mainly learned to recite passages from the Quran. Then, in 1912 Kuwait established non-religious schools in the region that were independently run and fully staffed by Kuwaiti, Egyptian, and Qatari teachers throughout the twentieth century. By the late 1950s, segregated schools opened for girls (Dahan, 2015). However, once the UAE gained its independence in 1971, there was an even greater need to import educational expertise based on its growing population. As the federal government looked to develop the nation and invest its new-found wealth, it began to focus on expanding its educational infrastructure across the country. At the time, the decision to 'borrow' other educational systems, rather than develop a local system of its own, was seen as the fastest way to provide an already established

pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching staff. At first, the UAE mainly relied on educators from Egypt and Jordan, two countries known for their long-standing educational history and pedagogical expertise in the region (Kirk, 2010). However, this early reliance on foreign curriculum and expatriate educators further influenced the importation of educational systems from Britain and America during the country's rapid development and desire for English as a global language (Al-Issa, 2017). Moreover, as the UAE actively recruited a western workforce from overseas based on its expanding multinational and multicultural expatriate community, there was a need to provide the educational systems and English-based curriculum of workers' home countries since schools were an important element for recruiting highly qualified individuals (Vora, 2013).

One of the more notable aspects of the educational sector in the UAE is its two distinct groups of institutions: public and private. Public schools are free to all UAE national citizens, with the structure and curriculum based on Islamic and Arabic principles. The language of instruction is Arabic and teachers are predominantly recruited from other Arab countries, fulfilling the need for a linguistically capable and culturally acceptable workforce (Kirk, 2010). However, the Ministry of Education has frequently announced that public education is in need of reform, citing 'traditional' methods of teaching, based on rote memorization, as the reason national Arab students are ill-prepared to become "critical, global citizens of the twenty-first century" (Sperrazza & Raddawi, 2016, p. 181).

In response, the UAE's Vision 2020 initiative, which is centered on modernizing educational standards in public schools, plans to incorporate more English into the classroom because it is considered a language of instruction that will promote "economic viability, [a] competitive national workforce, and an active role in this era of globalization" (Troudi & Jendli, 2011, p. 26). Currently, daily English-language classes are required as early as kindergarten and math and science are taught completely in English (Badry, 2011). Over the next five years, a New School Model policy will be implemented nationwide in which all public school children are to be taught by a native-English speaker alongside their regular Arabic teacher



(Seymour, 2016). While many Arab parents and educators view these bilingual initiatives as a threat to the status of Arabic, and especially to their linguistic identity as Arabs (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Dahan, 2015; Al-Issa, 2017), a growing portion of Emirati parents are removing their children from public schools altogether. Instead, they are choosing to enroll their children in private English-medium schools for what they perceive as a 'better' education that will prepare their children for acceptance into an English-medium university and workforce that demands global English (Dahan, 2015; Seymour, 2016).

While the private sector initially developed to meet the needs of expatriate groups, the UAE now has the largest number of English-medium private schools per capita worldwide with the sector expecting to grow 8 percent each year (Pennington, 2015). Over 70 percent of children living in the UAE, including native-Arab speakers, begin their English instruction in private schools as early as kindergarten (Soto, 2016). These private schools can run as high as 60,000 dirhams (over 12,000 British pounds) a year and follow an 'international' model that is mainly based on either a British or American curriculum. Students prepare for their A-levels or SATs, respectively, depending on which international school they attend. These schools also prepare students for admittance into top universities located in the United Kingdom, United States, and other English-speaking countries, or for one of the many English-medium universities in the UAE (Seymour, 2016).

The curriculum in private international schools also prepares its students for the academic rigor of western universities, thus, academic discourse plays a significant role in students' writing classes. As a result, teachers are mainly recruited from Britain, America, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand for their western educations and native fluency in English, as well as their ability to teach academic writing according to the norms of Standard English (Kirk, 2010; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Solloway, 2016). The belief that native speakers are better at teaching their own language than non-native speakers is still very prevalent in the UAE today and adds to the demand of private English-medium schools in the region (Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Hudson, 2013). While such beliefs have long been contested

(Kachru, 1992; Kramsch, 1993; Jenkins, 2006; Canagarajah, 1999, 2014), they add to the perception by parents in the UAE that an English-instruction education, taught by native-speaking teachers, is necessary for their children's future success (Seymour, 2016).

Another model of education, prevalent in the UAE, is the private 'national' school, with more than 100 schools in Dubai alone (Vora, 2013). These schools tend to cost less than the expensive British- or American-style private schools and cater to the many different national groups living in the UAE. For example, there are French schools that teach to a French curriculum, Russian schools, Arabic schools, Pakistani schools, and Indian schools, the latter of which comprises the majority (Vora, 2013). Indian and other private national schools usually employ foreign instructors from the same national background as the school itself and teach aspects of the culture, language, and history. Often, these schools are significant to parents who want to preserve a 'national culture' to their children, but, it is important to note, the overall language of instruction is commonly English.

While the teachers in Indian national schools are rarely native-English speakers, they possess a high mastery of the language and are expected to teach the majority of their subjects in English, including academic writing (Vora, 2013). Not only do they prepare students for state exams in India, similar to the A-levels or SATs, but many are required to teach aspects of a British or American curriculum. Therefore, national schools are sought after by Indian parents because they prepare students for top universities in India, and also, they provide ample preparation for English-medium universities in the UAE and abroad (Vora, 2013). However, it should be noted, these schools lack the same prestige as private international schools since the curriculum is not solely based on British or American educational models. Even more significant, the teachers are not native-English speakers from western countries. As previously stated, these two factors are desired by parents in the UAE who want their children to obtain English proficiency for its status, academic opportunities, and entry into a globalized economy based exclusively on English (Dahan, 2015).

Although Arabic is required at all private schools in the UAE, whether a private international school or a private national school, it is often taught as a cursory class, relegated to a few hours a week (Vora, 2013). Arabic teachers in private schools have observed that students dismiss their courses as unnecessary since the language lacks the social prestige of English (Bassiouney, 2014; Badry & Willoughby, 2016). Furthermore, students in private schools complain that reading and writing in Arabic is difficult since they have mainly learned through rote memorization with very little practical use for outside the classroom (Seymour, 2016). Even students in public schools are finding it increasingly difficult to read and write in formal Arabic since its complex grammar structure makes it “notoriously difficult to learn” without consistent practice and reinforcement throughout primary and secondary school (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011, p. 8).

Since math and science are now taught entirely in English in public schools, with future initiatives by the Ministry of Education to promote even more English in the classroom, Arabic has lost its status as the primary language of instruction in the UAE (Troudi & Jendli, 2011). At the time of this study, all universities in the UAE—even public universities once established on the Arabic language—now require English as the medium of instruction (Al-Issa, 2017). Thus, over the course of 45 years, English has evolved from a foreign language into a second language by becoming the primary language of instruction in the UAE (Findlow, 2006; Al-Issa & Dahan 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Dahan, 2015; Al-Issa, 2017).

## **2.5 Western-Style Universities in the UAE**

The prevalence of foreign universities in the UAE reflects the country’s overall desire to modernize and compete on an international level, which is fueled by a global economy that demands western degrees, primarily those accredited by the United Kingdom and United States (Noori, 2016). Therefore, the expansion of British- and American-style universities, cited as the fastest growing in the Gulf (Findlow, 2005), is not unexpected, given that the UAE established itself on the importation of foreign models for its primary and secondary educational systems in

the early 1970s (Kirk, 2010). The prevailing perception that education can be 'bought' from overseas has provided an array of opportunities for students from the Gulf to obtain western-style degrees without having to live in a foreign country to attend university (Noori, 2016). This is especially important for students whose parents do not want them to live in a country with different cultural values or for those finding it difficult to obtain visas overseas (Rupp, 2009).

Instead, students from the UAE or greater MENA region can remain near home, or within close proximity to their home countries, while attending the following western-style universities: foreign institutions with branch campuses or independent, government-supported universities. Overseas branch campuses mirror the curriculum of the main university and offer a foreign degree equivalent to what is offered at home (e.g., Middlesex University in Dubai or New York University in Abu Dhabi). However, these institutions are not as popular as independent western-style universities in the UAE, which are locally established and funded by the Emirati government, yet fully accredited by educational commissions standards in the United Kingdom or United States (e.g., British University in Dubai or American University of Sharjah).

The increase of these independent universities signifies the UAE's desire to gain prominence as a leader in higher education in the Gulf region, and tremendous resources are spent on attracting students from the UAE and other MENA countries (Kirk, 2010). Besides the billions of dirhams spent each year on developing its higher education sector for students in the Gulf (Noori, 2016), the UAE is also benefitting from North Africa's desire for a stronger presence in a global market dominated by English (Vives, 2017). While English has become a required subject for any degree offered at universities in North Africa, such as Sudan, they do not carry the same prestige as western-style universities in the UAE (Kamwangamalu, 2018). Therefore, a growing portion of North African parents who are able to send their children to private English-medium schools in their home countries are subsequently sending them to western-style universities in the UAE (Dakhli & Ketata, 2015).

In particular, American-style universities make up two-thirds of the independent universities in the UAE as an American higher education is widely sought after in the Arab world (Romani, 2009; Vora, 2013). These universities cost as high as 95,000 dirhams (close to 20,000 British pounds) a year and are desired for their faculty from English-speaking countries who comprise the majority of instructors. Even those instructors who are not native-English speakers have western degrees and experience living or teaching abroad. The curriculum at American-style universities tends to encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and less dependence on rote memorization. Often, classes are student-centered rather than teacher-centered, and the American curricular standards are based on a liberal studies program, such as general classes in the arts, sciences, and humanities.

Overall, faculty are known for holding their students to high standards and university officials strictly adhere to American accreditation standards so as to offer an education equivalent to that in the United States (Miller & Pessoa, 2017). If not, these institutions could potentially lose credibility with the local and international community who choose them for their educational values, qualifications, and teaching practices believed to be on par with universities in the United States (Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2012). American-style academic writing is also highly endorsed because of its dominance in U.S. universities, as well as international universities worldwide, and great care is taken to help students gain fluency in the conventions of academic writing in English (Hyland, 2013).

## **2.6 Academic Writing at GAU**

At GAU, where this study takes place, the university requires a series of academic writing courses offered by the Writing Studies department that aims to prepare students for other genres of academic writing in their disciplinary courses. Students are placed into different levels of these academic writing courses as freshmen depending on their minimum TOEFL (550) or IELTS (6.5) scores for acceptance at GAU, as well as an additional score based on a written English Placement Test produced by the Writing Studies department. Instructors in the Writing Studies

department, where I currently teach, have Masters or PhDs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Education, Rhetoric, or English. They must have a minimum of five years' experience teaching academic writing at the tertiary level, preferably with multilingual students, before teaching at GAU.

Overall, instructors teach students the discursive patterns and rhetorical skills of genre-specific writing assignments, which are based on a common-core of English-language conventions, skills, and forms that are believed to share similar traits across the disciplines (Hyland, 2006, 2013). This genre-approach to writing also incorporates process writing (a format based on brainstorming, drafting, and revising that results in a final written product) with critical reading and writing assignments that require strong analysis and research skills. When I refer to 'academic writing' at GAU throughout my study, it is based on this description.

### **2.6.1 Bridge Program**

If students cannot achieve the minimum required English-proficiency scores needed for acceptance at GAU, they have an opportunity to attend the Academic Achievement Bridge Program on campus, a year-long English preparatory course, in which students re-take the TOEFL or IELTS upon completion. The program prepares students for matriculation into the university by increasing their English-language proficiency to a level suitable for study at GAU. Specifically, the English courses include intensive instruction in reading, writing, grammar, listening, and speaking, as well as TOEFL or IELTS training. They exemplify Hyland's (2006) description of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in which students from diverse linguistic backgrounds are taught isolated literacy skills. Once students achieve the minimum required English-proficiency scores for matriculation into university, they can re-take the written English Placement Test and begin their series of required academic writing courses in the Writing Studies department.

### **2.6.2 Writing Studies Department**

The purpose of the Writing Studies department is different from the Bridge Program. The curriculum is designed for students who are expected to have the

English-language proficiency and discursive abilities to practice and produce the conventions of academic discourse in English. As previously stated, writing instructors prepare students for their disciplinary courses by helping them gain academic fluency in the particular standard language conventions and forms necessary for writing in English at an American-style university. Once students pass the written English Placement Test, they are put into one of two writing courses: a beginning-level writing course (WRI 001), which introduces basic academic writing conventions, such as critical reading and writing skills, and the production of a five-paragraph essay. Or, students are placed into an intermediate-level writing course (WRI 101), which focuses on the rhetorical skills needed for writing argument essays, such as APA citation, quoting, paraphrasing, and academic research. After successful completion of WRI 101, students must take an advanced-level writing course (WRI 102), which builds on the skills acquired in WRI 101 but introduces academic critiques and short research papers. The last course in the series (ENG 204), offered by the English department, culminates in the construction of a major academic research paper.

### **2.6.3 WRI 101: First-Year Composition at GAU**

At the time of the study, the participants were students in my intermediate-level writing course (WRI 101). Dana and Prashant were immediately placed into my course as beginning freshmen. Mumin had to partake in the university's year-long Bridge Program before being placed in WRI 101. Once he entered my course, he was re-taking WRI 101 for a second time. The course description is as follows:

WRI 101 instructs students how to read and write academically. Emphasizes rhetorical forms of summary, analysis, argumentation, persuasion, and critical thinking. Focuses on developing reading and writing skills by emphasizing critical thinking, process writing, and peer review. Introduces APA citation format and research skills.

There are three formal writing assignments required of WRI 101 students. They are listed below with a brief description:

1. Academic Summary: to develop the ability to paraphrase and summarize academic texts
2. Analysis Essay: to compose analytic essays utilizing a range of rhetorical modes such as description, compare/contrast, cause and effect, causal, and rhetorical and process analysis
3. Argument Essay: to produce an argument essay that utilizes a variety of rhetorical strategies such as analysis, synthesis, rhetorical strategies, APA citation, and academic research

It is important to note that the argument essay is referred to throughout chapters 5-7 when the participants reflect on their writing experiences as students in my WRI 101 course during fall 2015.

## **2.7 Impact of Academic English on Student Motivation in the UAE**

It is not the purpose of the study to query the course requirements of the Writing Studies department or examine how academic writing in English is taught at GAU. My study is concerned with how multilingual students in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers based on past writing experiences in English-medium schools, which impacts their present and imagined-future identity constructions as writers at an American-style university. These experiences can shed light on educational practices in the UAE that require multilingual students to gain fluency in the written conventions of academic English (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Miller & Pessoa, 2017).

Language practices that encourage academic discourse in English over Arabic, as well as other major languages spoken in the UAE, can have a negative impact on students' motivations as learners (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017). Research conducted in English-mediums schools in the UAE reveals that students' lack of written fluency in English is often misconstrued as lack of motivation (Dahl, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Solloway, 2016). Other studies have found that students feel demotivated in the classroom because they do not culturally identify with English as the language of instruction (Ahmed, 2011; Diallo,



2014; Seymour, 2016). Once at university, multilingual students may still feel disengaged with writing based on their past difficulties trying to acquire the conventions and norms of academic English (Miller & Pessoa, 2017; Ahmed, 2018). Specifically, in a prior small-scale study (Sperrazza, 2016) that I conducted on 80 of my first-year writing students at GAU, 59% stated that they began to experience negative feelings about their writing abilities in academic English during secondary school.

While the above studies reflect some of the current issues surrounding academic discourse and student motivation in the UAE, I believe there is a major gap in literature on how students' past writing experiences impact their present and imagined-future identity constructions as writers. Their particular investments in English and their personal motivations as academic writers are crucial for understanding narrative identity construction in the writing classroom. Therefore, the participants' motivational writing strategies, linguistic ideologies about English, attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse, and sociocultural influences that position them in the writing classroom play a significant role in this study on writer identity and narrative identity construction in the UAE.

At the same time, I do not believe the participants are representative of all students attending private English-medium schools in the UAE, or even, GAU. Their experiences with academic discourse in English are subjective as are their perceptions about themselves as writers in English. These factors may have some bearing on my results, and I will account for them when discussing ethical considerations in Chapter 4 and the limitations of my study in Chapter 9.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In summary, I discussed the participants' different backgrounds and English-medium schools they attended before entering university, which reflects the diversity of students at GAU. Then, I discussed the expansion of English in the UAE and its impact on the educational sector in the region, which now uses English as the primary language of instruction. I also discussed the difference

between public Arabic schools and private English schools with a particular focus on private 'international' schools and private 'national' schools as they reflect where the majority of students from GAU receive their educations. Next, I described the prevalence of western-style universities in the UAE and their endorsement of academic writing in English. I further described academic writing at GAU, which expects students to have the English-language proficiency and discursive abilities to practice the conventions of academic discourse in English. I also discussed the purpose of the Writing Studies department to help students prepare for other genres of academic writing in their disciplinary courses. Then, I described the requirements of WRI 101, the first-year composition course in which the study takes place. Finally, I briefly addressed common concerns about academic discourse in English and its impact on multilingual students' motivations as writers.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of related literature that is divided into three main sections: discourse, writer identity, and narrative identity construction. The first section examines discourse through the lens of poststructural theory with a specific focus on the power that dominant discourses wield in shaping identity construction within social contexts. Then, I explore the role of academic discourse by addressing the differences between primary and secondary Discourses and the challenges that may arise when multilingual students are expected to acquire the norms and conventions of English in their secondary Discourse. I further discuss the general expectations of academic discourse within an American educational system that students encounter at secondary school and their first year at university, which relates to the type of academic writing the participants experienced and produced in their own classrooms. Finally, I discuss specific studies in the UAE that address the challenges multilingual students face as academic writers in English, which relates to the rationale of my study.

The second section examines writer identity with a specific focus on how multilingual writers construct their identities in English as an academic discourse. I further explore the significance of writer identity based on Ivanič's (1988) notion of 'possibilities of selfhood,' which informs how I view the construction of writer identity in this study. Then, I discuss several studies specific to the Gulf that highlight how the sociocultural construction of writer identity impacts multilingual writers in English. Finally, I review the theoretical frameworks that support my examination of writer identity, as follows: Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as informed by Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory and Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, as well as Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, which helped me understand how the participants' motivations as academic writers in English impacted the construction of their writer identities;

Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), which helped me understand how the participants 'invested' in particular language practices based on their agentive access to English as an academic discourse; and Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, which guided my understanding of the various sociocultural influences that positioned the participants as academic writers in English and impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

The third section examines narrative identity construction by discussing how narratives that reflect significant life events construct a 'life story' about identity. Next, I present debates surrounding 'big' stories versus 'small' stories and explain my decision for examining the participants' 'big' stories about writing. Then, I discuss five major studies that examine student narratives based on literacy practices in academic English and how they contribute to writer identity. Following this, I review the theoretical frameworks that support my examination of narrative identity construction: McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model, which helped me understand the impact of 'master' and 'little' narratives on identity construction, and Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which helped me understand why the participants used particular narrative motives based on my presence as their teacher-researcher. Finally, I end by discussing how the multiple theories that assist my analysis provide a coherent understanding of writer identity and narrative identity construction.

## **3.2 Discourse**

### **3.2.1 Poststructural Theory**

Poststructuralism developed during the second half of the twentieth century as a response to structuralism, which comprehends society in relation to dominant systems, oppositional binaries, and especially, fixed structures, such as the structure of a language. Therefore, structuralist theories of language, attributed to originating with the works of Saussure (1966), emphasize how language exists independently of its users and only provides them with the ability to understand

stable structures of linguistic knowledge. In contrast, poststructuralists view language as a social construction related to identity and they seek to understand how dominant discourses shape the identities of individuals while embracing multiple meanings and contradictions within social contexts. Rather than seeing experience as fixed, objective, and pre-existing in isolation, poststructuralism understands experience by relating it to 'subjectivity,' which Weedon (1987) describes as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, their sense of themselves and their ways of understanding their relation to the world" (p. 32).

Identity therefore captures the plural possibilities of subjectivity by giving people a unified sense of who they are in the world (Weedon, 2004). The significance of adopting a poststructuralist perspective in educational research is that it addresses "the ways in which particular discourses constitute subjectivity [that] have implications for the process of reproducing or contesting power relations" in the classroom (Weedon, 1987, p. 92). Since my study examines how students feel about writing and choose to construct their narrative writer identities based on subjective experiences in the classroom, the assumptions of poststructuralism regarding subjectivity and dominant discourses are quite relevant.

The importance of power in structuring discourse, and how language, as symbolic capital, both empowers and disempowers, is attributed to Bourdieu (1977). For Bourdieu, language is a social and political practice in which discourse is given importance and meaning depending on the value of the person, or group, who uses it. It works as a form of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1997) by recognizing a person's worth based on the skills and knowledge he or she has acquired, such as those obtained through one's education. This notion reflects how discourses produced in schools, based on the hegemonic principles of academic writing, are able to preserve and uphold fundamental standards about language. Since its usage is presented as universal, powerful discourses that assume the standards of a language are accepted as established truths by both students and instructors alike (Foucault, 1980).

These powerful discourses also position its users, and as Foucault (1980) and Weedon (1997) argue, subjectivity and language are mutually exclusive and thus play an important role in how students negotiate their identities in the classroom. In other words, identity can be seen as the way individuals “position themselves in an act of discourse” (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Closely linked to this concept of discourse is Foucault’s (1980) nexus of power/knowledge, which he describes as “the single inseparable configuration of ideas and practices that constitute a discourse” (p. 27). Within this perspective, discourse guides our conduct and governs the action of others. It creates knowledge and produces meaning in a society that is based on relationships of power. This specific relationship between power and knowledge is used as a form of social control that is administered discursively through institutional organizations (Foucault, 1977, 1980).

Moreover, the institutional ideology of discourse gains its power because those in control present it as an accepted reality, or ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980):

Each society has its own regime of truth ... that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(p. 131)

This is particularly true of the educational system in the UAE where the primary language of instruction throughout the country’s educational sector is English (Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017) and American-style universities are more prevalent than Arabic ones (Kirk, 2010; Dahan, 2015). The belief that English is more valuable than home languages and local educational practices is promoting a particular version of reality, or ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980), that is actively shaping students’ writer identities in the classroom when they use English as an academic discourse. As Wright (2007) states:

To relinquish use of one's own language to make space for the language of another group is almost always indicative of a shift in power relations. Language renaissance is rarely neutral but is rather a harbinger or reflection of power shifts. (p. 204)

Therefore, the histories that students bring to the classroom can never be considered neutral because they are always positioned against the established, prevailing beliefs endorsed by the dominant culture of their institution. Holland and Lave (2001) present the paradox of identity being situated in historically dynamic practices but experienced as unitary and durable at the same time. They emphasize that "the continuity and the transformation of social life are ongoing, uncertain projects" but that individuals maintain "histories in their persons" (p. 4) based on what they have learned in the world. This concept is especially significant to my study as I explore how the participants' past writing experiences in an English-medium secondary school continue to impact their present and imagined-future experiences as writers at an American-style university in the UAE.

### **3.2.2 Academic Discourse**

Gee (1996) theorizes that discourse is similar to an identity kit, which provides instructions on how to appropriately act and speak depending on the sociocultural or institutional situation. While 'discourse with a little d' refers to language in general, 'discourse with a big D' includes one's socially situated identity that involves thinking, believing, valuing, acting, or interacting with others. While 'primary Discourse' reflects one's initial socialization through family or a specific culture, it is the 'secondary Discourses,' obtained and maintained within fixed institutions, such as schools, that exert the most power in society (Weedon, 1997). Thus, academic discourse is a powerful secondary Discourse as it is a form of written and spoken language that is privileged, required, cultivated, or conventionalized. It refers to ways of thinking and using language that exist in the academy and therefore is upheld by instructors and educational institutions. Duff (2010) describes academic discourse as a form of institutional ideology that both enculturates and positions students because they arrive with different types of prior

linguistic experiences. Therefore, academic discourse is a complex representation of knowledge, power, and identity that comprises linguistic ideologies, often displayed in texts, but that also has strong social, cultural, institutional, and historical foundations and functions (Leki, 2007). Based on this description, academic discourse has its own set of rules and procedures to determine what counts as meaningful or not in the academy. Sometimes its norms and conventions match the primary Discourses that students bring to school; other times, there is a mismatch between Discourses.

### **3.2.2.1 Primary Versus Secondary Discourses**

When the primary Discourse of home reflects some of the literacy practices taught in the secondary Discourse of school, students are able to move from one Discourse to another in a relatively seamless fashion because they do not have to consciously think about shifting or changing their identities related to the ways they read, write, or speak. However, when primary and secondary Discourses do not match, movement from one Discourse to another is quite difficult based on the differences between literacies, culture, or values, which can cause a clash in students' identities (Hagood, 2014). The academic discourse that multilingual students are required to use in their English-medium schools brings about even more discursive challenges when it is learned as a second language that differs from what students use at home (Hyland, 2013; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017). Discursive issues and tensions, commonplace in academic discourse, may be especially acute when local and dominant languages differ as schools typically do not value the primary Discourses from diverse student populations (Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Duff, 2010; Hyland, 2013; Fairclough, 2014). This can lead to resistance, lack of motivation, and discursive conflict with the dominate discourse that teachers model in school, which can play a central role in how students engage or disengage in the academy (White & Lowenthal, 2011).

In Hagood's (2014) study on literacy practices and discourses, she states that when students experience these discursive conflicts, there are three common ways they respond to their secondary Discourse at school. These responses reflect



similar reactions that the participants of my study experienced when writing in their secondary Discourse in English: (1) Students assume the identity of their secondary Discourse and set aside the identity, literacies, or home language of their primary Discourse. This helps them achieve success at school but once at home, they resume the identity of their primary Discourse. (2) Students reject the identity of their secondary Discourse because they do not want to acquire its conventions and norms or because they do not understand how to acquire them. In either case, this negatively impacts their success in school. (3) Students learn the conventions and norms of their secondary Discourse in order to navigate within it, but they do not assume it as an additional identity. They acquire enough skills in their secondary Discourse to 'get by' but this does not necessarily lead to their success in school. According to Hagood (2014), it is necessary to help students examine their discursive conflicts in the classroom so that they may understand the underlying tensions that cause them, which is supported by other studies on discursive writing practices by multilingual students in English (Fernsten, 2008; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Park, 2013; Canagarajah, 2014; Rahimivanda & Kuhi, 2014). This informs my own study on writer identity as the participants constructed meaning about themselves as writers based on their subjective experiences writing in their secondary Discourse in English.

### **3.2.3 The 'Debate' About Academic Discourse at University**

Academic discourse at university traces its roots to early twentieth century Harvard. It has been the most dominant form of writing instruction in western universities up until now, and therefore, has more cultural capital than other discourses (Bourdieu, 1997; Berlin, 2003). It is how academics communicate their knowledge, publish contributions, and establish their reputation (Hyland, 2013). It is also the means by which students are assessed and expected to demonstrate their abilities as writers (Hyland, 2009). In his seminal essay "Inventing the University," Bartholomae (1986) describes how academic discourse signifies a student's ability to recognize and produce writing conventions while interacting as a member of the academy. He stresses that in order to succeed as a writer, students must be able to communicate as 'academics' by acquiring their scholarly language and writing

standards, which assumes the use of Standard English and correctness of form (i.e. spelling, punctuation, usage, and syntax). Bartholomae (1986) further explains:

The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline. (p. 4-5)

In this regard, academic discourse sustains the belief that students need the 'necessary skills' to be successful members of the university.

There is great debate about what or how these 'necessary skills' should be taught at university. However, as the demand for English-medium schools and western-style universities continues to grow in the UAE (Kirk, 2010; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017), it is important to be aware of these debates as they inform the educational practices of writing instructors in the region. Some scholars believe that making generalizations about academic writing is impossible. Just as there is "no autonomous, generalizable skill called ball using or ball handling that can be learned and then applied to all ball games," there is no "autonomous, generalizable skill or set of skills called 'writing'" (Russell, 1995, p. 59). Others argue that reducing academic writing to a set of conventional norms assumes that anyone "can learn to write academic genres by adhering to a definite rule-set" (Lynch-Binie, 2009, p. 47). Hyland (2006) adds, defining what is common in academic writing is relatively easy if teachers only taught the forms of a standard language, but academic discourse is based on a variety of genres that differ across a range of disciplines, and therefore, is challenging to teach as a common core. However, many scholars have demonstrated that patterns and formulas do prevail in academic writing and advocate the benefits of teaching genre-specific writing conventions to students (Swales, 1990; Wilder & Wolfe, 2009; Birkenstein & Graff,

2008; Thonney, 2011). In fact, Wilder and Wolfe (2009) found that students who were explicitly taught academic conventions and genre structures wrote better essays than those receiving no instruction at all. A genre-approach to writing is therefore based on the concept that students will be able to participate in a discourse community if they learn how to use the genres of that community (Swales, 1990; Gee, 1996; Hyland, 2006).

### **3.2.3.1 A Genre-Approach to Academic Writing at GAU**

At GAU, the university where this study takes place, students are taught academic writing based on a genre-approach in which they must learn a common core of conventional norms that share similar traits across the disciplines. In Musa's (2010) study on academic writing practices in a Gulf university, he determined that many western-style universities in the region practice similar writing norms based on the following traits: a) a comprehensive command of grammar, spelling, and punctuation based on Standard English; b) use of appropriate academic vocabulary; c) a suitable writing style to meet audience expectations; and d) organizational skills based on specific genres of essay assignments. Therefore, when I refer to conventional norms throughout my study, it is based on this description.

MacDonald's (1994) study on student writers in an American educational system also informs my study as it depicts the different stages of writing that students are expected to practice throughout secondary school and university in order to demonstrate the acquisition of these conventional writing norms (Gardner & Nesi, 2012). While MacDonald's (1994) study is inarguable 25 years old, the four stages, which describe a hierarchical progression of academic writing assignments, still prevail in most U.S. writing programs as based on my own experiences as a student and educator in American secondary schools until 2006. Moreover, I have been required to teach academic writing according to these stages as an instructor in American-style universities throughout the MENA region from 2007 until the present date of this study.

Specifically, these stages reflect the generalized writing assignments students are obliged to practice in American writing programs, which sheds light on the writing assignments the participants were required to write in their English-medium schools and American-style university. Furthermore, as previously stated, American-style academic writing is highly endorsed in the UAE and greater MENA region because of its dominance in U.S. universities, as well as international universities worldwide, and students are normally expected to practice and acquire the conventions of this type of discourse in their English-medium schools (Hyland, 2013; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). According to MacDonald (1994), the four stages of American-style academic writing are as follows:

Stage One: During secondary school, American students write personal essays, such as narratives, or five-paragraph essays that are meant to prepare them for writing at university. Specifically, these two assignments were discussed by the participants when writing about their past experiences in their English-medium secondary schools.

Stage Two: During their first-year writing course at university, American students are introduced to a 'generalized' form of academic writing that reflects the 'necessary skills' and writing conventions students are expected to practice based on genre-specific assignments. Specifically, this stage refers to WRI 101, the first-year composition course I teach at GAU. The genres are based on assignments such as summaries, analysis essays, and argument essays. Throughout my study, the participants mainly referred to the argument essay when discussing their present writing experiences.

Stages Three and Four: This is when American students practice higher-level writing and use their common-core of writing skills for their disciplinary courses. At GAU, this is when students take WRI 102 and ENG 204 in order to complete their series of required academic writing courses offered by the Writing Studies department. The genres are based on assignments such as academic critiques and research essays. It is expected at this point that students will be able to apply

the skills from their required set of academic writing courses to their other courses across the disciplines. While the participants did not experience this type of writing at the time of the study, they made references to some of these higher-level assignments when discussing their imagined-future writing experiences at GAU.

### **3.2.4 Challenges for Multilingual Students as Academic Writers in English**

Academic writing has been found to be especially challenging for multilingual students in English-medium schools because much of the focus is on acquiring the conventional norms for genre-specific writing assignments, as described above, rather than on the language through which the norms are learned (Evans & Morrison, 2011; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). In addition, the criteria for native-like fluency in academic writing involves grammatical intuition, a capacity for fluent spontaneous discourse, creative ranges of communication, and especially, immersion with the language during childhood and beyond (Davies, 2008). Even though English is the *lingua franca* in the UAE, and it is used as the primary language of instruction (Findlow, 2006; Troudi & Jendli, 2011), many students do not have sufficient literacy immersion because their home language is different than what is taught in school (Seymour, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017).

Moreover, students in the UAE learn academic English at different stages in their lives, especially those from a transient expatriate community, and may have only used English as a form of global communication before arriving to the country (Kirk, 2010; Miller & Pessoa, 2017). While the participants were privileged enough to attend private English-medium schools that denote a sense of academic rigor, other schools in the region are known to operate at lesser degrees of rigor (Shine, 2008; Dahan, 2015), which may not prepare students for the demands of an American-style writing program at university (Picard, 2007). Yet, regardless of these situations, it appears that many students in the region, no matter their linguistic or educational backgrounds, are expected to write in academic English with a high level of mastery from the moment they enter their western-style universities (Miller & Pessoa, 2017).

Miller and Pessoa's (2017) study highlights some of the writing challenges perceived by faculty at an American-style university in the Gulf that multilingual students face as entering freshmen, which informs my own study. These challenges are based on the following instructor concerns: lack of academic preparedness for university-level writing; difficulties with disciplinary genres; and an inability to write in academic English at the level required of an American-style university. While these writing challenges share similarities with native-English students entering university as beginning writers, the paradox is that multilingual writers are often seen as 'deficient' in English if they cannot master academic writing; whereas, native-English speakers are just considered novices with the potential to improve (Flores, Kleyn, & Menkin, 2015). Thus, I believe the challenges that multilingual students in the UAE face as academic writers are often based on the assumption that they should be able to write with the same level of mastery as their native-English counterparts, which is a prevailing belief in English-medium schools and western-style universities worldwide (Jenkins, 2009; Miller & Pessoa, 2017).

#### **3.2.4.1 Gatekeeping Practices, Formulaic Writing, and Standard-Language Correctness**

Several studies conducted in the UAE inform my study as they highlight how English-related issues impact the way multilingual students are perceived as academic writers in the region. Issues regarding gatekeeping practices, formulaic writing, and standard-language correctness are particularly significant to my study as they highlight specific issues experienced by the participants. Dahl's (2010) longitudinal study in universities throughout the UAE found that teachers blamed their students if they lacked knowledge about the conventions of academic writing, which was often attributed to their poor English skills. This notion of gatekeeping practices, or teaching to a 'hidden curriculum' (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013), is further addressed in Hall's (2011) study in the UAE in which she found that secondary-school teachers in the region were often hired for their native-English skills, not for their knowledge or experience teaching composition. Thus,

they relied on their own interpretations of academic writing conventions or assumed their multilingual students had prior knowledge or experience with these norms. Shine's (2008) longitudinal study on feedback practices at an American-style university in the UAE found that instructors often did not provide explicit directions for it was commonly assumed that students were already familiar with the discursive conventions of academic writing. As a result, students did not understand what to revise or how to revise their essays based on their teachers' comments.

Picard's (2007) study revealed that many students had difficulty adjusting to their western-style universities because their previous teachers used formulaic methods of academic writing. These may have allowed students to pass the written portion of such exams as the IELTS or TOEFL for entry at university, but they did little to prepare students for the content-driven, genre-specific writing assignments required in their academic writing courses at university. In addition, an emphasis on 'accountability measures' in schools throughout the UAE has increased the demand for common assessment methods for writing assignments in English-medium schools, specifically regarding the use of rubrics (Raddawi & Bilikozen, 2018). Raddawi and Bilikozen's (2018) study at an American-style university in the UAE found that using standardized norms for essay assignments led to simplified, formulaic writing in which some instructors believed common rubrics hindered students' voices, writing styles, and creativity. Moreover, Raddawi (2011) and Sperrazza and Raddawi (2016) found that many secondary school students in the UAE were not allowed to choose their own essay topics or write about culturally relevant issues, which made them overly reliant on their teachers' approval and guidance throughout the writing process.

Solloway's (2016) study highlighted a common practice in the UAE in which writing teachers enforce 'orthographic correctness' in English by emphasizing accuracy and standard language norms over writing content. When students could not achieve the surface-level correctness demanded of them, they were blamed for their poor English skills, which was previously highlighted in Dahl's (2010) study

when students were unaware of academic writing conventions. Gobert's (2010) study on grammar correction in a UAE university found that students perceived themselves as failures when their essays were covered in error corrections; thus, they believed they would never master academic writing in Standard English. In Shine's (2008) study on written feedback practices at an American-style university in the UAE, she found that students often relied on their instructors to identify grammar mistakes for them after submitting their essay assignments. In some cases, students did not believe they had the knowledge or capabilities to find their own errors or fix them without the help of their instructors. In other cases, students expected their instructors to provide the corrections for them. As mentioned in previous studies (Dahl, 2010; Solloway, 2016), this led instructors to blame students for their poor English skills, especially when they could not identify or correct their surface-level errors on their own.

### **3.3 Writer Identity in Academic Discourse**

While the abstraction of 'identity' is dynamic and difficult to define (Casanave, 2002; Hyland, 2005), especially when it is used in diverse disciplinary contexts, my study on writer identity is based on the poststructural understanding of identity as a "complex, contradictory and multifaceted notion dynamic across time and place" (Norton, 1997, p. 419). Thus, I view academic writing as an act that not only conveys textual function and ideational content, but also the identity of the writer that is constructed through discursive acts within a social context (Ivanič, 1998, 2004; Norton, 2000; Hyland, 2002). According to Ivanič (1998, 2004), writer identity is a discursive representation of the self that a person brings to the act of writing; the self a person constructs and re-constructs through the act of writing; and the multiple ways the self as a writer is perceived by others.

#### **3.3.1 Ivanič's Four Aspects of a Writerly Self**

Ivanič (1998) suggests four aspects of thinking about writer identity that intertwine to construct a writerly self: The first aspect is the 'autobiographical self,' which is a construct of past experiences and literacy practices that a writer has historically and culturally experienced. These influences are based on the writers' particular



interests, values, and linguist experiences, which shape their words during the act of writing. The second aspect is the 'discoursal self,' which is the writer's self-representation through writing practices, discourses, and discursive features that emerge from a text the writer has created. It is the persona a writer adapts when writing that is concerned with wanting to sound a particular way rather than presenting a particular stance. The third aspect is the 'authorial self,' which represents a writer's self-worth in relation to the writer's position, opinions, and beliefs that enable one to write with a voice of authority and establish an authorial presence in the text. The fourth aspect is 'possibilities for selfhood,' which is concerned with the "socio-cultural context of writing" (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 136). Specifically, 'possibilities for selfhood' transcends the act of writing since it is more concerned with the social aspects that a writer must engage with after entering the academy, such as institutional values about writing; understandings of the self as a writer; and relationships of power between teachers and students (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). Therefore, what is 'socially available' for one writer may vary considerably for another writer.

Since my study is concerned with how the participants experienced their identities as academic writers in a social setting, rather than on the 'correctness' of acquiring textual features, Ivanič's (1998) fourth aspect of writer identity informs my study. In some cases, students may consciously acquire the social aspects present in the dominant discourse of the academy; in other cases, these aspects are acquired subconsciously, in which students are unaware of the particular institutionalized values or relations of power that influence their discursive actions in the writing classroom. Moreover, students are "positioned by the discourses they participate in: by the possibilities for selfhood that they take up and the ones they reject (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, p. 237). Thus, 'possibilities for self-hood' can encompass subject positions as well as the potential for agency in the writing classroom. The growing diversity of multilingual students in English-medium schools, such as those in the UAE, has introduced even more conflicting writer identities since the sociocultural context is vastly different from what students had previously experienced in their home languages or linguistic communities (Hyland, 2013).

Thus, depending on the student, 'possibilities for selfhood' is likely to be multiple, diverse, and contradictory, with considerable variations depending on the writer.

### **3.3.2 Studies on Writer Identity in Multilingual Students**

There are several studies that explore writer identity in multilingual students from the Gulf. However, as previously stated, these studies differ from my own as they do not examine the impact of academic discourse in English on students' perceptions of their English-language abilities. Moreover, only one of the below studies (Taj, 2017) examines writer identity from a student perspective. With that said, the following studies inform my own research as they highlight issues experienced by multilingual writers in the region. Taj's (2017) study on Saudi doctoral students in the UK found that their struggles adapting to a new culture were impacting their writing. Specifically, some students chose to avoid interactions with their instructors, supervisors, or writing tutors because they felt uncomfortable in their English-speaking academic community. Thus, they missed opportunities to understand how to better construct their identities in a new writing environment. Elyas' (2011) study on UAE students in the tertiary sector found that "students appear to be developing autonomous identities as 'globalized' citizens" (p. 312) outside of the classroom in online communities, but the motivation to identify with English as a global discourse rather than solely as an academic discourse was seemingly ignored by their writing teachers. Hudson's (2013) study on western writing instructors in public universities in the UAE found that students sometimes resisted writing in English because they did not want to acquire a writer identity consistent with the ideologies, values, and beliefs of their Anglo-American instructors. Miller and Pessoa's (2017) study addresses a similar concern in American-style universities in the Gulf in which western writing practices are seemingly imposed on students while ignoring their previous writer identities based on local writing practices. In contrast, studies by Al-Issa and Dahan (2011), Troudi and Jendli (2011), and Al-Issa (2017) discuss the growing concern that many Arab students in the region prefer to write in English, and thus, are losing their identities as Arabic speakers and writers.

It is important to note that the concept of writer identity in academic English is often unfamiliar to multilingual writers. One study revealed that five ESL graduate students of varying backgrounds expressed a complete unawareness of their writer identities in English even though they were quite familiar with writing academically (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006). In contrast, Ivanič's (1998) study explored the writer identity of eight mature graduate students in the U.K. who were native-English speakers. Even though the academic world was unfamiliar to them, the concept of writer identity was an obvious element in their writing. Others argue that writer identity is not necessarily novel to multilingual writers in English but that the way they are expected to construct their identities as academic writers in English is indeed unfamiliar. When Matsuda (2001) described his experience finding his voice as an academic writer in English, he stated that it was not the process of discovering his 'self' as a writer that was difficult, but rather, the process of negotiating his identity based on the expectations of academic discourse in English. Park (2013), as well, described the challenges she experienced trying to adopt a writerly voice in English after moving to the United States from South Korea. Burgess and Ivanič (2010) argue that academic writers, especially those who are multilingual, need to possess an awareness of their socially available 'possibilities for selfhood' in order to overcome previous acts of writing in which they felt inferior, rejected, or culturally conflicted in the classroom. Rahimivanda and Kuhl's (2014) study stresses the need for second-language writing teachers to provide explicit directions about textual features so that students become aware of what the authors call "poor writer identities" (p. 1499) associated with misunderstandings about academic discourse in English.

### **3.3.3 Writer Identity and 'Timescales'**

While Ivanič (1998) portrays a 'writerly self' as fluid and constantly shifting; subject to tensions and contradictions; and rife with fluctuations that can easily occur from one assignment to another depending on the text or discursive requirements, Lemke (2002) argues that there is also a 'recognizable identity,' which writers construct within and across these different 'selves' and discursive situations. It is therefore necessary to consider the relationship between different 'timescales,' or

sequence of events, in order to understand how specific writing experiences contribute to the construction of an overall writer identity (Lemke, 2002; Wortham, 2003, 2008; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). Burgess and Ivanič (2010) contend that a full understanding of the construction of writer identity should, indeed, include the relationship between time and discourses as it impacts how writers construct meaning about themselves. This concept of a 'timescale' is significant to my study as it reflects how writer identity can be both multiple and coherent over time. However, this does not imply a static, 'singular' self (Ivanič, 1998). Burgess and Ivanič (2010) stress:

It is important to point out that we do not view identity construction as taking place in discrete, isolatable "moments" but rather as a continuous process in which any given "moment" is temporally extended by its integration with other processes to include the past and the future. (p. 234)

I also believe that identity is a continuous construct of moments that shape our understandings of ourselves (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1987). In relation to my own study, I chose to examine particular writing moments that were based on the participants' past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the classroom, which impacted how they constructed their writer identities in narrative form. The continuum between these moments provided me a much richer and fuller understanding of the participants' identities as writers rather than looking at these moments in isolation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, my study aims to avoid a generalized view of writer identity based on singular experiences, and instead, it addresses the individuality and diversity of each student's multiple experiences that contributed to the construction of their writer identity. This concept will be further explored in Section 3.4.3 when discussing how the uniqueness of sequential life experiences contributes to narrative identity construction in McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model.

Moreover, my study explores the complexity of writer identity through a range of theoretical frameworks that I believe highlight specific issues multilingual students

face as academic writers in English. These issues are based on motivational strategies that writers in English use in the classroom; ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English; and sociocultural influences that position academic writers in English and impact their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms. The theories that guide my thematic analysis of writer identity are as follows: Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as based on Markus and Nurius' possible selves theory (1986) and Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, which helped me understand how the participants' motivations as academic writers in English impacted the construction of their writer identities in relation to their ought-selves, ideal selves, and possible selves; Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory of achievement motivation, which helped me understand how the participants' perceptions of themselves as writers were motivated by their 'fear of failure'; Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), which helped me understand how the participants 'invested' in particular language practices based on their agentive access to English as an academic discourse; and Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, which guided my understanding of the various sociocultural influences that positioned the participants as academic writers in English and impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

### **3.3.4 Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System**

Research on language learning motivation started with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) theories, which stressed the importance of culture and attitude toward language learning. They introduced the concept of integrativeness, which corresponds to the wish to learn and acquire the language of a native-speaking target community. Gardner's motivation theory and his social approach were so influential that most studies before the 1990s adopted this paradigm (Dörnyei, 2001). However, the reconceptualization of L2 motivation occurred when this traditional model did not apply to current language-learning situations (Dörnyei, 2006). Specifically, the wish to identify with a distinct group of native-English speakers was losing relevance as learners were increasingly wanting to

communicate with a global community outside of English-speaking countries. The need to reinterpret the notion of integrativeness was especially evident in a large-scale longitudinal study that Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) conducted in Hungary. They found that students were surprisingly motivated to learn English even though they had little direct contact with an English-speaking community and seemingly no desire to integrate into one. McLelland (2000) also claimed that integrativeness should be redefined as “integration with a global community rather than assimilation with native speakers” (as cited in Dörnyei, 2005, p. 95).

The UAE, for example, signifies how English is used as a *lingua franca* so that its multinational population can communicate with each other (Findlow, 2006; Solloway, 2017), but even more significant, English is learned so that students can have access to educational, professional, and economical opportunities only made available within a globalized world (Dahan, 2015). As Graddol (1999) states about the globalization of English, “[It] will be a language used mainly in multilingual contexts as a second language and for communication between nonnative speakers” (p. 57). This reconceptualization of English, and language motivation in general, underlines the significance of Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, which incorporates previous conceptualizations of L2 motivation in a classroom learning context with sociocultural notions of the self taken from social psychology. Below, I will address the psychological models that support Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System as they inform my study on the participants’ motivations as academic writers in English. These psychological models help comprise the three major components of Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) framework: the ideal self, ought-to self, and learning experience.

#### **3.3.4.1 Markus and Nurius’ Possible Selves Theory**

Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System was influenced by Markus and Nurius’ (1986) possible selves theory. In this psychological model, an individual’s self-concept not only consists of one’s current perception of the self, based on past and present experiences, but also representations of one’s hopes, wishes, and fears for the future in the shape of desirable and undesirable possible selves.

Markus and Nurius (1986) distinguish between three main types of possible selves: (1) the self that one should become; (2) the ideal self that one would like to become; and (3) the feared self that one is afraid of becoming. These possible future selves harness the potential of one's imagination to determine motivated, and unmotivated, behavior that will propel one forward from the present to the future. Possible selves can help students in particular understand their motivations as learners by imagining themselves in two particular ways: showing an 'undesirable' possible path toward the future by highlighting where they might end up if effort is not maintained or showing a 'desirable' possible path toward the future if effort is maintained (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Thus, a possible self is based on wanting to become, or not wanting to become, a desired or undesired self. Markus and Nurius (1986) describe the influence of their possible selves theory as follows:

An individual's repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats. Possible selves provide the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization and direction to these dynamics. As such, they provide the essential link between the self-concept and motivation.

(p. 954)

In particular, Oyserman and Markus (1990) highlight the importance of developing positive future self guides for adolescents as this is the period in one's life when young people naturally invest time in "envisioning, trying on, and rehearsing future or potential selves (p. 112). This informs my own study since the participants, as well, underwent a transition from secondary school to university in which they had to adapt their previous self-concepts as writers to their current writing context at GAU. In some cases, the participants maintained a positive self-image of themselves as writers; in other cases, they maintained negative self-images.

Hirano's (2009) longitudinal case study in Brazil supports the concept of an undesirable possible self as she explored the impact of a negative self-concept carried across different time periods in a language learner's life. As Hirano (2009)

discovered, a past experience in sixth grade cemented in her participant's mind that he was a "poor learner" in English, and he carried this "maintained identity" with him during four other future occasions in which he tried to learn English (p. 34). Thus, the participant's possible self was maintained even when he had several opportunities to alter his self-concept based on changing circumstances, such as different teachers and classroom environments (Bruner, 1987; Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011).

In contrast, Taj's (2017) study on Saudi doctoral students in the UK highlights how some of her participants were able to envision a desirable possible self by imagining themselves as 'successful' doctoral students. This positive self-image helped motivate the participants who were initially struggling in a new academic environment as multilingual writers in English. In my own study, I examine the participants' possible selves as a way to understand how they envisioned themselves as writers in both desirable and undesirable ways based on past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the classroom. I also explore the concept of 'positivity bias for the future' in which the participants, no matter their desired or undesired self-images, envisioned their future possible selves with positive, even idyllic, imaginings (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) research on narrative identity construction supports Markus and Nurius' (1986) concept of a desired possible self as McAdams revealed it is common for individuals to narrative their lives based on ideal envisionings for the future according to 'redemption' themes: a story line in which one overcomes past negative experiences in order to imagine positive future experiences. This concept will be explored in more detail in Section 3.4.3 and Section 3.4.4 when I discuss further theoretical frameworks that support my study in relation to narrative identity construction.

### **3.3.4.2 Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory (Ought-to Self and Ideal Self)**

Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System was also informed by Higgins' (1987) model of self-discrepancy. In this psychological model, Higgins (1987) defined the *ought-to self* as what one should become and the *ideal self* as what



one would like to become as representative of a future-self state, which expands upon Markus and Nurius' (1986) notion of a future possible self. Specifically, the ought-to self represents the pressure one might feel to not disappoint family, teachers, or society at large. Thus, in relation to students, they try to 'avoid' negative outcomes in the classroom such as earning bad grades. In contrast, the ideal self represents the desire to become one's best possible self. In this regard, students try to 'approach' positive outcomes in the classroom that would promote this idealized version of themselves, such as earning good grades. However, as Dörnyei (2005, 2009) points out, "It is not always straightforward to decide at times of social pressure whether an ideal-like self state represents one's genuine dreams or whether it has been compromised by the desire for social conformity" (p. 14).

Higgins (1987) suggests that the ideal self can indeed overlap with the ought-to self and be interpreted as either a positive or negative influence: the person one wants to become versus the person one should *not* become. This concept relates to Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory in which their notion of a *feared self* reflects the person one is afraid to become and therefore should *not* become. According to Oyserman and Fryberg (2006), people with *balanced possible selves* have a clear idea of their ideal (approachable) self and their ought-to (avoidable) self. Therefore, they are positively motivated by both their wishes and fears. It is also important to note that people who envision a step-by-step process to achieve their ideal self are more successful than others who solely imagine a future goal. Strahan and Wilson's (2006) study on U.S. university students found that those who envisioned their future careers, such as becoming a doctor or lawyer, were less successful than those who envisioned the steps to attain their desired careers, such as going to the library or joining a study group. This informs my own study as the participants who were more successful in achieving their ideal selves also devised writing strategies in the classroom when practicing the conventions of their genre-specific essay assignments in academic English.

Ostrowska's (2014) study on language learning motivation in UAE students explores the concept of an ideal self and ought-to self when examining students' motivations to learn English. The author found that none of the participants were motivated to 'learn English' as a goal of its own for their ideal selves. Instead, she determined that the sociocultural aspects surrounding English in the UAE, specifically its global status, dominance in education, and necessity for obtaining a prestigious job, were far more impactful on students' ideal selves. The author states that the "concept of an Ideal L2 Self seems one-dimensional in its understanding of self and identity in the globalized culture that the UAE students experience" (Ostrowska, 2014, p. 23), and teachers need to be more aware of students' sociocultural backgrounds, hopes, and fears in order to help improve their second-language acquisition. These findings are significant to my own study as I also discovered that the participants were motivated as academic writers in English based on sociocultural factors specific to the UAE, not just a sole desire to 'improve' their writing. This indicates that there is a need for more studies in the region that can highlight the diverse motives of multilingual students using English through the examination of their ideal and ought-to selves, which I believe would provide richer findings about their external and internal motivations, as evident by Ostrowska's (2014) study.

#### **3.3.4.3 Covington's Self-Worth Theory (Learning Experience)**

While Dörnyei (2005, 2009) incorporated the ought-self and ideal self into his L2 Motivational Self System, he also added a third component: the L2 learning experience. The classroom environment, in particular, impacts motivation and can influence how students approach or avoid their learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). As Dörnyei (2005, 2009) points out, "For some language learners the initial motivation to learn a language does not come from internally or externally generated self images but rather from successful engagement with the actual language learning process" (p. 28). De Castella, Byrnes, and Covington's (2013) study on student motivation in the classroom highlights Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) third component as it advocates a better understanding of classroom contexts and how they impact students' perceptions of themselves as learners. The authors (De

Castella, et al., 2013) also point out that there is a need for more research in cross-cultural settings as students respond differently to their classroom contexts depending on the culture, language, and individual backgrounds of both students and teachers. This notion informs my study as the participants devised specific learning strategies as academic writers based on their sociocultural experiences in English-medium writing classrooms. Specifically, Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory helped me better understand how these learning contexts impacted the participants' identities as academic writers in English.

Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory of achievement motivation focuses on the pervasive desire to approach success and avoid failure, which links to Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as informed by Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, since it is also based on the concept that students use avoidance/approach goals in the classroom. In school, where students' worth is largely measured by their ability to achieve (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011; Fivush, et al., 2011), self-perceptions of incompetence can trigger feelings of shame and low self-esteem. In these settings, efforts to regulate one's feelings and protect one's sense of self-worth sometimes lead students to develop strategies designed to alter the meaning of failure. This concept of self-regulation also relates to Perry (1991) and Pekrun's (2006) notion of Perceived Academic Control (PAC), which is based on students' beliefs in their abilities to influence achievement outcomes in the classroom. PAC therefore highlights the difference between an 'externally imposed responsibility' and an 'internally accepted responsibility,' which is the difference between 'being held responsible' by outside expectations forced upon students and 'feeling internally responsible' for one's own learning outcomes. The distinction is that those who 'feel' responsible are internally motivated and self-regulated no matter the learning environment, whereas those who are 'held' responsible are more likely to only apply effort in proportion to the sense of control they feel in their learning environment (Fishman, 2014). The notion of PAC informs my study as it helped me understand the various ways that the participants perceived their writer identities based on their sense of control over their abilities as academic writers in English.

In learning contexts where students are concerned with the implications of failure, they may seek to avoid failure by succeeding, or they may manage their fears by 'altering' the personal meaning of failure. Three major examples of self-regulation behavior, based on Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, directly relate to how the participants responded to their learning contexts as academic writers in English: (1) over-striving behavior, for students who seek to avoid failure by succeeding at all costs; (2) self-protecting behavior, for students who blame other factors for their failure so as to deflect responsibility away from their own abilities; and (3) failure-accepting behavior, for students who adopt a form of 'learned helplessness' in which they assume their lack of ability is the cause of their failure. These variations on 'fear of failure' (Covington, 1984, 1997) greatly impacted how the participants perceived their writer identities, and thus, inform my study accordingly.

Other studies (Klem & Connell, 2004; Lam, Cheng, & Ma, 2009) find that there is a direct link between teachers' own motivations in the classroom and how this impacts students' classroom engagement and academic achievement. In particular, Kearney, Plax, Hayes, and Ivey's (1991) seminal study on 'teacher misbehavior' highlights how deliberate shaming practices by teachers can impact students' sense of self-worth and ability to achieve positive academic outcomes in the classroom. Since my study is concerned with how the participants perceived their writer identities based on subjective experiences in the classroom, I find that notions of self-worth (Covington, 1984, 1997) and Perceived Academic Control (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006) are especially significant to the participants' identity construction as academic writers in English.

#### **3.3.4.4 Three Components of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System**

In summary, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) formed his L2 Motivational Self System based on the following three components, as previously described above:

1. The ideal self, which is the vision of the person one would like to become in the target language.

2. The ought-to self, which is the vision of the person one feels he or she should become in the target language.
3. The learning experience, which concerns situated motives based on the environment in which the target language is learned.

Dörnyei (2005, 2009) suggests that these three components can indeed be achieved but that crucial steps must be taken in order to improve one's motivational 'future self guide,' as evident in other studies (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013). The steps to achieve an ideal future self are listed below:

1. The learner must create a desired self-image.
2. The image is different from the learner's current self.
3. The image is vivid and detailed.
4. The image is realistic.
5. The desired self-image takes effort (is not easy to obtain).
6. The image is acceptable in the learner's environment.
7. The image is regularly imagined.
8. The image can be achieved with specific strategies.
9. The image is balanced by an awareness of the feared self so as to attain the ideal future self.

While Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System is significant for understanding learners' motivations in the classroom, it is important to note that this theory is initially intended for second-language learning, not second-language writing. To date, there is no indication of research directed toward developing an ideal 'writer' self in English, which I believe would contribute to further understandings of writer identity construction for multilingual students. Specifically, I believe Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) nine steps for achieving an ideal L2 self would also benefit multilingual writers in English since the steps provide an 'awareness' of one's identity that is often missing from students' notions of a writerly self in academic English, as previously mentioned in Section 3.3 (Matsuda, 2001; Abasi, et al., 2006; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Rahimivanda & Kuhi, 2014). While awareness does not necessarily transform students overnight into academic writers, I do

believe it can provide them opportunities to address some of the challenges specific to academic discourse in English in this region.

### **3.3.5 Norton's Theory of Social Identity**

Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) draws on poststructuralism and Weedon's (1987) theory of subjectivity when theorizing about learners' identities in a social context. Her understanding of social identity stresses the importance of power relations among learners when constructing their identities based on the following characteristics of subjectivity: it is contradictory and of a multiple nature; it is a site of struggle; and it changes over time (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). In describing identity she states:

I use the term identity to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how the person understands possibilities for the future. I argue that SLA [Second Language Acquisition] theory needs to develop a conception of identity that is understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction. (Norton, 2000, p. 5)

Other motivational theories fail to capture the differing social aspects of subjectivity and instead view identity and language learning based on binaries, such as the affective variables of motivation versus unmotivation in language learners (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985). However, according to Ostrowska (2014), this is a normative and essentialist view. Such Gardnerian (1985) theories disregard the histories, experiences, and conceptualizations of the self that individually motivate learners, and instead, mainly focus on the goal of the learner, which seemingly seeks to replicate the target language group (Ostrowska, 2014). On the other hand, other theories that consider social variables, such as Schumann's (1986) acculturation theory, do not address why learners may or may not be motivated or why—under the same sociocultural conditions—learners either willingly engage with or resist learning the target language. Norton (2000) problematizes the theoretical assumptions of Schumann's (1986) model of acculturation in her

seminal study on immigrant women in Canada when Schumann's notions about language learning clearly did not apply to Norton's participants. Instead, Norton's (2000) study highlighted how her participants' identities as learners were reproduced differently across learning contexts depending on power relations with users of the target language.

Therefore, Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) social identity theory challenges previous motivation research (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Schumann, 1986; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Oxford & Shearin, 1994) by claiming that students' desires to invest in their learning are not just intrinsic to the learner, but rather, dependent on complex power relations embedded within the social environment around them. By viewing learning as a sociocultural construct, educators can shift from seeing learners as internally motivated to seeing them as invested in their learning based on how they are externally impacted by different social, historical, and cultural influences. In addition, Pavlenko (2002) and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006) highlight certain limitations in previous motivation theories as they often do not reflect the complexity of learners in multilingual societies, such as those in the UAE; instead, they mainly focus on language learning in English-speaking countries. Thus, I believe there is a need for studies such as mine, which address English as an academic discourse for multilingual writers in a global context, especially since the changing demography of English finds that multilingual users of the language will eventually outnumber native speakers worldwide (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1999). Furthermore, the influx of English-medium international universities, which are increasingly expecting multilinguals to write with the same academic fluency as native-English speakers (Hyland, 2013; Miller & Pessoa, 2017), also signifies the need for more motivational studies within a global context.

Norton and Toohey (2011) argue that language learners may claim alternative identities that either enhance or diminish their interactions with others as power relations in the social world affect learners' opportunities for meaningful exchange. Learners can occupy multiple positions that enable them to adopt a seemingly

powerless position in one discourse and a more powerful one in another discourse. Yet, as previously mentioned, despite the context for learners to renegotiate their identities, Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) claims that the possible identities language learners are able to adopt are mediated by relations of power. In order to capture the relationship between power, identity, and interaction, Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) uses the poststructural concept of 'investment' by drawing on Bourdieu's (1997) notion of cultural capital, which suggests that forms of cultural capital have an exchange value. Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) argues that when learners invest in interactions, they are not only exchanging knowledge or engaging with others; they do so with the understanding and expectation that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources in return. As a result, an investment in interaction is an investment in the learner's own identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

In relation to the participants of the study, their investment in particular genre structures and writing approaches impacted how they perceived themselves as academic writers. Hyland's (2006) research on genre structures states that genres represent how writers use a language within social and cultural contexts; if L2 writers are unfamiliar with these conventions, they may lack investment in the social context of their disciplinary community because they will not be able to achieve its writing expectations (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). On one hand, genre-based pedagogical approaches have been criticized for reproducing the dominant discourses that give rise to Norton's sense of power relations and their impact on identity construction (Lea & Street, 2000; Bazerman, 2004). On the other hand, some believe that providing L2 students with the techniques to access the dominant genres of the academy will help them challenge power relations because they will be able to meet the expectations and requirements of writing in a disciplinary community (Swales, 1990; Gee, 1996; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Rahimivanda & Kuhi, 2014).

Lavelle's (1993) study in particular highlights how students invest in 'surface' or 'deep' approaches to genre-specific writing depending on their sense of PAC



(Perceived Academic Control) in the classroom: Surface approaches reproduce the rules, conventions, and strategies of academic writing without straying from the teachers' guidelines. It often lacks the investment that Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) claims can impact writers' identities in meaningful ways. In contrast, deep approaches involve writing for personal meaning and purpose, which allows students to achieve a sense of investment in their own learning and writing acquisition. Thus, if students felt powerless in their classrooms or overly dependent on their teachers' opinions, they adopt a 'surface' approach; if they felt a sense of agency within their writing contexts, they adopt a 'deep' approach. In these terms, investment can be seen as both the source and outcome of the participants' identities.

Norton's (2000) notion of investment that depicts learners as "constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (p. 11) is different, yet related, to Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) notion of motivation. Specifically, motivation theory often views the learner as having a coherent identity with characteristics that are maintained across time. This concept is highlighted in Hirano's (2009) case study, as previously mentioned in Section 3.3.1, in which the author explored the impact of a negative self-concept carried across different time periods in a language learner's life. Thus, Hirano's (2009) participant constructed a "maintained identity" (p. 34) even when he faced changing sociocultural circumstances, such as different teachers and classroom environments (Bruner, 1987; Fivush, et al., 2011). In contrast, investment theory regards the learner as a social being with a complex identity that changes across time and space and is reproduced within social interactions. As Norton (2015) explains, "I have argued that in addition to asking, 'Is the learner motivated to learn?' a teacher could ask, 'What is the learner's investment in the language practices of my classroom?'" (p. 378). For example, a student may be highly motivated to learn English, such as Hirano's (2009) participant, but the student may lack investment in the actual language practices of a classroom if they are difficult, demeaning, or rooted in discursive conflicts between students' primary and secondary Discourses (Hagood, 2014).

Thus, motivation is a psychological construct that indicates the learners' desires to achieve a goal (Gardner, 1985), but investment is a sociocultural construct that takes into account the social context. To further explicate, Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) perception of motivation, based on how avidly learners may pursue a goal, does not take into consideration that there are certain power relations that function beyond learners' motivation levels (Ostrowska, 2014). In contrast, Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) perception of investment seeks to capture learners' desires to interact based on their changing identities and power relations across different contexts (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Therefore, I found it useful to combine both Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) concept of motivation with Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) concept of investment in order to capture the varied aspects of identity in relation to academic discourse in English. In particular, this combined notion of motivation and investment—as both psychological and sociocultural concepts, respectively—work well together when understanding why the participants constructed their narrative identities as writers in certain ways.

Norton (2001) also emphasizes the role of possible future selves, which supports Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory. In regard to possible selves, Norton (2001) draws attention to the role of the learner's 'imagined community' and imagined self in mediating investment in the classroom. Specifically, Norton (2001) uses Anderson's (1991) notion of 'imagined communities' when investigating how English language learners choose to identify with discourse communities inside and outside the classroom. It is necessary, states Norton, to understand how learners imagine who they might be, and who their communities might be, when they use languages such as English that represent status and power in a global context (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

Therefore, imagined communities can have an impact that is just as strong on learners as other discourse communities in which they have direct access and membership (Norton & Toohey, 2011). When writing teachers lack awareness of

their students' imagined communities by holding them up to institutionalized, normative standards, for example, it can hinder students' abilities to construct their own subjective writer identities in the classroom. In relation to my own study, the ability for students to merge who one currently *is* with who one can *possibly be* in an educational context relies heavily on teachers seeing them as multicompetent writers in academic English rather than multilingual writers who are incapable of writing with native-like fluency in academic English. Therefore, attempting to understand students' writer identities entails understanding their imagined community as well as their current, existing one (Norton, 2001).

### **3.3.6 Davies and Harré's Theory of Positioning**

The concept of positioning relates to the multiple ways people construct their sense of self and others through discursive practices such as oral and written discourse, language use, and speech acts. Tan and Moghaddam (1999) state,

Positioning involves the process of ongoing construction of the self through talk, particularly through the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of conversations have specific locations. (p. 183)

Although Tan and Moghaddam (1999) use the word 'talk' to describe the discursive process of self-construction, scholars have also explored positioning and construction of the self through written discourse (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), which informs my own study. Positioning theory has been used in the field of education over the last two decades as a way to explore issues such as social, cultural, and linguistic diversity in the classroom (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010). Since my study explores how the participants were positioned by sociocultural influences, such as teachers, family, and the self, positioning theory is relevant for understanding their writer identities.

Positioning theory is informed by social constructionism, which theorizes that people shape their identities in social contexts based on constructed understandings of the world through interactional experiences; thus, it compliments

poststructuralism, as the foundation of my study, since poststructuralists view discourse as a social construction related to identity within social contexts. The concept of social constructionism also relates to Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice as the authors view a 'community' as an interactional social context in which learning is a process of constructing and experiencing one's identity. In my study, I link Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice with positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) as I believe both capture the construction of identity within a social context such as the writing classroom. The concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) will be further explored below in Section 3.3.6.1.

In Davies and Harré's (1990) seminal work on positioning theory, the authors state that people use narratives to present themselves in certain ways by taking up stances, or 'positions,' in relation to other people and other discourses. The positions people take and which they attempt to impose on others are visible in 'social episodes' that are more than just acts of behavior; they also include the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of all those who participate. According to Davies and Harré (1990),

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (p. 46)

Bruner (1987) observes, the reality evoked or expressed by a particular language is contingent on a person's discourse: "Language not only transmits, it creates or constitutes knowledge or 'reality'" (p. 132). Thus, the 'reality' of any individual is revealed in the positions they take up in their discourse. Not only is it important to consider the subjective realities of individuals in a poststructural study such as mine on writer identity, it is useful to explore these realities as they can inform current notions of positioning and their impact on identity construction in the classroom. For example, the realities of the participants in my study, and the perceptions of their writer identities, are revealed in the positions they take up with

their teachers, families, and themselves, based on their subjective experiences with academic discourse in English-medium secondary schools and an American-style university in the UAE.

Davies and Harré (1990) formulated two types of positioning, which are also significant to my study: 'interactive positioning,' in which one person positions another, and 'reflexive positioning,' in which one positions oneself. Students will internalize the positions placed upon them, especially by those in dominant positions such as teachers or family, which impact their identity construction inside and outside the classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Ivanič, 1998, 2007; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; McVee, 2011). To illustrate, in Vetter's (2010) study, she examined subject-positioning by highlighting how a teacher used certain language to position students in the classroom. Vetter (2010) found, "The ways teachers position students as readers and writers over time contribute to how students fashion their identities and become members of the classroom community" (p. 36). Other studies have found that the positioning of students can affect their investment in the classroom, as well as how they position themselves as learners and writers (Norton, 2000; Fernsten, 2008; Hirano, 2009; Park, 2013; Canagarajah, 2014; Rahimivanda & Kuhi, 2014). Specifically, the authors (Fernsten, 2008; Park, 2013; Canagarajah, 2014; Rahimivanda & Kuhi, 2014) stress how important it is for students to re-position their identities as academic writers in English so that they can explore alternative identities in the writing classroom. In the UAE, several studies (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017) reveal how Arab parents position their children as English-language users by enrolling them in English-medium schools, which often conflicts with their Arab identities in the classroom.

Overall, studies such as these not only support Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning, but they also relate to Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) in which she claims that students' desires to invest in their learning are not just intrinsic to the learner, but rather, dependent on the complex, linguistic environment around them. While Yoon (2008) points out that a

single occurrence of positioning in the classroom may not seriously impact the identities of students, repeated positionings within the classroom could matter later to identity development. As identity theorists argue (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1987; Fivush, et al., 2011), people tend to preserve their identities, even when they are negative, in order to maintain coherence and stability in their lives.

Thus, the process of positioning may be seen as a recursive practice because students bring their past positions, which are constructed from prior writing experiences, into their current and future discursive contexts. As a result, some positions may be fairly stable while others can change frequently over the course of an interactional experience. Positions therefore can be seen as “momentary clusters of rights and duties to think, act and speak in certain ways” (Harré, 2010, p. 53). In this light, positioning can be regarded as a more dynamic process than previously suggested ways of viewing language as a ‘frame’ or ‘role’ (McVee, 2011).

A criticism of Davies and Harré’s (1990) positioning theory, specifically in the field of education, is based on misunderstandings about the distinction between ‘position’ and ‘role.’ Some researchers do not believe positioning theory has much to offer educational research because they view ‘positioning’ as merely an alternative to ‘role’ without considering the significance of discursive practices in the classroom (McVee, 2011). However, van Langenhove and Harré (1999) assert, “The concept of positioning can be seen as a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role” (p. 14), which supports Davies and Harré’s (1990) initial theory about positioning that emerged from discussions about “the problems inherent in the use of the concept of role” (p. 43).

Particularly, the authors (Davies & Harré, 1990) addressed the way that role highlighted “static, formal, and ritualistic” (p. 43) aspects of language use, whereas positioning highlights a more fluid and dynamic concept of language use, even when practiced in recursive ways. This distinction about positioning is especially important to my study as it helped me reflect on the dynamic nature of identity

brought to light in Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) social identity theory. The complex, multifaceted, and dynamic construct of positioning is further addressed by McVee's (2011) summary of seven essential aspects of Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory. Specifically, the significance of positioning within social contexts, as highlighted below, informs my own study on identity construction in the writing classroom:

1. A 'position' includes rights, duties, and obligations of an individual in social contexts.
2. Positions involve expectations about how an individual will enact rights, duties, and obligations.
3. Positions are inherent in narratives that individuals construct and enact interactionally.
4. Positions are dynamic: individuals in social contexts can both position and be positioned by others.
5. Positions can shift within social contexts and when individuals look back or reconstruct previous discursive experiences.
6. Numerous potential positions exist in any given social context.
7. Examining positions requires addressing discursive processes.

Another criticism of Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory comes from Bamberg (1997) who created a framework based on Three Levels of Positioning, as he believed there needed to be an additional aspect, or 'level,' for understanding how positions are constructed interactively in the way people talk to each other or about each other in the stories they tell. Specifically, while Bamberg's (1997) approach analyzes how people reproduce existing societal norms that perpetuate the way they relate to others, which reflects Davies & Harré's (1990) approach to positioning, his new 'level' *also* examines how people are capable of creating different positionings that are not necessarily reflected by societal norms.

However, I found that Bamberg's (1997) three levels did not apply to my analysis for the following reason: Bamberg's (1997) interpretation of positioning mainly

explores a 'person-to-world' construction in which people actively construct their identities through the narratives they tell, which guides their interactions with others; whereas, Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory practices a 'world-to-person' construction in which people passively construct their identities through 'master' narratives, based on generalized societal norms, which guide their actions through the narratives they tell (Blundell, 2016).

Since my study not only explores writer identity, but also narrative identity construction, 'master' narratives (as well as 'little' narratives) are essential for understanding how the participants constructed their identities based on common narrative forms that students typically adopt when writing about literacy practices in the classroom (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011; McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). Thus, McAdams' life story model (1985, 1993, 1996), which helped me explore the participants' narrative identity constructions, supports Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory as both frameworks highlight the significance of discursive writing practices through the lens of master narratives. This concept will be explored in more detail below in Section 3.4.3.1 when I discuss additional theories that support my study in relation to narrative identity construction.

### **3.3.6.1 Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice**

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice, as informed by social constructionism, views a 'community' as an interactional social context in which learning is a process of constructing and experiencing one's identity. This relates to Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory, which is also informed by social constructionism, as it theorizes that people shape their identities based on constructed understandings of the world through interactional experiences. As previously stated, social constructionism complements poststructuralism, which is the foundation of my study, as poststructuralists regard 'discourse' as the social construction of identity within social contexts. Thus, both frameworks work well together when analyzing writer identity as they capture the discursive construction



of identity within a social context such as the writing classroom. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe three dimensions by which a community of practice is formed:

1. Mutual engagement: This involves a participant's engagement with others and the ability to connect meaningfully to the contributions of others.
2. A joint enterprise: For a community of practice to function, its participants need to be engaged and working together toward a common goal.
3. A shared repertoire: These are the common resources participants use to negotiate meaning and facilitate learning, which can include language, discourse, routines, documents, concepts, artefacts, or symbols.

As previously stated, a genre-approach to writing, which the participants practiced as writers in secondary school and university, is based on the concept that students will be able to participate in a discourse community if they learn how to use the genres of that community (Swales, 1990; Gee, 1996; Hyland, 2006). When I refer to a 'discourse community' throughout my study, it refers to writing classrooms, as described in Section 3.2.3.1, in which the participants were expected to practice and acquire the institutionalized norms, conventions, and genres specific to academic discourse in English as modelled on American-style writing (MacDonald, 1994; Hyland, 2006; Thonney, 2011). Thus, issues surrounding mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire can become quite complicated for multilingual writers with different languages, discourses, and writing skills who enter monolingual communities as a site of practice (Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Duff, 2010; Hyland, 2013; Fairclough, 2014; Hagood, 2014). These issues are explored in my own study when the participants either engage, resist, or feel excluded from the discourse community of their writing classrooms based on their experiences with academic discourse in English.

According to Cox (2005), the concept of 'community' as a site of practice based on mutual engagements and understandings of learning tends to imply a rather static, uniform community that does not allow for differences. Cox (2005) further argues that people naturally differ within their communities as they have diverse skills,

knowledge, and understandings of learning. However, Brown and Duguid (1991) contend that although joint enterprises and shared repertoires can be very heterogeneous, they do, indeed, gain coherence because the very engagement of these various practices function together within one community. For example, within the discourse community of an English-based writing classroom, which the participants experienced during secondary school and their first year at university, members can include experienced teachers, writing tutors, and students with different levels of writing abilities in academic English as their secondary Discourse. Although the members differ in their degree of knowledge, experience, and writing abilities, the community's joint enterprise ensures that practices are negotiated according to mutual understandings of learning through the shared repertoire of academic discourse in English (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Nevertheless, agentic issues regarding power relations between community members, such as teachers and students, which Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) addresses in her social identity theory, are seemingly ignored in this view of community as a site of practice, which is also highlighted in Section 3.3.6.1 when discussing Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation.

Another crucial concept of communities of practice is how the authors (Lave & Wenger, 1991) view 'identity.' According to Wenger (1998), learning is a process of becoming; thus, it is also a process of experiencing one's identity. This view of identity in a site of practice is further summarized below (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998):

1. Identity is a negotiated experience in which members experience their participation based on how they perceive themselves and others perceive them.
2. Identity is experienced as a community membership in which members define themselves by the familiar and unfamiliar.
3. Identity is experienced as a learning path in which members define themselves by where they have been and where they are going.

4. Identity is a nexus of multi-memberships in which members reconcile various memberships into one identity.
5. Identity is a relationship between the local and the global in which members negotiate local ways of membership into broader gatherings.
6. Identity denotes 'belonging.' Belonging in this sense is a result of shared interests and histories that develop within the context of a community.

Since my study aims to explore students' writer identities within the social context of their writing classrooms, Lave and Wenger's (1991) view of identity as negotiated ways of being and learning in a site of practice works well with Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) theory of social identity. First, Wenger's (1998, 1999) view of identity, in which members define themselves by where they have been and where they are going, corresponds with Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System in which identity is shaped by possibilities and affiliations in the future, which also relates to Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory. Furthermore, Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) concept of investment in the social world reflects Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice as both views consider identity as a negotiated experience in respect to existing relations in a social context. Finally, Lave and Wenger's (1991) view of identity as a community membership, in which members define who they are by the familiar and the unfamiliar, is similar to Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) view of identity as being formed in the social world and not in isolation.

### **3.3.6.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP)**

Lave and Wenger (1991) explain LPP as follows:

A way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. ... This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (p.29)

Hence, when newcomers first join communities and become legitimate members of them, they start to learn at the periphery until they gradually acquire knowledge and participate in more complex activities that move them toward the center of that community. When this occurs, members are able to move from legitimate peripherality to full membership within the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In relation to the participants, this would include practicing the norms and standards of genre-specific writing assignments in academic English required in secondary school so that they may acquire further knowledge in order to practice the genre-specific writing assignments required in WRI 101, their first-year writing course at GAU.

It is worth noting that Wenger's (1998, 2000) later work expanded on the original work of Lave and Wenger (1991) in regard to LPP, which informs my study in two significant ways. First, Wenger (1998, 2000) explains that whether participants are newcomers or old-timers, learning is an interplay between one's competence and one's on-going participation as a member of that community. It is not just about the relationship between members within a particular community of practice. Learning therefore is aligned with the social constructionist perspective of knowledge as an experience of recontextualizing previous understandings with new experiences (Seifert, 2002). In this view, learners are seen as social beings and their knowledge is a matter of active participation in the world, which can be achieved through meaningful participation in social practices. However, Fox (2000) argues that this viewpoint does not fully address all the power relations existing within a community of practice that may hinder meaningful participation, let alone the powerful forces that exist outside of a community, which can also impact meaningful participation.

This concern informs my study as the participants often constructed their legitimacy as academic writers in English based on sociocultural influences outside of the realm of their classroom community, such as ideologies about the prestige of English in the UAE; the dominance of English as a global language; and the importance their own families placed on acquiring academic English. Furthermore, this viewpoint does not consider the potential for conflict between old timers,

among newcomers, or even within members themselves, who are negotiating their previous understandings of knowledge with their new experiences as learners (Østerlund & Carlile, 2003). Thus, the relationship between members, or within members themselves, is not considered a source of conflict in Lave and Wenger's (1991) or Wenger's (1998, 2000) learning theories. This further justifies the need for Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) social identity theory in my study as it specifically addresses how identities are mediated by relations of power in a social context.

Second, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory predominantly focused on individuals' learning and identity formation within a single community of practice (Haneda, 2006). However, Wenger (1998, 2000) eventually determined that people usually have multi-memberships and participate in multiple communities of practice. This point is especially significant to my study as the participants, as multilingual writers, were members of various writing communities: those based on the primary Discourse in their home language and those based on their secondary Discourse in English as students in private English-medium schools and an American-style university. As previously mentioned in Hagood's (2014) study, when primary and secondary Discourses do not match, movement from one Discourse to another is quite difficult based on the differences between literacies, culture, or values, which can cause a clash in students' identities. Hence, it can be argued that movement between the learning communities that represent these discourses is also quite challenging. Furthermore, when teachers ignore the significance of their students' additional writing communities, including the shared repertoire of their home languages, it can impact how students view their own negotiations and memberships within the dominant discourse community of their writing classrooms.

This conflict is addressed in my study when the participants either embraced, resisted, or felt rejected by the discourse community of their writing classrooms depending on their experiences with teachers as members of those communities. While Wenger (1998, 2000) does, indeed, acknowledge that these multiple memberships are to be reconciled into one identity, this implies a harmonious

union. In contrast, the participants' construction of a distinct writer identity for my study was often based on conflict and struggle as they tried to present themselves as 'successful' academic writers in English within their journal responses. This issue will be explored in more detail below when I discuss narrative identity construction.

### **3.4 Narrative Identity Construction**

Narratives are critical for understanding identity construction because who we are is very much defined through the stories we tell about ourselves (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1987; Bamberg, 1997; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). People construct and share these stories by detailing particular periods in their lives and what those experiences mean to them. While the ability to narrate single-event stories is more or less in place by the end of childhood (Fivush, et al., 2011), multiple-event narratives involve the integration of personally significant experiences across a continuum that form in adolescence and continue to provide a framework for constructing people's identities throughout their lifetimes (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Glück & Bluck, 2007; Demiray, Gülgöz, & Bluck, 2009). Thus, narratives allow us to craft our sense of self, our identity, by structuring experiences in a sequential format across different time periods, which helps facilitate subjective reflection of our lives (Bruner, 1987; Lemke, 2002; Wortham, 2003, 2008; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). The construction of this type of story is called a 'narrative identity,' which McAdams and McLean (2013) define as follows: "a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life some degree of unity and purpose" (p. 233).

According to Bruner (1987), whose work examines the 'life story,' memory, life, and narrative feed into each other so that eventually our ways of telling about ourselves become so habitual that narratives structure experience itself: "In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (p. 15). Autobiographical narratives have become a preferred method of research in the field of education as school memories provide important insight into identity

construction based on the classroom context and other aspects of teaching and learning that impact students' perceptions of themselves (Miller & Shifflet, 2016). However, it is important to note, this type of research mainly occurs in classrooms situated in English-speaking countries, which highlights the major gap in literature on using narratives in the Gulf region.

In relation to the participants, their experiences as writers are constructed through selected stories based on their past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the writing classroom. Thus, an examination of their narrative identities works in conjunction with previously discussed theories on writer identity in my study: Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) theory of social identity depicts learners as "constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (p. 11), which relates to the concept of narrative identity as a continuous selection of stories that construct a sense of one's self. This concept also relates to Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory as it examines the multiple ways people position their sense of self and others through discursive practices, such as writing narratives. As Bruner (2003) states about narrative identity and the self, "We constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears of the future" (p. 210). Therefore, an examination of narrative identity also relates to Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as influenced by Higgins' (1987) notion of an ideal, ought-to, and feared-self; as well as Markus and Nurius' (1986) notion of a possible self, since the theories capture the significance of imagined-future selves. Finally, since my study aims to explore students' writer identities within the social context of their writing classrooms, the use of narratives, and an examination of how they are discursively constructed, also relates to Lave and Wenger's (1991) view of identity as negotiated ways of being and learning in a community of practice.

### 3.4.1 'Big' Stories and 'Small' Stories

The debate about 'big' stories and 'small' stories within the field of narrative inquiry (Bamberg, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Moissinac & Bamberg, 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) sheds light on why I decided to examine the participants' constructions of their writer identities based on 'big' stories about their past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the classroom. Briefly, with big stories, people reminisce on particular life-determining events, or on their lives as a whole, and tie together these events across a continuum to construct a sense of self about their lives. In contrast, small stories typically occur in conversational exchanges about everyday occurrences that do not necessarily define a person's whole life, but they still provide insight into how people construct a sense of who they are in relation to the world (Bamberg, 2004, 2006, 2010).

Thus, according to the authors (Bamberg, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Moissinac & Bamberg 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2013), if researchers are only on the lookout for 'big' narratives, which Bamberg (1997, 2004, 2006, 2010; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) considers prototypical representations of the self, they potentially miss out on other kinds of relevant narrative activity reflected in 'small' stories. While the approach to studying this kind of small, fragmented, narrative is usually situated in opposition to an interest in big coherent narratives that make up a life story, I believe both provide insight into how people construct their narrative identities, as reflected in other studies on identity construction (Freeman, 2011; Stockburger, 2011; Blundell, 2016).

For the purpose of my study, however, I have chosen to solely examine writer identity through the participants' 'big' stories for the following reason: The concept of identity construction within an institutionalized context such as the classroom is already based on fixed notions of what it means to be a student (Alexander, 2011). These established values that guide students' actions and perceptions of themselves as learners are constructs of generalized stories based on institutional



norms within the academy, which reflect McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) description of a 'master' narrative. As previously mentioned in Section 3.3.6, master narratives are based on a 'world-to-person' construction of sociocultural narratives in which people fashion their identities according to commonly available stories; thus, I believe this notion supports an examination of the major, life-determining events reflected in big stories about students' writer identities. In relation to educational research, an understanding of the master narratives available to students, and how students position their 'big' stories as writers and learners within these narratives, provides insight into how predisposed students are to conventional narratives that instruct how they should perform in the classroom (Alexander, 2011; Fivush, et al, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

### **3.4.2 Studies on Narrative Identity Construction**

Five studies (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Fernsten, 2008; Alexander, 2011; Park, 2013) in particular have influenced my research on narrative identity construction because they each examine student narratives as a way to uncover the impact of literacy practices and academic discourse in English on writer identity. First, Williams' (2004) study explores the different types of identities that university students adopt when writing literacy narratives. She determined that students tend to construct themselves based on three common writer identities: the hero, the rebel, and the victim. This informs my own study as the participants each adopted one of these archetypal writer identities when narrating their past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the writing classroom. Williams (2004) found that an understanding of these recurring master narratives can help instructors reassess their own teaching practices, as well as make students aware of the types of writers identities they maintain throughout their educations.

In Carpenter and Falbo's (2006) study, the authors focus on the influence of 'successful' master narratives and how they impact university students' representations of themselves as academic writers in their literacy narratives. Specifically, the authors determined that students construct their writer identities based on the implicit assumption that they must succeed in school. These master

narratives are so pervasive in the classroom, states Carpenter and Falbo (2006), that they limit students' choices as to how they see themselves as writers. The authors suggest that instructors should re-assess the expectations in their narrative assignments so as to provide more opportunities to acquire other writer identities. This concern relates to my own study as I felt that the writing prompts I created for the participants to describe their past, present, and future writing experiences elicited an expectation that they should construct themselves as successful academic writers. This issue is addressed in more detail in the methodology section of Chapter 4, the data analysis section of Chapter 8, and the conclusion in Chapter 9.

Alexander's (2011) study also addresses the impact of 'success' master narratives on writer identity, but she further explores a less-limiting approach to identity construction in the form of 'little' narratives. Influenced by Lyotard's (1999) criticism of master narratives, Alexander (2011) describes little narratives as "less generalizable and more individualized and more situated" (p. 611). However, it is important to note, these little narratives, which Alexander (2011) considers a liberating alternative to master narratives, are the selfsame constructions that Williams (2004) considers 'archetypical' writer identities: the hero, the rebel, and the victim. Thus, literacy narratives overall, whether in master or little form, conform to a 'world-to-person' construction, as previously mentioned in Bamberg's (1996; 2004, 2006; 2007; 2010; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) depiction of big stories, which he considers prototypical representations of the self.

Fernsten's (2008) study on writer identity in non-native English students asserts that teachers position students as either "good writers" or "bad writers" depending on their abilities with academic discourse in English (p. 45), which informs my own study on how multilingual writers are positioned in their English-medium classrooms. Fernsten (2008) further explored how university students resisted or conformed to writing practices by developing a writing prompt titled 'Who Are You as a Writer?' This prompt, along with weekly journal entries, allowed students to understand how their 'non-native English status' linked to their perceptions of their

own writer identities. Fernsten (2008) concluded that teachers and students can reconstruct negative writer identities by viewing linguistic differences as an asset rather than a barrier to writing competency.

Finally, Park's (2013) study on adult English-language learners informs my study as she used a chronological approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to narrative inquiry for understanding how writer identities are shaped based on past, present, and imagined-future experiences with English. The writing prompts highlighted the students' past in their native countries; their present as English-language learners in the U.S.; and their future educational goals. The chronology of the questions played a significant role in Park's (2013) study because they helped students construct a narrative writer identity based on their "life history" as English-language users (p. 337). Park (2013) discovered that her students' engagement in the classroom increased because they better understood their educational journeys and goals, which helped Park gain new insight into her students' struggles and needs as English-language learners.

It is important to note, while the above studies inform my own research on writer identity and narrative identity construction, they all take place in university classrooms throughout the United States. To the best of my knowledge, research involving narrative identity construction, as based on academic discourse in English, is absent in this region. Therefore, I hope my study will spark interest in using narratives about writer identity for multilingual students in English-medium schools throughout the Gulf. In order to fully explore the participants' narrative identity constructions, I used the following theoretical frameworks: McAdams' life story model (1985, 1993, 1996), which helped me analyze the 'master' and 'little' narrative forms reflected in the story arcs of the participant's narrative identity constructions and Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which helped me understand the participants' narrative motives when constructing their writer identities based on my own presence as their teacher-researcher.

### 3.4.3 McAdams' Life Story Model

The key premise of McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model was formulated on Erikson's (1968) early developmental theory on identity. Erikson (1968) asserted that the major task facing young adults as they transition from adolescence into adulthood is the development and strengthening of identity. According to Erikson (1968), human development passes through key stages, with each stage posing new and difficult challenges, which can be accomplished by answering identity questions such as, 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the adult world?' While Erikson (1968) and McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996) agree that identity develops during the adolescent and young adulthood years, their point of difference is in the proposed means by which identity develops. Unlike Erikson's developmental stages, McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996) suggests that identity is developed through the life story, which also strives to answer the question, "Who am I?" This informs my own study since the participants underwent a transition from adolescence in secondary school to young adulthood in university in which they had to adapt their previous self-concepts as writers to their current writing context at GAU. According to McAdams (2008), these internalized stories integrate the reconstructed past and anticipated future based on relevant life events that comprise a 'narrative identity.' The uniqueness of these stories is what makes them particularly significant to identity construction (McAdams, 2008).

It is important to note, my study does not aim to address the broad scope of significant life events experienced by the participants; instead, it offers a more focused examination of significant *writing* events experienced in the participants' lives. Thus, McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) notion that narrative identity is, indeed, a life story, provides the foundation for my study on writer identity in the following way: Just as a life story is based on recalled and reconstructed memories that are entirely unique to an individual, so too are the subjective memories that the participants' experienced in their writing classrooms. The relevance of these writing experiences shifts McAdams' question on identity from "Who am I?" to "Who am I as a writer?" Therefore, in relation to my study, I consider McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) concept of a life story as a life story *about writing*.

McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996) suggests that narrative identity is the most important component of a three-level hierarchy on identity construction. The first level in the hierarchy is based on broad categories about personality that lack flexibility in terms of describing behavior across different settings and contexts. For example, an individual may be described as 'extroverted,' which denotes a certain pattern of behavior, but this does not guarantee that the person will always behave this way across a range of settings. This description can also be applied to many other individuals, and thus, is not unique to a person's identity. The second level includes constructs such as motives, goals, and values that are concerned with what individuals want from their lives. While these personal concerns show contextual flexibility, they are still shared by a number of people, and thus, are not entirely unique to a person's identity. The third level of McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) hierarchy is based on narrative identity, or the 'life story,' in which individuals structure their most significant experiences across a sequential format so as to facilitate subjective reflection on their identity development. According to McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996), this third level is entirely unique because an individual's life story includes recalled and reconstructed memories based on subjective life events rather than generalized behaviors shared by many individuals as depicted in levels one and two.

However, it is important to stress, reflection and evaluation of one's life story are essential for these experiences to be considered self-defining identity constructions (Fivush, et al., 2011), which relates to how the participants had to reflect on their own subjective writing experiences in order to construct meaning about their writer identities. This hierarchical framework on identity also forms the basis for McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) description of identity development as three layers of the self: From birth, people are 'actors' who have roles to play as they interact in the world, such as child, student, or spouse. When they enter adolescence and early adulthood, they become 'agents,' playing their roles and interacting with the world, but making decisions about their desired goals and outcomes. The final layer depicts people as 'authors,' in which they construct a narrative self based on

ideas about their future as impacted by their past and present experiences. Thus, the term 'narrative identity' provides an understanding for authoring a sense of oneself, which informs my own study on writer identity as a narrative construction based on a past-present-future story arc.

#### **3.4.3.1 'Master' Narratives and 'Little' Narratives**

McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model highlights two major concepts related to the participants' choice of story arcs and narrative motives as reflected in their narrative identities as writers: master narratives and little narratives. 'Master' narratives, also referred to as cultural narratives, are normative representations of major life events based on sociocultural standards that individuals feel compelled to follow, such as getting an education, becoming married, and having children (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Thorne & McLean, 2003; Fivush, et al., 2011). According to McAdams (2001), master narratives provide evaluative frameworks for a person's life story, and thus, are central to narrative identity construction. Moreover, identity theorists (Fivush, et al., 2011; Szpunar, et al., 2013; Rasmussen & Berntsen, 2013) find that the guidelines of master narratives allow for 'positivity bias for the future,' which can help people fashion their futures in positive, idyllic ways while fulfilling their master narratives. According to Rasmussen and Berntsen (2013), people tend to construct their sense of self based on positive master narratives, as opposed to negative master narratives, because of their very adherence to established societal norms. This notion reflects Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory as it also addresses how people construct their sense of self based on common, positive imaginings for the future.

In contrast, other identity theorists (Bamberg, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Moissinac & Bamberg 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2013) are critical of how these archetypical master narratives guide individuals based on a world-to-person view, which De Fina (2013) considers a "mechanical association between identities and sets of beliefs" because they are based on pre-established societal norms (p. 41). Since the life story is typically constructed in accordance with master cultural norms, the

'uniqueness' of one's narrative identity, which McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996) stresses in his third-level hierarchy on identity construction, is questionable for its very adherence to convention. Thus, one can argue, "How can a person construct a unique narrative identity when the only narratives available conform to a set of scripted master norms?" I attempt to address this issue below when discussing the role of 'little' narratives as an alternative to 'master' narratives when examining narrative identity construction.

A common master narrative for students, as previously described in Section 3.4.2, is the 'success' master narrative because it provides fixed notions of what it means to be a student (Alexander, 2011). Since students are defined throughout their educations by how well they perform and succeed, they are quite aware of the value that 'success' has within the academy, which is often reflected in the literacy narratives they write in school (Alexander, 2011; Fivush, et al., 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). This type of 'success' master narrative is evident in each of the participants' story arcs and informs my study accordingly. In order to construct a master narrative based on success, a 'redemption' theme is often employed, in which individuals overcome and learn from their past mistakes or negative life events (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). This notion also informs my study because it enabled the participants to present themselves as successful writers even when faced with prior negative writing experiences, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.4 when examining Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory.

'Little' narratives, however, which are embedded within the master narrative construct, avoid the generalizations of master narratives because they provide alternative ways for presenting one's narrative construction; thus, one's narrative identity is not necessarily defined by archetypical master constructs (Alexander, 2011). Instead, little narratives highlight McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) concept of an internalized and evolving life story as they reflect the uniqueness of one's experiences rather than the generalizations grounded in master narratives. Therefore, I believe an examination of little narratives addresses previous concerns

by identity theorists (Bamberg, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Moissinac & Bamberg 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2013) who tend to view master narratives as constrictive archetypes that position identity construction.

At the same time, studies by Williams (2004), Carpenter and Falbo (2006), and Alexander (2011), as discussed in Section 3.4.2, revealed that the authors did not differentiate between how they viewed master-narrative forms and little-narrative forms, as both constructs embodied guidelines for how they examined their participants' writer identities. While I agree that master and little narratives do present similarities, especially since little narratives are embedded within the master-narrative construct, I still found that the little-narrative construct offered me a more individualized examination of the participants' narrative motives than that of a generalized master narrative.

#### **3.4.3.2 Significance of 'Written Reflection' in Narratives**

A criticism of McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model is centered on the selfsame terms 'narrative identity' and 'life story' (Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011) as each construct is defined only in terms of its counterpart—the life story is narrative identity and narrative identity is the life story. It is not clear in McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) model, according to some (McLean, et al., 2007; Vignoles et al., 2011), whether narrative identity is based on the 'reflection' of one's life story or whether narrative identity is based on already determined insights of the self. For the sake of my study, the circular relationship between the two terms provides an understanding of how I view the construction of writer identity as I believe it was only through the participants' reflections about writing that they were able to construct their narrative identities as writers. To further explicate, these reflections would not have been possible without the narrative task of writing them down.

In accordance with McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996), I consider reflection an essential process for stories to be considered self-defining identity constructions, but even more important, I believe there is a better chance for this evaluative reflection to



occur when the stories are constructed in *written* form. According to Banks and Salmon's (2013) study on autobiographical reasoning, the specific act of writing helped participants evaluate their identity construction and sense of self in the world. Travagin, Margola, and Revenson's (2015) study also found that participants gained a greater understanding of their life events when depicting their stories through 'expressive writing tasks.' Thorne, McLean, and Lawrence's (2004) study on identity construction found that when young adults were asked to describe self-defining memories in their lives, the process of writing about those moments provided a strong sense of their identity development. In Canagarajah's (2014) study on language awareness, he stresses the role of literacy narratives in facilitating identity construction, as he found it was only through the discursive act of writing about these experiences that students were able to "resolve their linguistic and identity tensions" as writers (p. 775).

An additional concern when considering narrative identity is whether individuals have one single identity or multiple identities (Vignoles et al., 2011). From a poststructural perspective, identity is multifaceted, ever-shifting, and rife with numerous meanings based on subjective experiences and power relations (Weedon, 1987; Norton Peirce, 1995; Ivanič, 1998; Norton, 2000); thus, a narrative identity is also conceptualized in various ways depending on how individuals are positioned when describing themselves. This relates to Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) social identity theory as Norton's understanding of identity construction stresses the importance of power relations within social contexts. For the participants, the construction of their writer identities depended on how they positioned themselves and others within their written narratives. In this sense, the participants do not simply have one life story to tell about their writer identities; their life stories are plentiful as each one can comprise any number of experiences that are carefully selected and continuously updated depending on the social context and person in which their story is told (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Davies & Harré, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). They may have other writer identity constructions that are only available when narrated in other social contexts, such as with their family, friends, or peers at school.

The above point is especially significant as it highlights how my own presence as the participants' teacher-researcher impacted which experiences they chose to include or omit about themselves in their written narrative responses. With this consideration in mind, Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory address the construction of narrative motives, which helped me explore why particular life stories about writing, and thus narrative identity constructions, were presented over others by the participants.

#### **3.4.4 Goffman's Theory of Self-Presentation**

The theory of self-presentation is derived from Erving Goffman's seminal book (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman's (1959) interest in social interaction led him to theorize that identities are strategically shaped and re-shaped when individuals seek to create a desired image about themselves throughout the numerous social encounters they face in their lives. Self-presentation is therefore the attempt people make to express themselves and behave in certain ways that create a desirable impression on others. Goffman's (1959) understanding of identity can best be understood through his dramaturgical metaphors on social interaction, which highlight that identity is a fluid concept of the self that varies depending on the social context. Thus, it supports a poststructural study such mine that examines the impact of power relations on identity construction, as well as social constructionism, which theorizes that people construct their identities through interactional experiences in social settings.

However, Goffman's (1959) theory is mainly associated with symbolic interactionism, which posits that people ascribe meaning to symbols, objects, or situations based on their interactions with others. Goffman (1959) therefore analyzes social interactions through dramaturgical metaphors that describe how people live their lives like actors performing on a stage. This performance is the presentation of the self, or rather, a person's efforts to create specific impressions in the minds of an audience. In Goffman's (1959) view, identity is not at all fixed or internal, but rather, individuals create short-term situated identities, or temporary

renditions of themselves, and alter them according to the social context. This relates to McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story approach, which also highlights situation-specific views on identity, as people often select or tailor aspects of their life stories depending on a particular audience (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Thus, both frameworks are significant to my study as they helped me understand how the participants' narrative identity constructions were influenced by my own presence as their teacher-researcher.

Since Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor was highly influential to Ivanič's (1998) groundbreaking framework on four aspects of a writerly self, as discussed in Section 3.3, the concept of self-presentation is central to current research on writer identity (Matsuda, 2015), and thus, informs my study accordingly. In reference to Goffman's (1959) model of self-presentation, Ivanič (1998) views the writer as 'performer' who interactively builds a relationship with the 'audience,' or reader, through discursive practices in the classroom. This continual interplay is evident in my own study, as the participants performed their narrative identities as writers based on my own audience presence as their teacher-researcher. As a result, I believe the participants' discursive choices were impacted by their awareness of me and their desire to please me by depicting themselves as 'successful' students within their past-present-future story arcs as writers. This relates to McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model, as well, in which people commonly follow master narratives based on societal norms. In this vein, students commonly structure their self-presentations as 'successful' students when asked to write literacy narratives for their teachers as institutional norms in the academy value 'success' (Alexander, 2011; Fivush, et al., 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Thus, when students share their experiences with teachers, as figures of authority, they may be motivated to alter the content of their narratives in significant ways, as highlighted in Pasupathi and Hoyt's (2009) study on the impact that adult listeners have on the various ways adolescents narrate their life stories. Specifically, if teachers ask guided questions about their students' literacy experiences, as I did in my own study on writer identity, this can motivate students to include or omit

certain details that may create contradictory presentations of their writer identities (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011), even as they aim for what Goffman (1959) describes as 'expressive coherency' in their stories. These motivations, based on Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, link to Higgins' (1987) self-worth theory and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory, as they each depict the influence of an audience, such as family or teachers, on people's perceptions of their ought-to, ideal, and possible selves.

#### **3.4.4.1 Audience-Pleasing and Self-Construction Motives**

The concept of 'audience pleasing,' in which people present a possible self to others that they believe they should become (Higgins, 1987), highlights Goffman's (1959) description of 'saving face.' This is considered one of the key elements in self-presentation, as it is based on maintaining one's external role in relation to the presence of another in order to avoid embarrassment, shame, or guilt (Goffman, 1959, 1967). This external role is constructed to provide an audience with what they expect to see, and thus, the actor's words and actions are often predefined and limited. It is important to note, in order to maintain narrative trust, the presentation of one's self must be in line with past and future presentations to the same audience, which Goffman (1959) defines as 'expressive coherency.' This point is especially significant as it explains why students often follow 'redemption' themes in their narratives in which they overcome past mistakes in their stories so that they can appear successful in the present and future (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). A redemption theme also reflects Markus and Nurius' (1986) construction of a possible future self as the participants idealized their futures by presenting themselves as successful no matter their past experiences as writers.

The concept of 'self-construction,' in which people present a possible self to others that they would like to become (Higgins, 1987), highlights Goffman's notion of 'impression management.' This is another key element in Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation as it relates to how people construct their internalized goals in accordance to their social context. For the participants, even though they appeared to 'choose' their role as successful students, it was derived from the social context

of my study in which they wanted to present themselves in the best possible light so as to 'impress' their teacher-researcher audience. Thus, it can be argued, what appeared to be their internalized goals as writers were essentially externalized expectations shaped by their need to impress their teacher researcher.

The notion of a 'true' self, or 'authentic' self, in reference to Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory, is questioned by some (Vannini & Franzese, 2008; Branaman, 2010) because its existence is based on an 'idealization' of one's self that is presented to others. Goffman (1959) posits that the act of self-presenting reflects one's 'authentic' self by its very aim to present a 'true' self. Thus, the self-presentation of an idealized, true self is part of the authentic self. Goffman (1959) further stresses that self-presentation is produced by the interaction between performer and audience, not solely by an individual, and it is through this synchronicity that an authentic self is constructed. In relation to the participants, it can be argued that their 'authentic' writer identity was necessitated by my audience presence as their teacher-researcher because they aimed to construct an 'ideal' writerly self for me.

As a result, it was only through the participants' narrative self-presentations that they were able to construct a true version of their writer identities for my study. Goffman's (1959) concept of a true self parallels the socially constructed ideal self in Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory and therefore justifies how both theories helped me understand the participants' narrative identity constructions. However, as previously stated in Section 3.4.3.2, people comprise multiple life stories that reflect various identities as the experiences they present to others are carefully selected and modified depending on the social context and person in which their story is told (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Therefore, while I consider the participants' writer identities to be a true version of themselves within my study, I also acknowledge that they may have different versions of their true selves as writers outside of the realm of my study.

### 3.5 Overview of Multiple Theoretical Frameworks

The use of multiple theoretical frameworks provides a coherent basis for my study as each theory aligns with the other to provide a common perspective on identity in a social context. Furthermore, the frameworks offer relevant theories for understanding writer identity and narrative identity construction, which support my thematic analysis of the participants' past, present, and imagined-future experiences as writers throughout chapters 5-8.

**Table 3.1** presents a summary of the key features in the theoretical frameworks that are relevant to this study.

**Table 3.1: Key Features of Theoretical Frameworks**

Theoretical Frameworks	Key Features
<p><b>Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005, 2009)</b> as informed by:</p> <p><b>Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory</b></p> <p><b>Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory</b></p>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners are socially motivated by envisioning three aspects of the self (ought-to, ideal, and future possible selves) in a learning environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External factors motivate students to create ought-to selves based on who they are expected to be as learners (Higgins, 1987)</li> <li>• Internal factors motivate students to create ideal selves based on who they would like to become as learners (Higgins, 1987)</li> <li>• Desired or undesired selves, based on past and present experiences, impact how students imagine a possible future self (Markus &amp; Nurius, 1986)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Covington's Self-Worth Theory of Achievement Motivation (1984, 1997)</b></p>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of the self impact learners' abilities to succeed or fail</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Fear of failure' is related to students' sense of self-worth</li> <li>• Students devise learning strategies to approach success or avoid failure in the classroom</li> </ul>
<p><b>Norton's Social Identity Theory (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000)</b></p>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social identity is multiple and shifting based on discursive power relations</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students invest in their learning based on power relations in the classroom</li> <li>• Students invest in their learning depending on their sense of agency in the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Davies and Harré's Positioning Theory (1990)</b>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identities are constructed based on discursive practices that position oneself and others in a social context</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People use narratives to present themselves in certain ways by constructing 'positions' in relation to others</li> <li>• People construct positions based on societal norms that reflect a 'world-to-person' approach to identity construction</li> </ul>
<b>Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice (1991)</b>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning in a social context is a process of experiencing and constructing one's identity in a 'community of practice'</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A community of practice is based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire</li> <li>• Learners practice at the periphery and move toward the center when they become legitimate newcomers in a community of practice</li> </ul>
<b>McAdams' Life Story Model (1985, 1993, 1996)</b>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative identity is based on the construction of an internalized coherent life story</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection and evaluation of life-story events is necessary for constructing a narrative identity</li> <li>• People construct their narrative identities based on generalized 'master' narratives or more individualized 'little' narratives</li> </ul>
<b>Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory (1959)</b>	<p><b>Brief Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identities are shaped in social interactions by trying to create a desirable impression on others</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People avoid embarrassment in front of others by 'saving face' through desirable self-presentations</li> <li>• People use 'impression management' depending on the social context or person they are trying to impress</li> </ul>

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In summary, I provided a literature review that explores discourse, writer identity, and narrative identity construction based on relevant studies and theories that create a consistent understanding of identity in relation to the participants of this study. The theoretical frameworks used in this study share a common perspective on identity in a social context that reflects a coherent understanding of writer identity and narrative identity construction. In relation to writer identity, I discussed the following theories: Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, as informed by Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory, Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory; Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000); Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning; and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice. In relation to narrative identity construction, I discussed the following theories: McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model and Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In order to provide a detailed and transparent account of the collection procedure, this chapter outlines how I developed my research methodology over the course of the study. First, I give an account of the research paradigm, including its ontological and epistemological underpinnings, as well as the importance of reflexivity when conducting a qualitative study. Then, I discuss the research design, theoretical frameworks, and participants selected for the study. Next, I provide a description of the methodology chosen to collect the data and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, I discuss how I conducted thematic analysis followed by a consideration of ethical implications and limitations to the study.

#### **4.2 Research Paradigm**

A paradigm refers to a set of very general philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and our understanding of the world (epistemology). The belief that ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions (Creswell, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) informs the sequence of my research paradigm and emphasizes the importance of researchers reflexively understanding their world views. In this section, I will first describe how I identified my research paradigm. Then, I will discuss in further detail how my ontological and epistemological beliefs influenced my methodology.

Since my study is grounded in poststructuralism, I view language and discourse as social constructions that shape the identities of individuals while embracing their multiple meanings and contradictions. Therefore, given the subjectivity of my participants' individual experiences as writers, the informing paradigm reflects my interest in their subjective perspectives and writing experiences. It provides insight into the participants' various interpretations of knowledge and reality that they

constructed about their past and present writing experiences, which eventually influenced their understandings of themselves as writers in their future writing classrooms. This type of paradigm also allows me to reflexively consider my own biases and presuppositions and the possible effects they would have on my study. I felt this was important because I was not an objective researcher studying an educational context from the position of outsider, but very much a member of the institutional context under scrutiny as the writing instructor of my participants.

This study uses an interpretivist paradigm that supports the belief that individuals understand the world around them based on their subjective experiences. This paradigm is also sometimes referred to as social constructivism because it emphasizes that meaning is multiple, varied, and socially situated based on our interactions with others (Creswell, 2009). Since interpretive researchers recognize that their own backgrounds and experiences influence their view of the world, they try to position themselves within the research by acknowledging how these influences shape their own interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2009). As such, both the researcher and participants' meanings of the world are embedded in the research (Cohen, et al., 2011). Critics of interpretivism (Wellington, 2015) may find fault with this approach as the results of a study are mediated by either the researcher's interpretations or the participants' understanding of reality, but since this type of research is based on a construct of social meaning, the subjective context of the research is necessary to the study (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative researchers such as myself are concerned about understanding the complexity of their participants' experiences and interpretations rather than making objective generalizations about them (Cohen, et al., 2011).

#### **4.2.1 Ontology**

Since ontology is the theory of being, it is concerned with the assumptions individuals have about the existence of the world. For myself, I believe that the social world exists based on how individuals subjectively interpret and interact with it (Grix, 2004); therefore, my interpretive research follows an anti-foundationalist ontology, which posits that there is no one fixed foundation of objective reality

(Bates & Jenkins, 2007). Instead, truths are located in specific sociocultural contexts. Since the aim of my research is to understand how academic discourse in English, as a social construction, impacts the way my participants create knowledge and produce meaning about their narrative identities as writers, I believe my research paradigm, as informed by my ontology, is appropriate for a study such as mine. However, I needed to ensure that my interpretivist paradigm would provide me some assurance that my own findings, and the implications I drew from them, were as detailed and rigorous as possible.

As previously stated, critics of interpretivist paradigms (Wellington, 2015) may find fault with this approach since the results of a study are mediated by analysis that depends on how the participants understand their versions of reality and how the researcher interprets those understandings. Additionally, Fenwick (2003) points out the contradiction of anti-foundationalist researchers who reject objectivist views of knowledge while concurrently trying to “capture, measure, judge, and wring learning from fluid spaces of human life and meaning-making” (p. 5). Therefore, the complexity of collecting multiple perspectives from my participants without encouraging calculable notions of knowledge on my part necessitated a hermeneutic approach based on shared interpretations of knowledge between the researcher and participants (Crotty, 1998).

#### **4.2.2 Epistemology**

The interpretivist belief that the world is based on subjective experiences grounds my epistemological approach in subjectivism, in which social phenomena are experienced and constructed by one’s consciousness of them (Pring, 2000). While subjective epistemology does not deny that an external reality exists, an external reality is not considered possible beyond individual reflections and interpretations (Levers, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) emphasize that subjectivism is “always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity” (p. 21), which supports the poststructural view of my study that academic discourse in English contributes to the construction of writer identity in narrative form. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), epistemological inquiry looks at the relationship

between the knower and knowledge and asks, “How do I know the world?” (p. 183).

Therefore, by constructing their narrative identities as writers, the participants structured their experiences in a format that facilitated subjective reflection so that they could make sense of their lives (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1987). This also helped me, as researcher, better understand the participants’ knowledge construction and relationship to the world. While a criticism of subjective epistemology is that its very subjectivism makes the results of a study ungeneralizable to other educational contexts, allowing the participants to have a voice created an authentic understanding of new meaning (Crotty 1998) instead of a “pruned, synthetic version” of knowledge found in research grounded in objective epistemology (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 19).

On a personal note, my own epistemology is one that has been informed by my education as an English literature undergraduate; a Masters student in TESOL; and now, a doctoral student in TESOL Composition. I have worked as a writer, editor, and educator within the realm of English for over 25 years and have situated myself and my view of the world in relation to the construction and deconstruction of language. My identity, as such, and my knowledge of the world is intricately linked to my native-English background and my interest working with multilingual students in the Middle East. Therefore, my beliefs, experiences, and pedagogical practices influence the epistemology that I apply to my own research.

### **4.3 Reflexivity**

The principle of reflexivity is an essential step in qualitative research (Cohen, et al., 2007). I was particularly conscious of the criticism directed at qualitative researchers who assume the authority to represent their participants without discussion of their own identity and its possible influences on the research process (Pring, 2000; Creswell, 2007, 2009). Therefore, in the conceptualization of the research paradigm, I followed what Maxwell (2005) describes as ‘critical subjectivity’ in which I was conscious of my own subjective experiences during the

data analysis process. However, even when critical subjectivity is undertaken, Sandelowski (2006) raises cause for another concern: “Instead of giving voice to the voiceless, qualitative researchers have too often engaged in ‘ventriloquy,’ controlling the voices of the voiceless and, thereby, maintaining their voicelessness” (p. 10). Fox and Fine (2012) add to this discussion by arguing that in acting as ventriloquists, researchers tell ‘truths,’ but seem to have no connection to the social, cultural, or historical influences in their own lives.

Instead, Fox and Fine (2012) claim that researchers often avoid responsibility for their own positions by selecting, editing, and deploying the texts of others as if their own subjectivities do not come to bear on how they represent their participants. During the research process, I was concerned about the role of ventriloquy, the impossibility of objectivity, and the complications of speaking for those whose voices are often not heard in the pages of research. With Fox and Fine’s (2102) criticism in mind, I reflexively thought about my own intentions and subjectivities as a researcher, as described below:

Several years ago, I was requested to write a literacy narrative about my past language learning experiences as a faculty member of my Writing Studies department. This experience made me realize that all language learners—native and non-native alike—can easily have negative experiences with English as an academic discourse based on their institutional context. Ever since, I have been interested in the transformative nature of narratives as a way for my own students to understand how teachers, both past and present, as well as institutional contexts, have influenced their identities in relation to academic discourse in English (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Fernsten, 2008; Park, 2013; Canagarajah, 2014).

On the surface, my intention to understand my students’ narrative identities as writers may seem noble, but one could easily argue that my implicit faith in the transformative nature of narratives is a bias in my research. When determining the purpose of one’s research, Richards (2003) explains, “Even the most earnest

efforts can be undermined by a failure to identify personal bias in perceptions of actions or processes, or in the selection and presentation of evidence” (p. 267). Therefore, I have endeavored to establish a reflexive relationship with the methodological process itself by constantly calling into question the assumptions based on my own background experiences and knowledge that underlie the research decisions throughout my study. The significance of reflexivity is further discussed in Section 4.9.1 when I examine my role as teacher-researcher.

#### **4.4 Case-Study Design**

This is a case-study design that aims to understand the subjective writing experiences of three multilingual students at an American-style university in the UAE. It qualifies as a case-study design because it examines the participants’ real-life situations with multiple theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and methods. While there are several types of case studies, I decided to use a ‘descriptive’ case-study design because it presents comprehensive narrative accounts that make the ‘unfamiliar familiar’ about participants’ subjective experiences (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, it provides detailed contextual analysis of the participants with vivid descriptions that blend the depictions of their life events, experiences, and perceptions with my own analysis (Cohen, et al., 2011). In the field of L2 writing, several studies (Ivanič, 1998; Casanave, 2002; Abasi et al., 2006; Ouellette, 2008; Leki, 2007) advocate that a qualitative case-study approach is an effective method for gaining insight into participants’ writing experiences because it gathers data from various sources, which allows for various perspectives.

In the field of identity construction, Norton Peirce (1995) and Norton (2000) also suggest a case-study approach for gaining complex understandings of participants’ experiences as English-language learners. Case studies therefore highlight unique features about specific events that are key for understanding holistic situations (Cohen et al., 2007). In relation to my study, this attention to specific events is exemplified in the participants’ written narrative responses and interview responses about their past, present, and imagined- future experiences as writers. It was only through these specific events that I was able to capture a more in-depth

understanding of how the participants' motivational strategies, ideological and attitudinal beliefs about English, and sociocultural influences that positioned them as academic writers and contributed to their overall narrative identity constructions. These detailed accounts allowed me to better understand the complexities of the participants' writing situations—a phenomena that would have been difficult to capture through experimental or survey research (Yin, 2003).

Since a case-study approach encourages multiple frameworks and methodologies, it also uses a flexible range of methods for collecting and analyzing the data in order to reveal the participants' interpretations of their experiences. I gathered data from the participants' three journal responses, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews in order to gain an understanding of how they constructed their narrative identities as academic writers. Each of these methods captured the participants' subjective writing experiences and perceptions of themselves as writers, which reflects Yin's (2003) definition of a case study as "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 13). While it is argued that case studies may promote selectiveness during the data-collection process, biased interpretations, and limitations in the reliability of the findings (Tellis, 1997), I believe researchers using a case-study design can aim to minimize the influence of their personal preconceptions by employing reflexivity in their interpretations of the data. This issue is discussed further in Section 4.10 when addressing ethical considerations in my study.

#### **4.5 Research Questions**

The five research questions explored in my case-study design are:

- 1) *How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*
- 2) *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*
- 3) *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes toward writing?*

4) *How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*

5) *How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*

I chose multiple theoretical frameworks to examine the research questions after inductively analyzing the data for patterns and themes. Each theory aligns with the other to address my study's overarching question reflected in Research Question 1: *How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?* I felt it was necessary to examine the participants' identity constructions from different perspectives so that I could generate richer analysis from the data as I approached it from alternative viewpoints (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Moreover, the various theories made it possible for me to address each research question from a unique perspective, yet also, gain a more holistic understanding of Research Question 1 when questions 2-5 were looked together as a whole. These theories share a common perspective on identity in a social context and provide relevant understandings of writer identity and narrative identity construction that support my thematic analysis. A brief description of each theoretical framework and its relationship to the study's research questions are provided below:

For Research Question 1, I used multiple theories to explore themes about the participants' writer identities and narrative identity constructions based on past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences. These theories not only address the study's overarching question, reflected in Research Question 1, but they also address the remaining research questions of my study, as described below:

For Research Question 2, I used Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System to examine how the participants' motivational strategies impacted their writer identities. Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) theory highlights how learners are socially motivated by envisioning three aspects of the self (ought-to, ideal, and future



possible selves) in a learning environment. This helped me understand how the participants' external and internal motivations, based on their expected (ought-to-self) and imagined (ideal self) identities, impacted how they envisioned their future goals as writers. I also used Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory to examine how the participants devised learning strategies based on their 'fear of failure' as academic writers in English. Covington's (1984, 1997) theory highlights how perceptions of the self can impact learners' abilities to succeed or fail in the classroom based on their sense of self-worth as students. This helped me understand how the participants' learner identities, motivated by 'fear of failure,' impacted their expected and imagined identities as academic writers in English.

For Research Question 3, I used Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) to examine how the participants' ideological beliefs about English impacted their writer identities and investments toward academic discourse in English. Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) theory highlights how social identity is multiple and shifting based on power relations. This helped me understand how agentic issues surrounding English impacted the participants' investments and attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing approaches.

For Research Question 4, I used Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice to examine how sociocultural influences positioned the participants' writer identities and impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms. Davies and Harré's (1990) theory highlights how identities are constructed based on discursive practices that position oneself and others in a social context. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory highlights how learning in a social context is a process of experiencing and constructing one's identity in a 'community of practice.' Both theories helped me understand how positioning by teachers, family, and the participants themselves, impacted the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

For Research Question 5, I used Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible-selves theory to examine the participants' narrative motives when constructing their narrative identities as writers based on my presence as their teacher-researcher. Goffman's (1959) theory highlights how identities are shaped in social interactions by trying to create a desirable impression on others. Higgins' (1987) theory highlights how the ought-to self, based on what one should become, and the ideal self, based on what one would like to become, are representative of a future-self state. Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory highlights how identities are a construct of desired or undesired selves, based on past and present experiences, which impact how people imagine a possible future self. Each theory helped me understand how my presence as teacher-researcher motivated the participants to present their 'ought-to' selves, 'ideal' selves, and 'future possible' selves according to a particular narrative format based on 'success.'

I also used McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model to examine the participants' writer identities based on specific narrative forms used in the past-present-future story arcs of their narrative identity constructions. McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) theory highlights how narrative identity is based on the construction of an internalized coherent life story. This helped me understand how the participants constructed meaning as academic writers based on 'master' and 'little' narratives of success reflected in their life stories as writers.

**Table 4.1** summarizes how each theory is relevant to my study on writer identity and narrative identity construction. The table also depicts how each theory addresses research questions 2-5, which provide a coherent basis for answering the overarching question of my study reflected in Research Question 1: *How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*

**Table 4.1: Theoretical Frameworks and Relevance to Research Questions**

Theoretical Frameworks	Research Questions and Relevance to Study
<p><b>Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005, 2009)</b> as informed by Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory and Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory</p>	<p><b>Research Question 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do motivational strategies impact the participants' writer identities?</li> </ul> <p><b>Relevance to Study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed their writer identities based on their imagined identity (ideal self) and expected identity (ought-to self) as academic writers in English</li> </ul>
<p><b>Covington's Self-Worth Theory of Achievement Motivation (1992)</b></p>	<p><b>Research Question 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do motivational strategies impact the participants' writer identities?</li> </ul> <p><b>Relevance to Study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed their learner identities based on writing strategies motivated by 'fear of failure' in the classroom</li> </ul>
<p><b>Norton's Social Identity Theory (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000)</b></p>	<p><b>Research Question 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes toward writing?</li> </ul> <p><b>Relevance to Study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed their writer identities based on ideological beliefs about English that impacted their investments and attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing approaches</li> </ul>
<p><b>Davies and Harré's Positioning Theory (1990)</b></p>	<p><b>Research Question 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?</li> </ul> <p><b>Relevance to Study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants were positioned as academic writers by family, teachers, and themselves based on sociocultural beliefs about English</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice (1991)</b></p>	<p><b>Research Question 4:</b></p> <p>How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classroom?</p> <p><b>Relevance to Study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants positioned themselves in the discourse community of their writing classrooms based on their sense of legitimacy as academic writers in English</li> </ul>

<b>Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory (1959)</b>	<b>Research Question 5:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative norms?</li> </ul> <b>Relevance to Study:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed idealized images of their narrative identities as writers based on my presence as their teacher-researcher</li> </ul>
<b>Markus and Nurius' Possible Selves Theory (1986) and Higgins' (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory</b>	<b>Research Question 5:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative norms?</li> </ul> <b>Relevance to Study:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed their ought-to selves, ideal selves, and possible future selves based on my presence as their teacher-researcher</li> </ul>
<b>McAdams' Life Story Model (1985, 1993, 1996)</b>	<b>Research Question 5:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative norms?</li> </ul> <b>Relevance to Study:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how participants constructed their narrative identities based on generalized 'master' narratives of success as well as 'little' narratives that provided more unique understandings of success</li> </ul>

#### 4.6 Participants

I used a purposeful convenience sampling of three WRI 101 intermediate-level writing students from one of my fall 2015 academic writing courses at GAU. Purposeful sampling is the practice of selecting participants from a known sample that is rich with useful data for a particular study (Patton, 2002). Convenience sampling is described as selecting participants who are close at hand since they may be able to provide the most insight concerning shared experiences of a particular phenomenon (Thorne, 2008). In qualitative research, Creswell (2007) explains that “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Therefore, purposeful sampling is appropriate for my study because I selected participants who had experience writing in academic English in the UAE and greater MENA region. Convenience sampling is

also appropriate for my study because I had access, in my own classroom, to multilingual students writing in academic English at an American-style university in the UAE.

Purposeful sampling and convenience sampling work well together since my interpretivist research does not seek to generalize about a larger population, but rather, aims to provide insight about the participants' subjective writing experiences. Additionally, I felt it was necessary to use participants from my own classroom because interpretive research necessitates a relationship between the researcher and participant (Cohen, et al., 2011). While Duff (2010) claims that this type of partnership could possibly influence the participants to "represent themselves and their histories or experiences ... on their assumptions about what the researcher expects to hear" (p. 20), I believe our close involvement allowed room for more reflection on the participants' part and understanding on my part, which supports an interpretivist framework. Concerns about social desirability bias and unequal power relations between researcher and participants (Krumpal, 2013) will be dealt with in more detail in Section 4.9 when addressing ethical considerations in my study.

Since the participants were part of my fall 2015 intermediate-level WRI 101 course, they participated in an online journaling assignment in which all students in my course wrote reflectively about their past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences throughout the semester. While students, overall, wrote about positive and negative experiences in the writing classroom, I chose to select participants who only described a 'negative' experience for their first journal response of the semester. Since I was previously concerned about how students perceived themselves as writers upon entering my WRI 101 course, especially those who had encountered negative experiences in secondary school, as discussed in Chapter 1.2, I felt that the participants' writing experiences sufficiently addressed the rationale of my study: Multilingual students in the UAE who are expected to master English as an academic discourse often encounter challenges to their investments in the English language. Thus, I felt it was necessary to focus on participants with

negative writing experiences in order to gain insight into the particular challenges students in this region potentially experience.

The participants were not required to do any additional assignments beyond the class requirements save for the final interviews conducted at the end of the semester. Since all my students had access to the syllabus and grading distribution for the semester, I felt it was clear that the journal responses were part of an online journal grade in which all students, not just the participants, wrote reflectively about their writing experiences throughout the semester. It is important to note that the online journal counted toward 10% of the overall semester grade, but the journal responses and any other reflective writing, were considered informal writing tasks that encouraged reflection over academic writing standards. As such, the online journal responses were graded holistically based on their completion, not for following specific guidelines as required for the formal essay assignments.

**Table 4.2** provides background information about each participant that reflects their nationality, home language, and years studying in English.

**Table 4.2: Participant Information**

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Home Language	University Grade	Years Studying in English	Perceived Fluency in Written English
Dana	Female	17	Jordanian	Arabic	1 <sup>st</sup> year	13 years	Fluent
Mumin	Male	18	Sudanese	Arabic	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	11 years	Not Fluent
Prashant	Male	18	Indian	Hindi	1 <sup>st</sup> year	14 years	Not Fluent

**NOTE: The participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.**

#### 4.7 Methodology and Methods

This study employs a multi-method approach by using various means to collect and analyze the data. The advantage of using this approach is that it allows for different perspectives and provides a more holistic view of the social world as experienced by the participants (Morse, 2003). This is especially important for an interpretivist study that addresses subjective experiences as interpreted by both the participants and researcher. Based on these considerations, a description and justification of my chosen methodologies and methods is provided in the following sections.

**Table 4.3** provides a chronological summary of the data-collection methods and methodologies used for analysis.

**Table 4.3: Data Collection and Analysis Timeframe**

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Data-Collection (Methods)</b>	<b>Analysis (Methodologies)</b>
Sept. 15, 2015	Dana Mumin Prashant	Journal Response 1	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Sept. 30, 2015	Dana Mumin Prashant	Questionnaire	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Nov. 10, 2015	Dana Mumin Prashant	Journal Response 2	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Jan. 5, 2016	Dana Mumin Prashant	Journal Response 3	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Jan. 12, 2016	Dana	Semi-Structured Interview	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Jan. 14, 2016	Mumin	Semi-Structured Interview	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description
Jan. 16, 2016	Prashant	Semi-Structured Interview	Narrative Inquiry Thick Description

## **4.7.1 Pilot Studies**

### **4.7.1.1 Journal Response Questions**

In fall 2013, I conducted a study on writer identity for one of my doctoral courses at University of Exeter called “TESOL Classrooms and Pedagogy: Theory and Practice.” It took place in one of my intermediate-level WRI 101 courses at GAU, and similar to my current study, students were asked to write about their experiences with academic discourse in English. At the time, I required students to focus on a ‘negative’ writing experience from their past because I had assumed that they each had one to tell. I quickly learned that my journal question was too leading based on three major reactions from my students: (1) Some believed they did not have a ‘negative’ experience to share even though they had faced difficulties as writers; (2) others had negative experiences to share but they did not want to write about them; and (3) some only wanted to write about a ‘positive’ experience because they did not consider themselves struggling writers. Based on this trialed experience, I realized that I was forcing some of the participants to construct moments based on my own assumptions and expectations about the data. This influenced my decision to have students write about any experience of their choice in my current study as long as it involved academic discourse in English in the writing classroom. I felt this would elicit more authentic writing than if I solely focused on a ‘negative’ experience.

It is important to note that I selected my three participants based on their initial journal responses describing a ‘negative’ writing experience, but they were not forced in any way to do so. As previously stated in Section 4.6, I felt their negative experiences were important to explore as the rationale of my study highlights how multilingual students in the UAE are increasingly expected to master English as an academic discourse without considering the potential impact on their investments in the English language. In addition, I found that focusing on one singular writing experience presented a simplified view of my former students’ writer identities as it did not allow for enough self-reflection, which is essential for narrative identity construction (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). According to McAdams’ (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model, it is the sequential construct of moments that shape our



understandings of ourselves, which I believe was missing from my piloted study by only focusing on one writing moment. This influenced my decision to examine three writing experiences in my current study as I felt the continuum between the participants' past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences would provide more detailed self-reflections about their writer identities than looking at the moments in isolation.

#### **4.7.1.2 Questionnaires**

I drafted two questionnaires before creating a final version that I believed would effectively address the participants' background information. Piloting a questionnaire is necessary in qualitative research to help ensure that the questions obtain the intended information for the study (Wellington, 2000) First, I contacted the director of Faculty Development at my university who offers support to faculty who want to develop effective teaching and researching methods in their classrooms. Her field of expertise is Education and she has carried out several empirical studies at GAU. She mainly pointed out that I had too many closed questions while some of my open-ended questions lacked clarity. Once I had made revisions based on my colleague's suggestions, I piloted the questionnaire to a sample of 20 students in a different WRI 101 course of mine in which the participants were not members. I wanted to ensure that the questions were easy to understand and covered the essential information needed for my study.

After the students completed the questionnaires in class, I asked them what needed to be changed, rewritten, or updated so that the questions were "straightforward and that the format made logical sense" (Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004, p. 317). There were concerns about the open-ended questions that asked students to provide additional information about their former writing teachers and English-medium schools. While I did not want to guide the participants, it was suggested that I provide some examples so that they would have a sense of what kind of 'additional' information to include in the questionnaire. These revisions were made before administering the questionnaires to the participants. Finally, piloting

the questionnaire helped me determine that it would take roughly 15-20 minutes for the participants to complete the questionnaire.

#### **4.7.1.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

I chose three students from a different WRI 101 course in which the participants were not members in order to sample the piloted semi-structured interviews. I felt the students were appropriate since they shared similar traits with the participants, based on their linguistic backgrounds and experience writing in academic English. In addition, they had written two of the three required journal responses for the course. I also chose them based on their willingness and availability to be interviewed during the middle of the semester, which is why they had not been able to complete the third, and final, journal response. I felt it was necessary to pilot the interviews at this stage so that I would have enough time to make revisions before the participants were interviewed at the end of the semester. Piloting interviews is necessary before a major study, such as a dissertation, as it can help identify if there are flaws or limitations within the research design that could impact the overall study (Kvale, 2007). The objective was to familiarize myself with how to conduct semi-structured interviews, but also, to revise my questions if necessary for the final interviews. Based on these piloted interviews, I learned to avoid the following pitfalls and ensured that the final interviews were indeed of a 'semi-structured' nature that allowed for a much freer exchange of information.

During the first piloted interview, my questions were too guided and I felt that I was forcing the participant to provide me the answers I wanted to hear. This occurred when I repeated the student's answers back in such a way that I was actually rephrasing them based on my own preconceived notions and experiences with teaching academic writing in English. During the second piloted interview, I felt that the student was easily sidetracked and discussed issues that did not pertain to his written journal responses. However, my concern that the participant had 'gotten off track' indicates that I was still unfamiliar with a semi-structured format. Finally, during the third piloted interview, I felt that I had missed opportunities for a more in-depth discussion because I was still concerned about the interviewee losing focus

as was the case in the previous example. This influenced me to edit and refine my interview questions so that the participants would have enough clarity, flexibility, and guidance to respond uniquely to their subjective experiences described in their written journal responses. I also decided to narrow down my list of pre-set questions to only six so as to leave room for additional questions and responses that would have the potential to emerge during the semi-structured interviews.

## **4.7.2 Methodologies**

### **4.7.2.1 Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquirers view experience as a narrative construction and hold the belief that people live storied lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006). Narrative inquiry, then, is a way of thinking about experience as ‘experience as story,’ which provides an empirical understanding of both the participants and research topic (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). The narratives that participants tell are important because of the experiences they represent. Thus, allowing the participants to narrate their lives challenges the positivist view based on the need to capture one absolute truth in the process of meaning making (Wellington, 2015). Since qualitative research is grounded in the assumption that there can be multiple ways to construct reality and truths, representations narrated by the participants cannot be judged as being the only truth, but rather, a truth as represented by their experiences. It is through these narratives that participants can express how and why specific experiences occurred, which can produce challenging questions and insights rather than concrete answers (Saldaña, 2015).

Narrative inquiry is therefore a common methodology for educational research because a story about education is indeed a storied experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006; Craig, 2011). Furthermore, narrative inquiry offers an opportunity for participants to go through the reflective and generative process of constructing a coherent life story, which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as “living, telling, re-telling, and reliving” (p. 20). This supports McAdams’ (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model, as discussed in Chapter 3, which theorizes that narrative identity is a

sequential construct of people's self-reflections about their life stories. Narratives are most often depicted as: (a) a short story chronicling an event with characters; (b) a comprehensive story that covers an important segment of one's life, such as school, or (c) a narrative that covers someone's entire lifespan (Chase, 2008; Craig, 2011). In my study, the participants' three journal responses reflect a 'segment' of their lives about particular writing experiences. By representing the participants' lives in storied ways, they can make meaning of their individual lives within the context of their writing experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Craig, 2011). Therefore, the use of narrative inquiry in my study allowed the participants to construct a narrative identity based upon their perceived writing experiences, which can shed light on how motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural beliefs about academic discourse in English contributed to their writer identities.

Narrative inquiry makes it possible for the researcher to recount the participants' experiences in a manner that engages the reader and brings life to their stories. To accomplish this, it is necessary to gather the stories contained in the data and re-story them in some meaningful manner. It is during the re-storying process that an understanding of the participants' experiences is better conveyed to the reader (Creswell, 2007). This was achieved in my study by presenting the participants' written journal responses, questionnaire data, and interview responses in a past-present-future story arc. According to Cortazzi (1993), establishing a chronological sequence in re-storying is what separates narrative inquiry from other types of research. The use of chronology helps define a story arc that depicts the beginning, middle, and end of the participants' narrated experiences. This story arc, impacted by Dewey's (1938) transactional theory of experience, is situated in a three-dimensional space of interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interaction is between personal and social dynamics; the continuity involves the past, present, and future; while the situation refers to the context in which the story was experienced. The past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences of the participants are the focus of my case-study design as narrative inquiry assumes that people sustain a coherent narrative story by

constructing past and future experiences within the story arc they are presently narrating (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Since I was interested in how the participants interpreted significant writing moments based on their past, present, and imagined-future experiences, I chose to examine their written journal responses and interview responses for holistic, storied evidence that would provide a sequential understanding to their identity construction as writers. This approach to narrative inquiry allowed me to capture significant moments by providing the participants the flexibility to explore their writer identities from different time periods and perspectives in their lives that simultaneously explored the 'inward, outward, backward, and forward' directions of an experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain these four directions for examining an experience as follows: Inward means looking toward internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, and reactions. Outward means looking toward the external conditions, such as the environment. Backward and forward refers to the temporality of conditions, such as the past, present, and future experiences that one feels in a specific environment (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, continuity highlights the past that is remembered; the present relating to experiences of the past; and the future that looks forward to envisioning possible experiences (Dewey 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In relation to the participants, I address their inward and outward conditions by exploring how they feel about a particular writing situation, and I address temporal conditions by looking at a past-present-future continuum of those writing experiences. Therefore, my decision to use narrative inquiry helped me gain insight into the participants' lives; in fact, the very nature of this methodology helped me extract subjective experiences, descriptions, and interpretations from the participants that I believe are necessary for an interpretivist study such as mine (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Duff, 2010; Craig, 2011).

#### 4.7.2.2 Thick Description

Thick description is essential to narrative inquiry as it renders the participants' lives in rich, detailed, multi-dimensional ways (Saldaña, 2015). In Geertz's (1973) seminal book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, he describes thick description as follows:

It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (as cited in Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

Denzin (1989) highlights the sequential link between 'thick description' and 'thick interpretation' by stating that it is the qualitative researcher's task to thickly describe social events so that thick interpretations can be made available to the reader. Without thick description, thick interpretation is not possible; and, without thick interpretation, qualitative research will lack credibility to the research community; the research participants themselves; and with the wider audience of readers for whom the study is intended (Denzin, 1989; Ponterotto, 2006).

Therefore, it is important to emphasize Schwandt's (2014) definition that 'thick description' is the interpretation of what is being observed or witnessed by the researcher. It is this very interpretation, according to Denzin (1989) and Ponterotto (2006), which can increase personal bias on the part of the researcher by being selective, unrepresentative, and unfair to the participants' views. Bias, however, can be avoided by focusing on five primary areas that Denzin (1989) views as necessary for a comprehensive application of thick description: biographical (locating the context); historical (bringing past moments and experiences to life); situational (placing the participant in the situation under study); relational (bringing to life a participant's relationship to others); and interactional (focusing on interactions between the participant and others).

In my own study, thick description was achieved by describing the context of GAU, including a detailed description of the university and surrounding region that directly relates to multilingual students and academic discourse in English. This also entailed describing the participants' background information, such as nationality, languages spoken, and previous schooling in English. Most important, thick description entailed a vivid depiction of the participants and their subjective writing experiences through each of their case studies so that "the writing seem[ed] 'real' and 'alive,' transporting the reader directly into the world of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 250). This was further achieved with transparent descriptions of the data analysis so that readers would have an opportunity to understand the participants' interpretations of their narrative writer identities as well as my own interpretations—and possible assumptions and biases—of their writing experiences. As Ponterotto (2006) surmises, thick description should provide readers enough essential elements of the findings so that they, too, would have determined the same interpretive conclusions as the researcher.

### **4.7.3 Methods**

#### **4.7.3.1 Journal Responses**

The first method I used were journal responses (written narratives) so as to obtain rich, detailed information about the participants' subjective writing experiences in academic English. Journal responses are appropriate for an interpretivist study because they help capture subjective experiences constructed by the participants so that the researcher can explore and understand the significance of these particular moments (Cohen, et al., 2011). According to Bruner (1987), using the "storied texts" of participants provides a rich, lived reality to the research (p. 14) and, as Gibbs (2007) adds, it personalizes what would otherwise be considered generalizations about the participants' experiences. In addition, narratives are critical for understanding identity construction because who we are is very much defined by the way in which we remember and reconstruct our experiences (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). By examining journal responses, as opposed to other forms of data collection, researchers can explore the vividness of real-life

events perceived by the participants, and thus, aim to understand and make inferences about the data provided (Cohen et al., 2011).

Since the participants were also students in my intermediate-level WRI 101 course, they participated in an online journaling assignment in which all students in my course wrote reflectively about their past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences throughout the semester. Each journal response was based on a specific question about academic writing in English, for a total of three questions, and was administered during the beginning, middle, and end of the fall 2015 semester. The journal questions were created based on a pilot study about writer identity that I had conducted in fall 2013 for one of my doctoral courses at University of Exeter. (The pilot study was previously discussed in Section 4.7.1.1.) Before students wrote their first journal response, I reviewed the three journal response questions with the entire class and I answered any concerns during that time.

We also discussed key elements that would be appropriate for a journal response and reviewed three sample journal responses written by former students at GAU. The journal response questions were available on Blackboard, a virtual course-management system provided by GAU. Since students can only access Blackboard with their student IDs and university passwords, they could not read each other's journal responses without permission of the writer. This ensured privacy, and I hope, an online writing context in which students felt safe to share their writing experiences. However, as their instructor, I had access to each student's individual Blackboard account so that I could read students' journal responses after they were due.

While some students chose to write their journal responses during the times our class met in the computer lab, the majority of students wrote their journal responses outside of the classroom. Students were encouraged to email me or talk to me during class if they faced any difficulties accessing Blackboard to write or upload their journal responses. Each journal response was approximately 500



words in length but students were not penalized for going under or over the word limit. Neither were they penalized for any spelling or grammar mistakes. As previously stated in Section 4.6, while the three journal responses counted toward 10% of the overall semester grade, they were considered informal writing tasks that encouraged reflection over academic writing standards. As such, the online journal responses were graded holistically based on their completion, not for following specific guidelines as required for the formal essay assignments.

**Table 4.4** provides a summary of the journal response questions and date of submission.

**Table 4.4: Journal Response Submission Schedule**

Timeline	Journal Question #1: September 15, 2015	Journal Question #2: November 10, 2015	Journal Question #3: January 5, 2016
Journal Questions	Reflect on your <b>past</b> experiences writing in academic English.	Reflect on your <b>present</b> experiences in WRI 101 with academic English.	Reflect on your <b>future</b> experiences in WRI 102 with academic English.

The past-present-future timeline reflects how each question informs the next question in order to provide a more holistic understanding of academic writing experiences in English. The chronological nature of the journal questions highlights how different writing experiences can influence identity constructions and negotiations as academic writers in English. Specifically, the journal questions explore how writer identities are constructed by past, present, and imagined-future experiences in the writing classroom. Below is a more detailed account of the journal response questions:

*Question #1: The Past*

The first question highlighted the participants' past academic writing experiences in secondary school, including their feelings and assumptions about writing in an academic English context. The below journal prompt, offered at the beginning of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on your past experiences writing in academic English. Describe a specific writing moment in your secondary-school classroom that impacted you. Write about your feelings, beliefs, and understandings of yourself as a writer based on this particular moment.

Question #2: The Present

The second question highlighted the participants' present academic writing experiences, including their feelings and assumptions about writing their first academic essay in WRI 101, an intermediate-level writing course at GAU. The below journal prompt, offered during the middle of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on your present experiences in WRI 101 with academic English. Describe a specific moment writing your first academic essay. Write about your feelings, beliefs, and understandings of yourself as an academic writer based on this particular moment.

Question #3: The Future

The third question highlighted the participants' potential transformation as academic writers in the future. Specifically, the participants were asked to imagine themselves in WRI 102, an advanced-level writing course at GAU. The below journal prompt, offered at the end of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on your imagined-future experiences in WRI 102 with academic writing. Write about how you see yourself as an academic writer and how this was impacted by understanding your past and present writing experiences. Discuss how your feelings and knowledge about academic writing may have changed since the beginning of this semester.

See **Appendix I** for the three journal responses written by Participant 1. See **Appendix II** for the three journal responses written by Participant 2. See **Appendix III** for the three journal responses written by Participant 3.

#### 4.7.3.2 Questionnaires

The second method I used were open-ended questionnaires so as to obtain background information about the participants once I decided to use their journal responses for my study. See **Appendix IV** for the open-ended questionnaire used for the participants. Open-ended questionnaires are suitable for qualitative research, especially research that necessitates case studies, since they allow the participants to fully explain and interpret their answers about particular situations or subjective experiences in their lives. In addition, open questions provide an opportunity for the participants to include as much detail as they want without the limitations of pre-set categories (Cohen, et al., 2011). Since my qualitative research does not require statistical analysis or ratio data generated by closed questions, I believe the open-ended questionnaires are appropriate for an interpretivist study such as mine that does not seek to generalize about a larger population.

I made hard copies of the questionnaires and administered them to the three participants during different times of the day on September 30, 2015. This was necessary since the participants were in different course sections of mine. In addition, one participant had to immediately leave when class was over even though we had previously discussed that the questionnaires would be administered toward the end of class and would most likely require extra time after class was let out to complete. Therefore, two participants from different sections completed their questionnaires at the end of class that day, whereas the third participant met me during my office hours on the same day to complete her questionnaire.

On average, it took the participants 10-15 minutes to complete their questionnaires. I chose to administer the questionnaires myself, as opposed to having the participants complete them on their own outside of class, so that I could explain the purpose of the study and answer any items that were potentially unclear (Best & Kahn, 1998). In each situation, I explained the questionnaire and let participants know they had the right to discontinue at any time. I remained with

the participants until they had completed their questionnaires and ensured that they were placed in my hands before the participants left.

#### **4.7.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The third method I used to gather data were semi-structured interviews, which is a central tool in qualitative research because it offers “a valuable way of gaining a description of actions and events—often the only way, for events that took place in the past or ones to which you cannot gain observational access” (Maxell, 2005, p. 94). They are an essential source of case study information as they can produce large amounts of qualitative data quickly (Yin, 2009; Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016). In addition, it is a common practice in identity research to combine interviews with written narratives, such as journal responses, as both data-collection tools provide an additional layer to the participants’ understanding of themselves (Duff, 2010). Therefore, it is a technique for gaining insight into the participants’ thoughts, explanations, plans, motives, and emotions that can contribute to the uniqueness of their writing experiences.

I adopted a semi-structured format because it allowed me to explore different perspectives in more depth as the interviews were not limited by a set of pre-scripted questions; rather, other questions emerged during the interview process that were essential to the study. In other words, the interviews were less rigid than structured interviews but more systematic than unstructured interviews (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). This meant that the participants and I could discuss additional interests that may not have been foreseen when the questions were originally created (Cohen et al., 2007).

The interviews in this study aimed to explore the participants’ three journal responses in more depth. The semi-structured interview questions therefore sought to clarify the participants’ written journal responses; learn more about their reasons for responding a certain way; and offer the participants an opportunity to elaborate further on particular feelings, perceptions, and possibilities in an exploratory manner (Keats, 2000). See **Appendix V** for a list of questions used for the semi-

structured interviews. With this in mind, I felt the semi-structured interviews enhanced my own understanding of the participants' journal responses, which was further heightened by the pre-established relationship I had with the participants as their writing instructor.

The interviews began on January 10 and ended on January 14, 2016. The interviews were conducted in my office at GAU at the convenience of the three participants. They had agreed beforehand that my office was an acceptable choice. To ensure privacy, I put a note on my office door stating that interviews were in session so as not to be disturbed. Since my research aims to understand how the participants interpreted their experiences with academic writing in English, I employed Kvale's (1996) 'directive interviews' so that dynamic, in-depth responses, with reciprocal interactions on both our parts, would occur. While the questions were determined in advance based on the journal prompts and the participants' ensuing written responses in their online journals, each interview session had its own unique characteristics in that additional questions and participant responses naturally emerged during the flow of our conversation.

This type of interview was chosen for its flexibility because the participants were not limited by a set of prescribed questions, but rather, additional questions and responses emerged spontaneously based on these questions. In the role of interviewer, I aimed to keep the discussion moving and to avoid any questions or comments that might inhibit the conversation. Additionally, I was careful not to make the interviewees feel uncomfortable about their past writing experiences, present writing performances, or future imaginings as academic writers in English. I was not there to judge their feelings or experiences with academic writing in English; my intent was to gain further insight into their stories and subjectivities. I also tried not to interrupt the participants as I aimed to keep the interviews focused. Finally, if the participants had nothing further to say, I would respect their decision. I never tried to force them to speak or feel obligated to continue the interview for my own sake. With these considerations in mind, the interviews took 20 minutes on average for each participant.

For each interview, I had a prepared form with my semi-structured questions; an introductory statement explaining the purpose of the interview; and another statement guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants. This information is available in the interview transcripts, referenced below, as I read it out loud to the participants at the beginning of each interview. All interviews were recorded on my work computer with Audacity, a multi-track audio recorder. After each interview, I downloaded the recordings into separate files on my work computer and saved them under the participants' pseudonyms. Then, I transcribed each recording verbatim within five days of the scheduled interview. I chose to use verbatim transcripts to give a precise portrayal of the participants' writing experiences with as much detail as possible, which allowed me to use direct quotes when presenting the data in chapters 5-8. After transcribing the interviews, I emailed a copy to each participant for verification since member checking is important to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007; Starfield, 2010). However, while the participants emailed me back and confirmed that they had indeed received the transcripts, none of them had any comments, questions, or suggestions.

See **Appendix VI** for the interview transcript of Participant 1. See **Appendix VII** for the interview transcript of Participant 2. See **Appendix VIII** for the interview transcript of Participant 3.

**Table 4.5** details the date and timeframes for the participants' interviews.

**Table 4.5: Interview Schedule**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Interview Dates</b>	<b>Timeframes</b>
Participant 1: (Dana)	January 10, 2016	22 minutes
Participant 2: (Mumin)	January 12, 2016	19 minutes
Participant 3: (Prashant)	January 14, 2016	16 minutes

#### **4.7.3.4 Researcher Diary**

The fourth method I used to gather data was the researcher diary. I stored it as a series of Word documents in a separate file on my work computer. Since I use a laptop, I was able to type my diary entries at different times and locations depending on my preference. However, I mostly wrote in my diary while in my office at GAU since I consider this a private space to reflexively think about my research. Since large amounts of data were amassed during the collection process, the researcher diary helped me construct the conceptual framework; resolve fieldwork anxiety; deal with confusion during the writing-up process; and especially, remind me of past ideas and events that guided my decisions during the research process (Berger, 2013). In addition, a researcher diary helps maintain reflexivity, which Berger (2013) describes as:

The process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome. (p. 2)

This contributed to a better understanding of the participants' subjective experiences because I was constantly aware of how I may have assisted or hindered the process of co-constructed meaning when considering my interpretations of the data (Ponterotto, 2006). As such, I used my researcher diary throughout the research design stage, the data collection, the analysis, and the final writing-up stage. I also used it to note down emerging themes during the data collection; note down observations and reflections after conducting the interviews; and plan, write, and revise during the writing process of my study.

Most important, I used the researcher diary to reflect upon my own discriminations and biases as a teacher-researcher and how they potentially influenced my research (Sandelowski, 2006; Fox & Fine, 2012). This enabled me to better understand my role as teacher-researcher since I was able to start seeing my own relationship with the participants from a different angle and reinterpret those

experiences reflexively. See **Appendix IX** for sample excerpts from my researcher diary (Part I). Further issues regarding my relationship with the participants will be dealt with in more detail in Section 4.9 when addressing ethical considerations in my study.

#### **4.8 Thematic Analysis**

I used inductive thematic analysis as a way of identifying patterns and themes based on the journal responses and interview transcripts of the participants. This entailed much more than summarizing and organizing the data. Strong thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of the data, which is appropriate for an interpretivist study such as mine (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between semantic and latent themes by specifying that semantic themes address surface meanings of the data whereas latent themes search for an interpretation and explanation of the data.

For the sake of my study, I used a semantic approach in which themes were identified within the explicit, or surface, meanings of the data. I did not look for anything beyond what the participants had written in their journal responses or stated in their interviews. However, after patterns and themes were found at the semantic level, I later aimed to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications. Braune and Clarke (2006) distinguish between deductive thematic analysis that is driven by the research questions and inductive thematic analysis that is driven more by the data itself.

The primary purpose of inductive analysis is to allow research findings to emerge from significant themes inherent in raw data without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies, theories, or research questions. However, it is important to note, “Researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). For myself, this is evident in my prior knowledge and interest in writer identity and narrative identity construction. While I was aware of certain theories about these topics before analysing the data, I aimed



to keep an open mind during the analysis process and look for new patterns and themes not impacted by my prior readings of relevant literature.

Furthermore, while my analysis was indeed motivated by Research Question 1 (*How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*), additional research questions emerged only after I identified themes in the data. Based on this approach, I believe my overall study is guided by inductive analysis as I did not force the data to reflect pre-existing notions I had about academic discourse in English, writer identity, or narrative identity construction. This understanding of inductive analysis is consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) description: "The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12).

#### **4.8.1 Data Analysis**

Since my study is concerned with how students construct their narrative identities as writers, it was essential to first gain a sense of the multiple meanings inherent in the data. I did this by reading and re-reading across the journal responses and interview transcripts of the participants. Then, I took notes and wrote down my early impressions of the data in my researcher diary. While Gibbs (2007) points out that all researchers approach their data with certain pre-conceived notions in mind, I aimed to avoid this as much as possible by re-examining the initial notes in my researcher diary in an objective manner during the early stages of my analysis. See **Appendix X** for sample excerpts from my researcher diary (Part II). Next, I created a table displaying the participants' background information gathered from their open-ended questionnaires. See **Appendix XI** for a table of the participants' background information. Last, I analyzed the data through an interpretivist framework in which I coded and identified patterns and themes by using inductive thematic analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The items analyzed were produced by the participants during the fall 2015 semester in my WRI 101 intermediate-level academic writing course:

- Three journal responses about past writing experiences written by the participants during the beginning of the semester
- Three journal responses about present writing experiences written by the participants during the middle of the semester
- Three journal responses about imagined-future writing experiences written by the participants during the end of the semester
- Three open-ended questionnaire responses detailing the participants' background information

I also analyzed the data based on the following transcriptions:

- Three semi-structured interviews with the participants conducted at the end of the semester

#### **4.8.2 Initial Codes**

Initially, I began my study with one overarching Research Question (RQ). The first research question is as follows: *RQ1: How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?* After reviewing the journal responses, questionnaires, and interview responses, I created additional research questions that arose from the data. The additional research questions are as follows: *RQ2: How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities? RQ3: How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes toward writing? RQ4: How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?* Then, I divided the data into five main units that arose from the four research questions:

RQ1 – Writer Identity Constructions: **WIC**

RQ2 – Motivational Strategies: **MS**

RQ3a – Ideological Beliefs: **IB**

RQ3b – Writing Attitudes: **WA**

RQ4 – Sociocultural Influences: **SC**

The journal response data and interview response data that I collected from the participants depicted their motivational strategies as writers (RQ2) while the same set of data depicted how the participants' ideological beliefs about English (RQ3a) impacted their writing attitudes in the classroom (RQ3b). In addition, the journal response data and interview response data portrayed how sociocultural influences positioned the participants as writers and impacted their negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms (RQ4).

The questionnaire data provided essential background information about the participants that helped me further understand the journal response data and interview response data. After these four questions were answered, I intended to re-address my first research question (RQ1) when examining how the participants constructed their writer identities in narrative form since I would have a deeper understanding of the motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural influences that impacted their writing experiences.

Next, I began coding the data by breaking it down into separate units of meaning that related to each of the four research questions. I did this by manually typing codes within the participants' journal responses and interview transcripts, working systematically throughout the entire data set, and giving full attention to each data item. This also allowed me to capture a general sense of the overall data content and the possible themes that would eventually develop (Miles et al., 2014).

During this process, I used simple descriptions to capture the significance within the beginning and ending of each data excerpt (unit of meaning) of the participants' journal responses and interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2015). I wanted the data to 'speak for itself,' but most important, I wanted the codes to simply represent the data rather than appear abstract (Bryman, 2008). This helped me avoid coding based on pre-existing notions of what I 'hoped to find' about the participants' writer identities so that I could be open to new ideas and discoveries within the data (Miles, et al., 2014). See **Appendix XII** for an example of a coded journal response

related to research questions 1-4. See **Appendix XIII** for an example of a coded interview transcript related to research questions 1-4.

### **4.8.3 Themes**

I coded the data extracts a second time to ensure that I had not overlooked any relevant aspects. I wanted to code as much as possible at this point and tried not to ignore, or smooth out, any inconsistencies within and across the data items (Braune & Clarke, 2006). For each participant, I combined the codes that had a clear relationship to each other based on their motivational, ideological, attitudinal, or sociocultural themes. I did this by retyping the codes in a separate Word document so that I could have a 'visual representation' of the collated codes listed under specific themes (Miles, et al, 2014). The process of manually moving the data into individual categories within a Word document helped me better identify and conceptualize how the codes fit under relevant themes (Braune & Clarke, 2006). See **Appendix XIV** for a list of themes related to research questions 1-4.

However, after reviewing the codes for each participant, I became aware of inconsistencies within the themes. As an example, all three participants blamed their secondary school teachers for their writing difficulties, but never once criticized me, their current instructor, if they also had difficulties in my writing class. This made me consider my own role as teacher-researcher and how this may have impacted the participants' narrative choices when presenting particular writing experiences within their three journal responses. Specifically, I became concerned that the participants had constructed their writer identities based on my own presence as their teacher-researcher; thus, I realized that my research about narrative identity construction ignored the complexity of identity construction brought to light by my very own presence.

While the participants' writer identities were indeed influenced by their motivational strategies as writers (RQ2), ideological beliefs about English (RQ3a), attitudes about academic discourse (RQ3b), and sociocultural positionings by others (RQ4), I needed to consider their 'narrative motives' when presenting these experiences to

me in their three journal responses. This also made me consider the particular 'narrative forms' that the participants followed when constructing their narrative identities as writers within the past-present-future stages of their story arcs. This concern led me to create a fifth research question: (*RQ5: How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*) so that I could understand if the four themes, as discussed above, were indeed influenced by my presence when the participants constructed their narrative identities as writers within the past-present-future stages of their story arcs.

As a result, I divided the data into an additional four units, solely based on the participants' journal responses, so that I could answer Research Question 5: *RQ5: How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*

The four units are listed below:

RQ5a – Narrative Motives as Contradictions: **NMC**

RQ5b – Narrative Motives as Omissions: **NMO**

RQ5c – Narrative Motives as Purposeful Inclusions: **NMPI**

RQ5d – Narrative Forms as Identity Constructions: **NFIC**

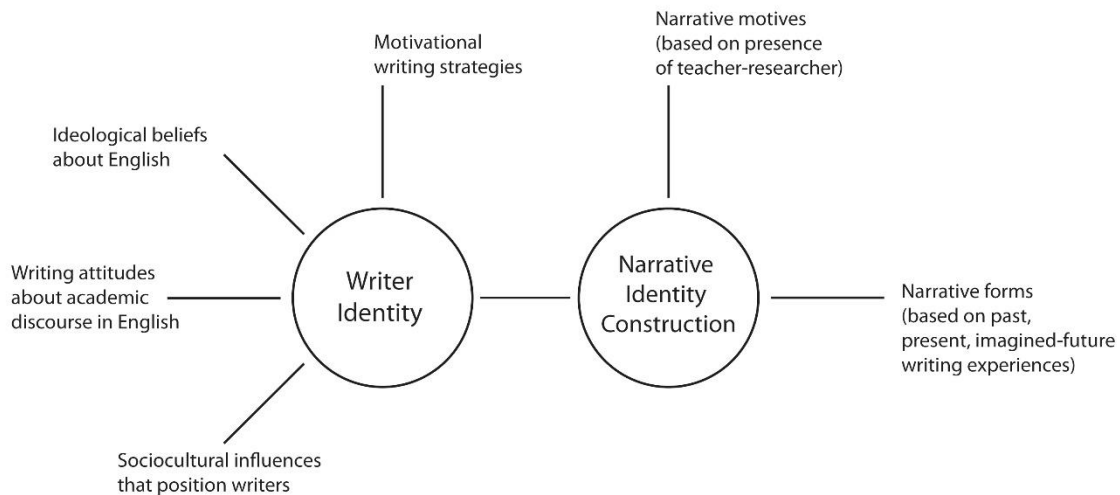
I coded the data extracts a third time, by following the same process as described before, looking for particular 'narrative motives' in the participants' journal responses, as well as the 'narrative forms' that the participants followed when constructing their writer identities according to 'master' and 'little' narrative forms within the past-present-future stages of their story arcs. See **Appendix XV** for an example of a coded journal response related to Research Question 5. Then, I manually moved the data into individual categories within a Word document to help me better identify and conceptualize how the codes fit under relevant themes.

Identifying these new themes offered me insight into the complexity of the participants' writer identities in narrative form, and also, it added an additional layer of understanding to the previous themes on motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural influences surrounding academic discourse in English that are prevalent in the UAE. The list of themes for 'narrative motives' addresses narrative contradictions (NMC), narrative omissions (NMO), and purposeful narrative inclusions (NMPI). The list of themes for 'narrative forms' addresses narrative identity constructions (NFIC). See **Appendix XVI** for a list of themes related to Research Question 5. Therefore, by aiming to answer all five research questions, as opposed to only Research Question 1, I gained a much more thorough understanding of how the participants constructed their narrative writer identities as first-year students at an American-style university.

#### **4.8.4 Thematic Map**

Finally, I created a thematic map to visually illustrate the themes in my study (Braune & Clark, 2006), which reflects the following: The participants' writer identities were shaped by their motivational strategies (MS), ideological beliefs about English (IB), writing attitudes about academic discourse (WA), and sociocultural influences (SC) in their lives. When constructing their identities in narrative form, the participants displayed 'narrative motives' based on contradictions (NMC), omissions (NMO), and purposeful inclusions (NMPI) that were influenced by my own presence as their teacher-researcher. As a result, these motives impacted the individual 'narratives forms' that the participants chose to follow when presenting their identity constructions (NFIC) as writers within the past-present-future stages of their story arcs.

**Diagram 4.1** provides a thematic map that illustrates how the participants constructed their writer identities and narrative identity constructions throughout the study.



**Diagram 4.1: Thematic Map of Research Themes**

#### **4.9 Ethical Implications**

Undertaking interpretive research is subjective and never neutral (Riessman, 2008) while case studies in particular have been criticized for their lack of generalizability (Yin, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1981) warn of overgeneralizing the findings of a case study when in fact “they are but a part, a slice of life” (1981, p. 337). It is therefore important to admit that the findings of the current study are not generalizable. The three participants have different backgrounds and perceptions of their writing experiences, which make it impossible to claim that my findings are applicable to other populations. Similar studies of multilingual writers in an American-style university in the UAE may produce different findings. Yet, I still believe this study has the potential to contribute to current knowledge about multilingual students in the UAE and their experiences writing in academic English. As Robson (2002) notes, case studies suggest perceptions that can help researchers with similar cases or situations. In relation to my study, researchers may compare and contrast my interpretations of the three cases with their own, possibly leading to future research about writer identity and narrative identity construction in the UAE or greater MENA region.

Rigor is an essential aspect of case study research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order for readers to believe in the integrity of a study, and use my interpretations to support their own, they must be able to trust the findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a solution to this dilemma by using the terms 'credibility' and 'trustworthiness' as "a qualitative researcher's answer to 'validity'" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 57). The significance of credibility and trustworthiness is therefore reflected by "how well a particular study does what it is designed to do" (Merriam, 1995, p. 52) so that other researchers can examine the subjective experiences of their participants in similar ways. Below, I discuss how I strived to maintain a rigorous study by examining my role as teacher-researcher; by addressing issues related to credibility and trustworthiness; and by reflecting on ethical concerns while conducting the research ethics of the study.

#### **4.9.1 Role of Teacher as Researcher**

In qualitative studies, a researcher takes on the role of 'instrument' during the data-collection process by mediating the meaning of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This has the potential to create biased views based on prior assumptions or expectations of the data. While Yin (2009) and Berger (2013) state that researcher bias is unavoidable, especially when the researcher is a participant in the classroom, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that such a close relationship between the researcher and participants helps to establish trust so that the researcher can gain a more adequate understanding of the data. With these concerns in mind, I acknowledge that my role as teacher-researcher has indeed influenced my own interpretations of the results since my personal background, beliefs, and experiences cannot help but impact the way I understand the participants' writing experiences.

Even more important, I am aware that this role has impacted how the participants perceived me as their teacher-researcher and responded to my presence while writing their journal responses and answering their interview questions. According to DeLyser (2001), familiarity with the participants may contribute to a loss of objectivity or accuracy in the data since a close relationship can create 'social



desireability bias' (Krumpal, 2013) in which participants feel they have to respond a certain way in order to support the researcher's beliefs and assumptions. First, by acknowledging the above factors, and aiming for transparency during the writing-up process, I tried to clearly present my interpretations as separate findings from those of the participants (Ponterotto, 2006). This was achieved by creating distinct sections for my interpretations that followed each participant's writer identity construction as depicted in their past-present-future story arcs in chapters 5-7. Next, I further addressed some of these concerns in Chapter 8 by examining the participants' narrative motives based on my own presence as their teacher-researcher during the data-collection process. With that said, I still acknowledge that the findings I present in chapters 5-8 are merely interpretations of the writing experiences that the participants shared with me.

Therefore, it is important to consider Horsburgh's (2003) stance that researchers who are intimately involved with their participants have a responsibility to discuss their background and its potential effect upon the findings. In the position of teacher-researcher, I report that I am an American woman who has been teaching academic writing in English for over ten years in universities based in Yemen, Egypt, and now, the UAE. I grew up in a monolingual English household in northern California, but as the daughter of a second-generation Italian, I was constantly asked why I did not speak the 'assumed' first language of my family. For me, I grew up with a sense of cultural loss because my father had chosen to move away from his family in New York and not speak Italian in our household. I believe I became a secondary school ESL teacher in the United States, and then a university writing instructor abroad, because I envied the multiple linguistic experiences of my students.

However, in all the educational settings where I have taught over the years, I have witnessed students being blamed for not writing like native-speakers in English. Whether intentionally or not, I must admit that I have also been responsible for positioning students based on their writing abilities since I am part of the institution that requires academic discourse in English. At the same time, I believe my

experience teaching academic writing in this region is useful to the study as it provided me a sense of familiarity with the participants' own experiences as multilingual writers in English. Specifically, I am not new to this region, the student population, or the teaching expectations and pedagogies that take place in academic writing programs that model American-style writing. Rather, I have over ten years' experience in such situations, which I believe has afforded me insight into the participants' writing experiences that an instructor new to this region would not necessarily possess.

Nevertheless, I still had ethical concerns about my relationship with the participants and my assumptions about their writer identities. Since I selected my participants based on their first journal response in which they described a 'negative' writing experience in secondary school, I began to worry that I had created a research environment in which I encouraged them to continue feeling positioned as academic writers in English. These concerns propelled me to reflexively analyze my reactions and interpretations of the data. While interpretivist research ostensibly contains both the researcher and participants' versions of reality (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Cohen, et al, 2011), I felt it was necessary that I did not enmesh our views together as one. I often had to ask myself, Whose reality did I ultimately want to portray through my research and writing—my own or that of my participants?

The above question forced me to constantly re-examine my writing and data analysis so that I could attempt to present an unbiased version of my participants' writing experiences and account for any preconceptions I carried into the findings. Therefore, I constantly reflected on our social interactions and questioned my own motivations regarding three major areas: Was I presenting my participants as positioned writers in their journal responses for the sake of my data results? Was I forcing them into the role of compliant interviewee so that I could guide their responses?' And finally, Was I engaging in 'ventriloquy' by controlling the voices of my participants when analyzing their experiences (Sandelowski, 2006)? While this reflexivity could not eradicate all my ethical concerns, it certainly contributed to a

more impartial, authentic, and honest account of the participants' writing experiences when presenting them in chapters 5-8.

#### **4.9.2 Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Despite concerns about the limitations of case study research, steps can be taken to ensure a rigorous account of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, I aimed for transparency in my research design, data-collection procedures, and analysis throughout the research process (Riessman, 2008). I admitted researcher bias while formulating my research paradigm and thinking through the process of epistemology and ontology (Holliday, 2010). Then, I used a multi-method approach to corroborate the data by using journal responses, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, which provided an expanded context for interpreting the participants' writing experiences. Narrative inquiry captured different time periods and perspectives of the participants based on a past-present-future story arc that depicted a holistic understanding of their writing experiences, which I believe contributed to the study's trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Thick description also allowed me to present the data with richness and detail so that anyone reading the findings would have enough essential information to determine the same interpretations as my own (Ponterotto, 2006). Next, I used extracts from the participants' journal responses and interview transcripts to support my interpretations of the data in chapters 5-8, and I included full copies of the data in the appendices, as well as a sample coded journal response and a sample coded interview transcript. Finally, I included discrepancies within the thematic analysis rather than making 'selective' preferences or outright exclusions of the data that did not fit perfectly within my research paradigm. While Wellington (2000) states that no one can be truly accurate when assessing 'validity' in the social sciences, I believe focusing on 'trustworthiness,' as described in the above procedures, can contribute to credible, worthy analysis in case study research (Cohen, et al., 2011).

### 4.9.3 Research Ethics

A major issue researchers face in qualitative research is ensuring credibility and trustworthiness when protecting the rights and values of the participants (Cohen et al., 2007). Bradburn, et al. (2004) note three major principles in which ethical concerns arise in a qualitative study: “the right of privacy, informed consent, and confidentiality” (p. 12). To ensure ethical standards, official consent was obtained from the University of Exeter, allowing me to proceed with the study. See **Appendix XVII** for Exeter’s consent form. I also obtained consent from GAU, the university where the study took place. Next, the participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and were under no obligations to participate in the study. I obtained the participants’ signatures on a consent form where they formally agreed to take part in the study, yet I also made it clear that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Specifically, I obtained permission from all three participants to use their written journal responses, questionnaires, and interview responses with the assurance of anonymity, and I guaranteed that the participants’ participation, or lack of participation, would not affect their final grade in my WRI 101 course. See **Appendix XVIII** for the participants’ consent form.

The participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality with the use of pseudonyms as the primary precaution. They were also informed about the purpose of the study and what their participation entailed in an information sheet that underlined several ethical principles of the study. See **Appendix XIX** for the participant information sheet. In this information sheet, I stated my name and all my contact information. I then clarified the focus and purpose of the study. The participants were also assured that the written journal responses, questionnaires, interview recordings, and interview transcripts were to be protected in a safe place for up to five years to prevent any possible violations of their privacy. Finally, the participants were made aware of any potential risks by participating in the study, which in this case, were minimal, such as the emotional challenges of writing about their language history. They were told that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed for the purposes of analysis and that their written journal responses and interview transcripts would be used as research documents or published at a

later date. The participants were also told that they had the right to review their interview transcripts (Silverman, 2013), which I emailed to them once they were transcribed, but no one contacted me to discuss them. By addressing these issues, I felt that I was as honest as possible with the participants about the research ethics that guided this study.

#### **4.10 Limitations**

The study was restricted to three participants from my fall 2015 WRI 101 course who were specifically chosen because their first journal responses reflected negative writing experiences with their secondary school teachers. However, since their subjective experiences related to my research interests on writer identity, I felt this type of purposeful convenience sampling was appropriate for my study. The interpretive construction of the participants' writing experiences, as based on their own understandings of their writer identities, could be a call for concern, but my study did not seek to generalize about a larger population; rather, it aimed to provide insight about students' subjective writing experiences. Furthermore, I had originally intended to review the transcripts with the participants so they could re-check their interview responses and ensure that the discussions of their subjective writing experiences were as authentic as possible. Since the participants did not request to review the transcripts with me, I was unable to follow through with this procedure.

In addition, as both teacher and researcher, social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013) and unequal power relations were a possible concern, but I felt it was necessary to use participants from my own classroom. Our close involvement allowed room for more reflection on the participants' part and understanding on my part, which supports an exploratory, interpretive framework such as mine (Cohen, et al., 2011). At the same time, I tried to address my own subjective interpretations of the participants' experiences by aiming for transparency so that others reading my analysis would understand my reasoning, and hopefully, determine similar conclusions (Ponterotto, 2006).

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

In summary, I provided transparent descriptions of my research paradigm by discussing the influences of ontology and epistemology, as well as the need for reflexivity throughout the many stages of data analysis. Additionally, I justified my choice of research design, methodology, and data-collection tools by relating them to the appropriateness of an interpretivist study. This was accomplished with thorough descriptions of narrative inquiry and thick description, as well as my multi-method approach to the research: using journal responses, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a researcher diary. I provided detailed and transparent descriptions of my inductive thematic analysis when describing the coding process I used for developing the themes of the study. Finally, I addressed ethical implications, including my role as teacher-researcher; trustworthiness and credibility; research ethics when working with the participants; and limitations of the study.

## THREE CASE STUDIES

### 5.0 Introduction to Chapters 5-7

In the following chapters I examine the narrative construction of three writer identities based on past, present, and imagined-future experiences with academic discourse in English. Narratives are critical for understanding identity construction because who we are is very much defined through the stories we tell about ourselves (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1987). It is important to emphasize that I consider narratives subjective constructions, not reflections of reality (Bruner, 1987). They are constructs of an inherent 'life story,' which provide meaning and significance to certain events in our lives (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). From this perspective, life stories create an understanding of the self through continuous reflection of the past that helps explain the present and projects into the future.

Narrative construction therefore relies on the way we interpret our social interactions with others so that we may develop an understanding of our own lives and identities. Regardless of their accuracy, narratives provide important insight into what is remembered and what matters to individuals by representing a personal 'truth' that influences their perceptions and behaviors (Bruner, 1987). Likewise, narratives about writing provide subjective interpretations about the interactions and events related to the experience of writing, which allow for a better understanding of what students consider significant regarding English as an academic discourse, classroom practices, and ultimately, themselves as writers (Ivanič, 1998; Fernsten, 2008; Park, 2013; Canagarajah, 2014).

My focus then within these chapters is not on the 'quality' of the participants' written responses, nor on the 'correctness' of their academic performance, but rather on how the participants feel about writing and experience their identities as academic writers. This interest in the experiential context of writing forms the foundation of my study and is reflected in the following research questions:

- 1) *How do first-year writing students in an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*
- 2) *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*
- 3) *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes about writing?*
- 4) *How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*

Chapters 5-7 are structured to present each participant's writer identity based on three journal responses collected during September 2015 to January 2016 from my fall 2015 WRI 101 course at GAU. The journal responses, which reflect the participants' past, present, and imagined-future experiences as writers, are combined with the participants' questionnaire data and interview responses in order to gain an additional layer of understanding to how they constructed, interpreted, and re-constructed their identities during a first-year writing course at an American-style university in the UAE.

The first journal explores the participants' past experiences and feelings writing in English as an academic discourse in secondary school. The second journal explores the participants' present experiences and feelings writing in English as an academic discourse in WRI 101, an intermediate-level writing course at GAU. The third journal examines the participants' imagined-future experiences and feelings writing in English as an academic discourse in WRI 102, an advanced-level writing course at GAU.

In Section I of each chapter, I present the participants' writer identity constructions in a past-present-future story arc. Thus, each participant's narrative is categorized into three major stages that are further subdivided into chronological scenes, which aim to reveal the various ways the participants perceive themselves as writers. This is followed by my interpretations of the participants' narrative identity



constructions in the remaining sections of each chapter by exploring motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural influences that impacted the participants' writer identities. In order to do this, I contextualized and thematized my narrative analysis with the following frameworks:

In Section II, I use Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System to examine how students are socially motivated in a learning environment by envisioning their ought-to selves, based on the external expectations of others, and their ideal selves, based on their own internal expectations. For the intent of my study, I refer to an ought-self as the participants' 'expected identity,' and I refer to an ideal self as the participants' 'imagined identity.' This helped me understand how the participants' external and internal motivations, based on their expected identities and imagined identities, impacted how they envisioned their future goals as writers. I also use Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory to examine how the participants devised learning strategies based on their 'fear of failure' as academic writers in English. Covington's (1984, 1997) theory highlights how perceptions of the self can impact learners' abilities to succeed or fail in the classroom based on their sense of self-worth as students. This helped me understand how the participants' learner identities, motivated by 'fear of failure,' impacted their expected and imagined identities as academic writers in English.

In Section III, I use Norton's theory of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) to examine how ideological beliefs about English impact students' investments in academic discourse in English. Norton's (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) theory highlights how social identity is multiple and shifting based on power relations. This helped me understand how agentive issues surrounding English impacted the participants' investments and attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing approaches.

In Section IV, I use Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice to examine how sociocultural influences position students and impact their negotiations within the discourse community of

their writing classrooms. Davies and Harré's (1990) theory highlights how identities are constructed based on discursive practices that position oneself and others in a social context. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory highlights how learning in a social context is a process of experiencing and constructing one's identity in a 'community of practice.' Both theories helped me understand how positioning by teachers, family, and the participants themselves, impacted the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

I felt it was necessary to interpret the participants' identity constructions from different perspectives so that I could discover unanticipated insights and generate richer analysis from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which was made possible from the various frameworks that I used. At the same time, I must acknowledge that my own subjective experiences, observations, and beliefs about academic discourse in English may have influenced my interpretations of the data, just as the participants' experiences and self-perceptions influenced their own narrative identity constructions. Therefore, I have tried, as clearly as possible, to provide an appropriate balance between the participants' narratives and my data analysis—or rather, between the participants' voices and that of my own—so that anyone reading about the participants' writer identities can determine similar interpretive conclusions.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**DANA'S WRITER IDENTITY:**  
**The Successful Writer**

**5.1 Introduction**

In Section I of this chapter, the construction of Dana's writer identity is presented in a past-present-future story arc that follows three major stages in Dana's life in which she constructs, interprets, and re-constructs her identity as a 'successful' writer. Stage One describes Dana's struggle as she encounters obstacles that prevent her success as an academic writer; Stage Two describes Dana's search for successful writing strategies; and Stage Three describes Dana's success as an academic writer at university.

The narrative construction of Dana's writer identity is further categorized into five chronological scenes, as follows: (1) her desire for academic achievement in secondary school; (2) her negative writing experience based on a teacher's assessment of her writing; (3) her perception that she is neither confident nor capable as a writer in secondary school; (4) her fears, motivations, and writing approaches as a first-year writing student at university: not knowing the 'ways of knowing,' looking beyond the 'A'; working out the rules of academic writing one step at a time; and finally (5), Dana's newly formed sense of self as a 'successful' writer, in which she presents herself as a proud and prepared academic writer at university.

In Section II of this chapter, I examine the motivations behind Dana's learner, expected, and imagined identities and how they impact her overall identity as a successful writer. This consists of Dana's learner identity as an over-striver; her expected identity as a determined writer; and her imagined identity as a successful debater at university.

In Section III of this chapter, I examine how ideological beliefs about English influence Dana's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs, which impact her overall identity as a successful writer. This is based on the prestige Dana associates with her secondary Discourse in English; her belief that an argument essay is a much more significant genre structure than the narrative essay; and her 'surface' approach to 'deep' writing.

Last, in Section IV of this chapter, I explore how sociocultural influences impact Dana's negotiations within the discourse community of her writing classrooms, and subsequently, her overall identity as a successful writer. This consists of positionings by Dana's teachers, in which they act as gatekeepers following a 'hidden curriculum'; positionings by Dana's family, in which they uphold her to a familial obligation of perfection; and positionings by Dana, herself, in which she embraces the discourse community of her writing classrooms but not always her own legitimacy as a member.

**Appendix I** provides Dana's three journal responses; **Appendix XI** provides Dana's questionnaire data; and **Appendix VI** provides Dana's interview transcript, all of which I refer to in this chapter.

The stages and scenes of Dana's writer identity construction are presented below and will address my first research question: *How do first-year writing students in an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*

## **5.2 Section I: Dana's Narrative Identity Construction**

### ***Three Major Stages of Dana's Writer Identity***

#### **5.2.1 Background Summary**

##### **Dana's Linguistic and Educational Background**

Dana is a 17-year-old Jordanian female who moved to the UAE when she was three years old. Her native language is Arabic and it is the language she speaks at home with her family (Questionnaire). Since the age of four, she has attended private, American-style schools in Dubai with native English-speaking teachers so

that she would have the appropriate schooling to gain entry into GAU (Interview). Based on this experience, she considers English her most fluent spoken and written language (Questionnaire). This is Dana's first semester attending GAU from which her two older sisters already graduated. As the youngest in her family, she feels pressure to achieve good grades just like her sisters, describing the oldest as "brilliant in the sciences" and her middle sister as "brilliant in both: the sciences and writing" (Interview). Dana's identity as an academic writer is therefore shaped by her access and affiliation to the English language, as well as the importance her family places on achievement, specifically in American-style schools well-regarded for their academic prestige and medium of instruction in English.

While Dana's linguistic and educational background provide a brief understanding of her academic writer identity, the three major stages of Dana's narrative identity construction, which are further divided into five chronological scenes, offer a much more detailed account of how Dana perceives her identity as a 'successful' writer.

### **5.2.2 Stage One: Dana's Struggle (with Academic Writing Obstacles)**

*Scene 1:*

*Sense of Self as a Student in Secondary School: "I Always Strived to Achieve"*

Dana has always had strong convictions about academic success and achievement. As she explains, "I have always worked really hard in school and I have always strived to achieve high scores in my classes" (Journal 1). From an early age she can remember having a "passion for numbers, equations, proving and analysis," but she never once saw herself as a writer (Journal 2). She preferred math and science because they were subjects that came easily to her, and also, she enjoyed the high marks she was able to attain in those classes (Interview). In addition, Dana always derived great pleasure from academic pursuits that resulted in public recognition of her knowledge and achievement. In secondary school, she was known for voicing her beliefs and standing up for what she considered "right," and this is what led her to become head of her debate club (Journal 2). While Dana always enjoyed "having arguments with people," she clarifies that they were "not the regular pointless arguments people usually have. I

love having a proper debate about a serious topic that includes references, proof, statistics and facts” (Journal 2). Her interest in debating allowed her to participate in Model United Nations at GAU when she was a junior and senior in secondary school (Interview).

*Scene II:*

*Negative Writing Experience: “Your Writing Is Underdeveloped.”*

However, Dana’s desire to be perceived as confident and successful was challenged during her tenth-grade English class when she was asked to write about a moment that caused her to mature and change. This assignment, unlike others she had written throughout school, encouraged her to reveal a part of herself that she normally did not share with others. While she did have a significant story to share—her parents’ divorce—it took her an entire day to decide whether she should share this information with her teacher or not. “I was a bit afraid of what my teacher might think,” Dana recalls. “I didn’t want anything to change the way she perceived me. I didn’t want to appear vulnerable and weak and I didn’t want to be known as the girl from the broken home” (Journal 1).

But, as soon as she started writing about this moment, Dana could not stop. “Words and memories flew out of me uncontrollably,” she remembers. “Before I knew it, I had come up with a piece I was proud to call my own” (Journal 1). She waited eagerly for her teacher’s feedback and assumed with anticipation that it would be positive. “I poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great. This was my first time taking such a school assignment with a lot of heart” (Journal 1). To Dana’s surprise, however, her teacher had written: ““Your writing is underdeveloped. Thoughts incoherent. Needs revision”” (Journal 1).

Dana’s initial reaction to her teacher’s comments was a mixture of disbelief and disappointment. She felt that her teacher had “managed to tear down the first piece that I truly composed with honesty” (Journal 1). Even worse, she felt hurt. Her teacher’s comments made Dana feel that none of her writing would ever be good enough:

I felt like since the moment I got my first 'B' my teacher just had this idea that a 'B' is always going to be my level in writing. She told me that I shouldn't take her comments to heart, and that I should just do better next time. (Journal 1)

However, while Dana admits that some people would consider a 'B' a "really good grade," she was never proud of being perceived at that level (Journal 1).

*Scene III:*

*Sense of Self as a Writer in Secondary School: Neither Confident nor Capable*

After reflecting on her experience in secondary school, Dana felt that she would never be able to compose a "proper, well-written piece of writing" (Journal 2). "I believed that, because of that incident, that I wasn't a confident writer," she explains (Interview). She describes her English teachers in secondary school as dispassionate and unsupportive: "They would never sit down and ask their students if they had questions about their essays," she remembers. "They would just come in, lecture for 50 minutes and then leave" (Journal 3). She also felt that they treated teaching like a task and blamed their lack of motivation on her own disinterest in writing, even though, she points out, she tried her best to understand and follow her teachers' expectations during class time (Journal 3). "When I was in English class with my teachers I tried to focus on which vocabulary to use, which skills to use." She further explains, "I used to go up to other students and ask them what they thought about an essay. Just to see, to understand what skills the teacher wanted" (Interview).

In Dana's mind, her secondary school teachers did not provide the explicit tools for her to acquire academic writing; rather, it appears they assumed she already possessed such knowledge when, in fact, Dana felt these conventions were never fully examined or explained to her. Instead, she tried to figure out on her own exactly what her teachers wanted, which she could only surmise as follows: "Pouring my heart out on the pages of a notebook without any consideration for the details does not make it a solid piece of writing" (Journal 1). She admits, though, that she rarely asked her writing teachers for additional help or asked them to

explain their expectations because she did not find them approachable (Interview). She determines from this experience, “The reason for me not liking English class wasn’t my fault” (Journal 3).

### **5.2.3 Stage Two: Dana’s Search (for Successful Writing Strategies)**

*Scene IV:*

*Fears, Motivations, and Approaches as a First-Year Writing Student at University*

*Fear: Not Knowing the ‘Ways of Knowing’*

When Dana first realized she had to take three academic writing courses as part of her core curriculum at GAU, she felt anxious. “I was honestly afraid,” she states. “I didn’t want what happened in [secondary] school to happen all over again. I didn’t want my grades to drop again just because of writing” (Journal 2). She echoes her previous belief that she loves math and science so much because they are “easy” subjects that she understands how to do, but with academic writing, she never had a clear idea of what her teachers expected from her (Interview). This gatekeeping mechanism, in which Dana’s teachers presented themselves as authoritative holders of knowledge, prevented Dana from being ‘in the know’ during secondary school. And, at university, this same fear of the unknown, of feeling ill-prepared to understand the various writing requirements expected of a WRI 101 student, leaves Dana with a general, overwhelming fear that she will not be able to achieve the standards expected of a university writing student (Journal 2). “The thought of writing in college always worried me,” she admits. “Am I prepared enough to move on? Can I manage it all by myself? Can I handle new writings coming my way?” (Interview).

This transition into university is especially terrifying to Dana because she never once felt she understood her teachers’ academic writing requirements in secondary school. Now, however, she is expected to shift into newer, unfamiliar genre structures of academic writing before she was ever able to master the styles and requirements of her secondary school writing teachers. Back then, she was only expected to write narrative essays, and while this genre did not require her to cite and research as she would be expected to do in WRI 101, she still remembers how



difficult it was trying to figure out the requirements her teachers wanted (Interview). In WRI 101, however, she imagines finding her own sources, using APA style, and writing argument essays as challenging, daunting tasks because she “never, never had to do something like that before” (Interview). She even compares herself to former classmates who were a year older and already freshmen at GAU: “Their level of writing was very beautiful. How will I be on the same level as them? How is this going to happen?” (Interview). However, she also stresses that she “should be capable to write at their level” since she has attended some of the best American schools in Dubai with the expectation on her parents’ part that she would be prepared for university (Interview).

*Motivation: Looking Beyond the ‘A’*

When Dana was in secondary school, she would often rely on her middle sister for help, the one she always considered “brilliant in the sciences and writing” (Interview). Dana was very persistent, she remembers, and even when her sister told her that she was too busy, Dana would keep asking for help until her sister would give her additional ideas or make “simple” corrections. “I would always say, ‘Will you read this for me? The due date is tomorrow! Can you read it?’” (Interview). However, relying on her sister for help also made Dana feel that she would never be “good enough” for a university writing course:

My sister is a beautiful writer. Everyone in my family loves what she writes, you know? And, with my mom’s job, my father’s job, whatever, they have emails, they have anything in English, and it passes through her. The fact is, her writings are what make me feel like my writings will never be good enough here. (Interview)

This time, though, Dana is determined not to let her self-doubts overshadow her current chances of success at GAU. “Although writing might not be my favorite thing in the world,” she says, “I have to admit that it’s really helpful” (Journal 2). She begins to see a connection between “having a proper debate about a serious topic that includes references, proof, statistics and facts” and some of the skills deemed necessary to write academically (Journal 2). This moment occurs when

Dana realizes that there is an additional need for her writing skills beyond trying to achieve 'A's on her essay assignments:

Although I was never into writing, I realized that it is essential for something I love. In order for me to excel at debating in university, I have to have proper writing and research skills. Therefore, I realized that my writing 101 class is what will help me improve. (Journal 2)

Instead of relying on her sister for support and inspiration, Dana has found a new source of motivation that stems from her own personal interests. And, with this goal in mind, she hopes to participate again in Model United Nations just like she once did in secondary school (Journal 2).

*Writing Approach: Working out the Rules One Step at a Time*

Dana is thankful that she is provided specific examples, guidelines, and materials in her WRI 101 class so that she can prepare herself to write in this new academic genre (Journal 2). Her former uncertainty about the rules, conventions, and various genres that comprise academic writing have influenced Dana to follow a very orderly approach when writing her first argument essay: She writes down all the notes, bullet points, and suggestions that her professor provides in class; she also follows the exact format of the sample argument research essays, especially when citing sources and creating a References page (Journal 2).

After that, she devotes an entire week to writing the first draft of her essay before revising it during class with her peers, something she had never done before in secondary school (Journal 2). Usually she just wrote her essays in one sitting and had her sister check them at home before the submission date (Interview). She repeats again that she is grateful for this guidance since she never felt she was shown what to do by her writing teachers in secondary school (Journal 3). Dana's desire to follow a rules-based strategy based on an adherence to standards and conventions helps her feel a sense of guidance as she writes. It also provides her with the assurance that she is prepared and capable to follow the requirements of future writing assignments. As she explains, "Once you know how to search and

format your ideas correctly, everything later on would be considered easy” (Journal 2).

#### **5.2.4 Stage Three: Dana’s Success (as an Academic Writer)**

*Scene V:*

*Sense of Self as a Writer in University: Proud and Prepared but not Perfect*

When Dana “thankfully got an ‘A’” on the final draft of her argument research essay, she recalls jumping up and down around her house because she felt so happy and proud (Journal 2). She states, “I’m really confident now,” not only because she earned an ‘A’ on her writing assignment but because of what the ‘A’ signifies to her: “[My WRI 101 professor] really liked my essay!” (Interview). In this regard, appraisal, especially from her teachers, has a significant emotional impact on the way Dana perceives herself as a writer. Yet, at the same time, Dana has discovered that there is a process to earning this appraisal, which makes earning an ‘A’ much more obtainable. She thinks back to the beginning of the assignment when students had to provide feedback on each other’s drafts: “One of my classmate’s thesis statement wasn’t very good, in my own point of view. I really profited from it as I dissected it and figured out why it wasn’t very good” (Interview).

She realizes that her writing does not have to be perfect from the moment she begins an assignment and attempts to compose her first draft; instead, she has learned that her writing can improve and eventually become better through several stages of drafting and revising. “I didn’t feel bad for sharing my thesis statement with the class after that, even though it wasn’t the best I could’ve written” she says. “I knew I had time to improve it later” (Interview). She determines from this experience, “I’m actually really proud of the improvements I made in this course and I’m gladly going to admit, that for the first time in four years I actually think that I got what it takes to compose good essays” (Journal 3). At this point, she feels prepared to enter her WRI 102 course the following semester, knowing that she has had the “proper background and practice” as a writing student (Journal 3).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In summary, Dana has constructed her identity as a successful writer by establishing herself as a high-achieving student in Scene I of her narrative. In Scene II, her struggle begins when she is not rewarded with the 'A' that she anticipated for her essay assignment. This is followed by moments of confusion and frustration in Scene III and the first part of Scene IV, in which Dana must confront her fears of failure as a writer. By the end of Scene IV, however, Dana discovers new motivations and writing approaches that help her rediscover success and redeem herself as an academic writer. Finally, in Scene V, Dana has regained her sense of confidence and presents herself as a successful writer ready to enter a higher level writing course the following semester.

These scenes, which support the three major stages of Dana's story arc (struggle, search, and success), also combine to represent a specific type of narrative format that Alexander (2011) refers to as the hero-narrative form. In order to adhere to this particular narrative form, certain contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions were present in Dana's construction of her writer identity, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.

Below, I will examine the motivational strategies that impact Dana's learner, expected, and imagined identities as a writer, as based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, which will address my second research question: *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*

### **5.4 Section II: Dana's Motivational Strategies**

#### ***How Dana's Learner, Expected, and Imagined Identities Impact Her as a Writer***

##### **5.4.1 Learner Identity: The Over-Striver**

According to Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, learners who seek to avoid failure by succeeding at all costs are considered 'over-strivers,' which is often reflective in Dana's behavior as a student. Specifically, her internalized self-worth

as a learner is largely based on her ability to achieve, as evidenced by her overwhelming desire to obtain 'A's, which is also fueled by the expectations imposed on her by a high-achieving family and the rigorous environment of attending private, English-medium schools throughout her education (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). While this learning environment appears to have influenced Dana to measure her worth solely by her grades, it also seems to have contributed to her feelings of fear, anxiety, and doubt, which are often the typical driving forces behind Covington's (1984, 1997) description of 'over-striving' learners and their need to achieve. Such a sense of anxiety can, indeed, have devastating results on learners, but in Dana's case, such a fear of failure seems to facilitate and eventually improve her performance in the classroom, since it motivates Dana to 'leave no stone unturned' in her pursuit of academic success as a writer (Covington, 1984, 1997; De Castella, et al., 2013).

This is evident in the following experiences she reveals in her journal responses: Instead of accepting her teacher's assessment that she is a 'B' writer in secondary school, Dana fights against this grade. She tries, to the best of her ability, to follow her teachers' expectations and even asks other students their opinion about the necessary skills needed to write an appropriate academic essay (Interview). Mainly, however, she seeks assistance from her older sister who would always review her essay assignments before they were due (Journal 2). While this never resulted in Dana receiving a higher grade for her writing, and in fact, caused her to doubt her abilities to influence 'achievement outcomes,' such as grades (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, Martin, Malmberg, Hall, & Ginns, 2015), she never once passively accepts her label as a 'B' writer; instead, she actively works to reposition her standing in the classroom by seeking outside help.

When Dana enters university as a freshman and new WRI 101 student, it is her fear of failure—specifically, to be labeled as a 'B' writer—that pushes her to seek assistance again when she is expected to write in new academic genres. When the necessary rules and conventions of academic writing become clear to Dana, at least in relation to her argument essay, she is overwhelmingly "thankful" (Journal 2)

because it allows her to regain the sole function of her learner identity: to avoid failure and achieve an 'A.' In addition, Dana's 'A' appears to help her reach a sense of Perceived Academic Control (PAC) within her learning environment in which she finally feels that her efforts and capabilities as a writer are able to positively influence her achievement outcomes in class (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015). Thus, the context of Dana's learning environment, and her subsequent identity as an over-striving learner, help form the foundation for Dana's expected and imagined identities, respectively, as she attempts to strive as a writer in order to achieve academic success (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

#### **5.4.2 Expected Identity: The Determined Writer**

Since Dana's expected identity as a student is shaped by external influences that stem from her high-achieving family and the value they place on education, her approach toward writing is subsequently impacted the following way: She tries to prevent further negative grades, such as 'B's on her writing assignments, by using an *avoidance* approach as she seeks to fulfill her expected identity as a determined writer (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Since this approach is based on the obligations of external factors, such as Dana's high-achieving family, Higgins (1987) describes this type of identity as an 'ought-to' self.

Since over-strivers are also heavily influenced by sociocultural obligations as they strive to achieve in the classroom, it is not surprising that Dana's expected identity is also tied to her ought-to self's need for academic achievement as characterized by high grades (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Even though Dana states several times that she does not like writing, and in fact, could never imagine herself as a writer (Journals 2-3), her desire to earn 'A's outweighs her dislike of the subject. Dana craves social recognition, as evidenced by her quest for high grades and the enjoyment she receives from displaying her views publically as a debater at school (Journal 1). This, coupled with her competitive nature to be assessed at the same 'level' as those she considers successful writers, such as her sister and peers

(Interview), suggests that Dana values the sociocultural prestige of an 'A' over the actual acquired learning process entailed to write academically.

Yet, since Dana's expected identity is oriented toward achievement and success, she continues to seek out as many strategies as possible until her desired outcome is achieved, which explains why she continues to pursue different types of assistance until she achieves her sought-after 'A': First, by trying to follow the expectations of her secondary school writing teachers; second, by having her sister review her essay assignments before submission; and finally, by utilizing the resources made available in her WRI 101 course at university. However, it is important to note, Dana does not achieve her desired outcome of an 'A' by only avoiding the type of writing that receives 'B's'; her desired outcome as a writer is eventually achieved when her expected identity is united with her imagined identity at university (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

#### **5.4.3 Imagined Identity: The Debater**

Dana's imagined identity as a successful debater is shaped by her intrinsic motivation to succeed and the extrinsic motivations stemming from her family to achieve academic success (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). In this way, Dana renegotiates the role of academic writing in her life by linking her expected identity as a determined writer with her imagined identity as a successful debater who wants to use her writing and researching skills to improve her debating at university. By doing so, Dana is able to positively motivate herself by focusing on her personal strengths as a debater rather than only on her weaknesses as an academic writer. To explicate, Dana tried for years to obtain an 'A' on her essays in secondary school, but infers that she was unable to do so because her teachers did not provide the necessary materials to help her fulfill their expectations; however, it appears that some sort of expectations were made available because Dana mentions that she tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to follow her teachers' expectations by trying to learn "which vocabulary to use, which skills to use" when writing her essays (Interview). In addition, when Dana relied on the revisions of her older sister during secondary school to help her obtain an 'A,' this also never resulted in

a desired grade. Yet, Dana is able to reach her desired outcome once at university when she focuses on her imagined identity by envisioning her success, rather than her failure, as a writer.

Markus and Nurius (1986) describe this type of identity as an 'ideal' self and it is based on vivid self-images for the future with a specific desired outcome that is considered the driving force behind students' internal motivations (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). In addition, this type of *approach* goal (Higgins, 1987), in which Dana has defined a need for academic writing based on her own personal interests, motivates her to achieve her desired outcome of an 'A' because she has coupled her very tangible expected obligations with her momentarily intangible future imaginings (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Her desire to *not* receive 'B's is positively impacted by her desire to *become* a successful debater because she can rely on the practice and acquisition of a set of standard writing skills, which are explicitly provided by her university instructor, to help her succeed at writing and debating at university.

This occurs when Dana applies strategic approaches in the classroom that help lead her toward her sought-after 'A': She takes notes on all available classroom materials; follows the language and style of student sample essays; and most important, she discovers that her writing can, indeed, improve through several stages of drafting. The drafting stage, in particular, provides Dana with the newfound realization that her writing does not have to be perfect after her first attempt, which is a far cry from how "easy" she finds math and science (Journal 1), both subjects that assess students based on their accuracy and correct responses rather than a continuous process of revision.

Immediate gratification in the form of an 'A' is most likely expected by Dana as evidenced by her assumption that she would receive a high grade on her narrative essay in secondary school just because she worked hard: "I poured my heart into that paper, thinking it would be great" (Journal 1). Yet, it appears that this revision process, coupled with her imagined identity as a successful debater, helps Dana



earn her first 'A' on an academic writing assignment. The significance of earning this sought-after grade, after years of failing to do so, indicates how much Dana values the recognition and acclaim that an 'A' represents. Not only is Dana "thankful" for her 'A' but she also stresses how "confident" she finally feels as a writer upon discovering that her instructor liked her essay (Journal 3). She equates a task-based endeavor with who she is as a person by relying so heavily on the praise and approval of her instructor (Oades-Sese, Matthews, & Lewis, 2014). However, such a reliance on her instructor's appraisal seems to benefit Dana in this case. While she finds the personal motivation to succeed as an academic writer based on her imagined identity as a successful debater, it is the eventual attainment of this very concrete 'A' that gives Dana the assurance that she is, indeed, improved, capable, and prepared to succeed the following semester in WRI 102.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In summary, Dana's learner identity as an over-striving student is based on internalized feelings about her self-worth that are influenced by her family's high expectations and the academic setting at her school in which she strives to achieve 'A's. Moreover, Dana's expected identity as a determined writer is also motivated by sociocultural expectations in her life, such as familial expectations that encourage high achievement. Dana's imagined identity at university as a successful debater motivates her to achieve an 'A' in writing by merging her ought-to self, who once *avoided* 'B's, with her possible self, who now *approaches* 'A's. The motivations surrounding Dana's learner, expected, and imagined identities, as based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, also pave the way for Dana's ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English as she strives for legitimacy and membership as an academic writer in the discourse community of her writing classroom at university.

Below, I will examine how ideological beliefs about English impact Dana's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and beliefs about writing, as based

on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), which will address my third research question: *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes about writing?*

## **5.6 Section III: Dana's Ideological and Attitudinal Beliefs**

### ***How Dana's Attitudes About Academic Discourse, Genre Structures, and Writing Impact Her as a Writer***

#### **5.6.1 Academic Discourse: Symbol of Prestige**

While Dana states that her family speaks Arabic at home, English is used professionally by Dana's parents in the workplace, and academically by all three of their children throughout their primary, secondary, and higher educations. It is therefore a highly valued language, especially in the UAE, because it represents high social standing to those who use it (Vora, 2013). Thus, the ideologies surrounding English provide Dana and her family social recognition and prestige based on their linguistic abilities (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Fairclough, 2014). In order to achieve this, Dana's parents rely on the expertise of their middle daughter to read and review their English before sending out work emails (Interview); and for Dana, she strives in her English-medium schools as an 'A' student and skilled debater, confident in her abilities to argue about serious issues in English (Journal 1).

As her secondary Discourse, one in which she has been using since the age of four, Dana also considers English her most fluent spoken and written language (Questionnaire). This, perhaps, is why Dana assumes that she "should" be competent and capable to write academically (Interview): As an over-striving learner, she most likely believes that she is deserving of 'A's since she is writing in the very discourse she associates with her many academic successes. Dana's expectation also appears to be supported by her parents, whom Dana is quite aware enrolled her in private English-medium schools so that she would be linguistically prepared as a student at GAU (Interview).

As previously stated, this common practice indicates the prestige of English and significance of acquiring an American-style education in the region (Romani, 2009; Noori, 2016). However, while English is highly valued by Dana's family, with Dana even considering herself more fluent in the language than Arabic (Questionnaire), it does not, to her dismay, guarantee an 'A' in academic writing. In essence, Dana's fluency in her secondary Discourse in English does not equate with a 'mastery' of academic writing in English, which reflects the oft-assumed belief that academic writing is a single set of generic skills, similar to the rules of Standard Written English, rather than a varied set of disciplines and genre structures (Hyland, 2006, 2013).

These genre structures, which Dana states were never explained to her in secondary school, reflect how academic discourse is often taught as a 'hidden curriculum,' in which writing students are expected to already know or easily acquire the guidelines or explicit tools to understand their teachers' expectations (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013). As explained by Dana, her teachers just lectured about academic writing, never answered questions, and were very unapproachable (Journal 3). When Dana provides an example of her secondary school teacher's comments, it lacks specificity, as follows: "Your writing is underdeveloped. Thoughts incoherent. Needs revision" (Journal 1). This suggests that Dana's teacher did, indeed, have assumptions about academic writing, either based on how she interpreted it as a disciplinary practice with genre-specific assignments or based on a specific pedagogical model designed for her own classroom assignment.

While there is a vague reference in the teacher's feedback to a sense of orderly structure missing from Dana's essay highlighted by the words 'underdeveloped' and 'incoherent,' the normative standard being referenced is never clearly defined to Dana. These pedagogical practices are not uncommon, as studies (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013) on academic writing shed light on the vague, sometimes conflicting requirements, between teacher expectations and student interpretations of what is considered acceptable in academic writing. For

Dana, however, the elusiveness of such normative standards, and the presumed ability of others to unpack its mysterious rules and practices, appears to have elevated the privileged discourse to an even higher level of prestige in her mind (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000): Mastering academic writing at university, Dana believes, will provide her the agency and authority she craves by maintaining a high GPA, improving her debating skills, and eventually, competing for Model United Nations (Journal 2). In essence, Dana desires the prestige and privileges that using a dominant discourse implicitly guarantees, perhaps even more so than in secondary school, because her own intrinsic interests and sense of agency, in relation to her imagined identity, can be achieved by investing in such discursive conventions at university (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

### **5.6.2 Genre Structures: Legitimacy of Argument Essays**

In secondary school, when Dana tries to figure out her writing teachers' expectations, she often refers to a "proper essay" or "solid piece of writing" as her understanding of the structure deemed necessary for academic writing (Journal 1). At one point, she even defines her perception of academic writing against what she believes it is not: "pouring her heart out on the pages of a notebook" (Journal 1). However, as previously mentioned, there are often vast differences between teacher expectations and student interpretations of what is considered acceptable in academic writing (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013), which can further frustrate a student like Dana who appears reassured by the exactitude of numbers and equations required for her favorite subjects, math and science. In particular, when Dana talks about her fears of the unknown when transitioning into university, she highlights how she did not understand the requirements for writing narratives (a common genre structure in her writing classes at secondary school), which further fueled her fears of having to write in a completely new genre structure at university, the argument essay (a common genre structure for first-year writing students at GAU).

However, by the time Dana has actually written the argument essay in WRI 101, she is able to pin-point certain characteristics of that genre-specific assignment:

researching her own sources and using APA style; whereas, when writing about secondary school in her journal responses, she never once discussed genre-specific characteristics, even when describing a negative writing experience based on a particular narrative about her parents' divorce. I believe this may have occurred for several reasons: One, as Dana mentioned several times, her secondary school teachers did not adequately explain their assignments' expectations to her; therefore, Dana was not able to provide the specific characteristics of her narrative assignments. Two, when retelling her negative writing experience, Dana was more concerned about her topic, her feelings while writing, and her reactions to her teacher's assessment than explaining the specific structural requirements of the assignment. Three, in WRI 101, Dana was provided guidelines, student samples, and the opportunity to revise her work through several stages of drafting, with the added benefit of describing her argument essay in one of her journal responses immediately after writing, as opposed to describing an assignment she wrote in tenth grade over three years ago.

And finally, I believe the genre-specific characteristics that Dana mentions about her argument essay—finding her own sources and using APA style—represent a type of prestige that Dana associates with a “proper, well-written piece of writing” (Journal 2). As someone who describes herself as having a “passion for numbers, equations, proving and analysis” (Journal 1) from a very early age, writing an argument essay provides a form of ‘legitimacy’ to Dana in a way that writing narrative essays does not. It also provides her a sense of agency and need to invest in the discourse community of her writing classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) for the following reason: The fact that Dana needs the skills of researching, citing sources, and making arguments as a debater—something she has practiced and valued since she first started secondary school—makes this type of writing assignment even more significant as it supports her imagined identity as a successful student, university debater, and eventual participant in Model United Nations.

### 5.6.3 Writing Beliefs: A 'Surface' Approach with 'Deep' Purposes

Dana is very concerned about how her performance in the classroom is perceived by others, such as her family, her teachers, and her peers. This desire for positive judgements and social recognition based on grades not only provides Dana a sense of her own worth as a student and writer, but it also shapes her beliefs about writing and her desire to invest in academic discourse (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Specifically, in Dana's case, she believes that her writing should follow a very detailed formulaic structure based on a reproduction of the rules, conventions, and strategies that she has construed since secondary school is what she needs to succeed as a writer. As a result, Dana's search for a 'one-size-fits-all' formula (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013) makes her believe that she will only attain an 'A' once she discovers the 'correct' procedure for writing academic essay assignments, which is based on her experience in secondary school when she felt her teachers were at fault for not providing the appropriate guidelines to earn a higher grade.

This 'surface' approach to learning and writing (Lavelle, 1993) seems appealing to Dana because it appears she would rather write the way her teachers 'want,' as opposed to her previous way of writing narratives, if it guarantees the potential of a better grade (Voller, 2015). For example, while Dana enjoyed the process of writing a narrative about her parents' divorce, which she described as overflowing with "uncontrollable memories" (Journal 1), she quickly determined that she should only follow her teachers' expectations in the hopes of improving her essay grades:

When I was in English class with my teachers I tried to focus on which vocabulary to use, which skills to use. I used to go up to other students and ask them what they thought about an essay. Just to see, to understand what skill the teachers wanted. (Interview)

Based on these experiences, Dana now writes according to a very structured format in her pursuit of an 'A, as exemplified by her adherence to the sample student essays made available in her WRI 101 class at university.

While this 'surface' approach to writing (Lavelle, 1993) helps Dana acquire a sense of guidance as she tries to achieve an 'A,' it does not mean that Dana is *only* capable of re-creating the same structured format as her WRI 101 instructor's student sample essays. Dana also uses a very 'deep' approach, which is based on a student's own personal investment in writing, not just a teacher's formulaic requirements (Lavelle, 1993). In Dana's case, she acquires a more personal investment in her writing through the drafting and revision process of her argument essay, which she experiences for the very first time in WRI 101 at university. Previously, when Dana was in secondary school, she only submitted her work after writing the first draft in class or after her older sister would review her essays the night before they were due. In each case, it appears that Dana did not spend enough time on her assignments for her writing to transform and improve based on her own judgements as a writer, especially if her sister was ultimately the one responsible for revising Dana's essays. But, once Dana is a student in WRI 101 and experiences a revision activity with one of her peers, she is able to realize how her thesis statement can improve over time with drafting, resulting in one's eventual improvement as a writer: "I didn't feel bad for sharing my thesis statement with the class after that, even though it wasn't the best I could've written. I knew I had time to improve it later" (Interview).

It is at this point that Dana realizes her overall essay can become more developed after each draft, which helps her gain more confidence and pride in her writing abilities beyond just a sought-after 'A,' as she states, "I'm gladly going to admit, that for the first time in four years I actually think that I got what it takes to compose good essays" (Journal 3). While she appears to still believe that a 'surface' approach to writing will better ensure an 'A,' Dana has begun to couple this belief with a 'deep' approach based on a more intrinsic investment in the development of her writing skills through the drafting process, which impacts her sense of agency within the discourse community of her writing classroom at university (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

## 5.7 Conclusion

In summary, ideological beliefs about English as a symbol of prestige contribute to Dana's interest in mastering the conventions and genre structures of such a privileged discourse, even when taught as a 'hidden curriculum.' Dana determines that an argument essay is a much more 'legitimate' form of academic writing than the narrative essay, as it encompasses many of the skills she needs to pursue her imagined identity as a debater at university: researching, citing, and making arguments. This need for academic legitimacy also influences Dana to use a 'surface' approach, based on following a formulaic structure to essay writing, along with a 'deep' approach, in which Dana has learned that her writing can improve and become more complex through several stages of drafting. The ideological beliefs that impact Dana's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs, as based on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), highlight how she invests in particular writing practices based on her own sense of agency and understanding of academic discourse.

Below, I will examine how sociocultural influences, based on Dana's teachers, family, and herself, position Dana and impact her negotiations within the academic discourse community of her writing classrooms. This is supported by Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, which will address my fourth research question: *How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*

## 5.8 Section IV: Dana's Sociocultural Influences

### *How Dana's Positionings as a Writer Impact Her Negotiations Within the Discourse Community of Her Writing Classrooms*

#### 5.8.1 Positioned by Teachers: Gatekeepers Upholding a 'Hidden Curriculum'

As previously mentioned, Dana felt unfairly treated by her secondary school teachers for labeling her as a 'B' student (Davies & Harré, 1990). She also believed they never provided her the explicit tools to learn how to write an academic essay (Journal 3). However, based on Dana's descriptions of her past teachers, their



actions did not appear intentionally biased toward her, but rather, they seemed to be based on general assumptions about writing-related expectations common in most schools that are implicit and opaque: i.e., the hidden curriculum (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013). With this in mind, teachers frequently presume that standard language and writing skills are acquired outside the classroom (as a primary Discourse in students' homes, for example), and that the remaining language competencies necessary for *academic* writing are acquired, as if by osmosis, from classroom interactions, lectures, and in-class writing activities (Heller & Morek, 2015).

These common-held beliefs are not only assumed by teachers. Dana, herself, believed that she “should be capable to write” at the academic level of her peers since she had been attending some of the best American schools in Dubai since the age of four (Interview), and thus, considered English her most fluent written and spoken language (Questionnaire). In addition, these implicit writing-related expectations are reflected in teachers' assessments, which often present teachers as authoritative holders of knowledge and their students as non-informed outsiders (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013). This was the case with Dana when she was told in secondary school that her writing was “underdeveloped” and “incoherent” but was advised to “just do better next time” with the assumption that Dana somehow possessed such knowledge (Journal 1). Consequently, the positioning Dana presumably experienced was not based on her abilities, or inabilities, as an academic writer, but rather, it seems, by the implicit normative assumptions that schools and teachers maintain in their function as gatekeepers (Davies & Harré, 1990; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013).

Since Dana blames her secondary school teachers for not providing the appropriate resources to support her development as a writer (and subsequently implying that this lack of guidance is what prevented her from achieving 'A's), it appears that Dana, as well, holds certain writing-related expectations about her instructors that they are somehow responsible for her overall achievement as an

'A' writer (Davies & Harré, 1990). However, academic writing, as a 'hidden curriculum' based on assumptions, is difficult to define, and especially, teach as a 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013). While Dana achieved an 'A' in her university writing class and attributes her success to the specific guidelines her WRI 101 instructor provided, such as in-class materials and student sample essays, this does not negate other teaching styles or preferences by other students that differ from Dana's implicit expectations about the way academic writing should be taught. While Dana may have been subjected to positioning based on her secondary school teachers' pre-conceived notions of 'hidden curriculum' expectations, or even their personal interpretations of academic writing standards in their individual classrooms (Davies & Harré, 1990), it seems that Dana's belief in her teachers' responsibility to help her succeed also makes her fault them when she does not succeed.

This narrative contradiction, in which Dana blames her secondary school writing teachers for preventing her from achieving an 'A,' will be addressed further in Section I of Chapter 8 when I examine the participants' contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **5.8.2 Positioned by Family: Upholding Perfection as a Familial Obligation**

Dana's over-striving behavior as a student, coupled with her 'fear of failure' in the classroom, conveys how susceptible she is to upholding sociocultural obligations of achievement and success in order to win the approval of those around her, such as her peers, teachers, and family (Covington, 1984, 1997). However, it appears that Dana's family in particular is the motivating factor that pushes her to seek academic success to such a degree that anything below perfection, no matter how slight the difference, is considered unworthy in Dana's eyes (Davies & Harré, 1990). For example, Dana's parents ensured that she and her sisters would attend reputable, English-medium schools in the UAE so that they would have the appropriate schooling in order to gain entry into GAU (Interview).

However, once Dana is accepted by GAU, she seems quite overwhelmed by the academic standards she is expected to achieve as a writer, as stated, “The thought of writing in college always worried me. Am I prepared enough to move on? Can I manage it all by myself? Can I handle new writings coming my way?” (Interview). She feels an immediate need to compare her level of accomplishment to that of her two sisters, whom she describes as “brilliant in the sciences,” implying that she, too, must perform at their level (Interview). In addition, Dana emphasizes how her middle sister is also a “brilliant writer,” and that everyone in the family not only “loves what she writes,” but they trust her expertise to such an extent that Dana’s parents use her to review their work emails, when written in English, before they are sent out to colleagues (Interview).

Mirroring her parents’ actions, Dana also defers to her sister’s expertise while in secondary school by asking her to review her own essay assignments, even though this makes Dana “feel like [her] writings will never be good enough” (Interview). The unfortunate result, of course, is that Dana appears positioned by her sister’s status in the family as ‘English expert’ (Davies & Harré, 1990) and is led to believe that she has to write at her sister’s level of achievement in order to be considered a successful, “beautiful” writer, as well (Interview). However, Dana never considers that her sister is already a graduate of GAU, and by default, has more experience writing academically; nor does she convey any awareness of the time, preparation, or effort that her sister may have to go through every time she is consulted as the family’s designated ‘English expert.’ Without this acknowledgement, it seems there is an implied assumption on Dana’s part that her sister is innately talented as a writer, which, by contrast, makes Dana untalented in her own eyes.

This need for perfection also minimizes Dana’s awareness of her own abilities as an academic writer. For example, one of the reasons Dana enjoys math and science so much is because she is able to easily achieve high marks in those subjects. She also enjoys the public recognition of excelling as a debater at school and winning arguments (Journal 1). In each case, Dana never describes the

struggle or difficulty that led to her accomplishments, but rather, she focuses on the successful end-result. With academic writing, Dana is unable to achieve such immediate, effortless success, and she therefore discredits all the 'B's she has earned throughout her schooling while simultaneously conceding that other people would consider such marks a "really good grade" (Journal 1). Yet, it is important to note, Dana does not specify her own family as part of the 'others' who would be proud of her grades and abilities in writing. While external praise and the social recognition of others are essential to Dana's sense of academic success, especially as an over-striving student (Covington, 1984, 1997), it appears that her own family's recognition of her achievements is much more critical to how Dana perceives her identity as a successful, academic writer.

Her parents' acknowledgment, praise, and reliance on the capabilities of Dana's middle sister as an academic writer in English suggest a high regard for perfectionism in Dana's family, especially when it comes to academic English. Such actions position Dana, whether intentional or not, by conveying the following message: If she cannot achieve her sister's level of perfection then she has clearly 'failed' as a writer, even when consistently earning 'above standard' grades of 'B' (Davies & Harré, 1990). It is also important to note that Dana never once describes her sister's level of perfection in detail, except to say that her writing is "beautiful" (Interview), which implies that Dana does not have a strong sense of what it means to be a successful, academic writer beyond achieving an 'A' and receiving her parents' praise.

This narrative omission, in which Dana does not describe the type of writing she so desperately wants to master, will be addressed further in Section II of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants' contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **5.8.3 Positioned by Self: Embracing Discourse Community (but not Always Her Own Membership)**

When Dana describes her negative writing experience in secondary school, she is initially very confident about her legitimacy as a writer, as evidenced by the following statement about her narrative essay: “I had poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great” (Journal 1). Such assumptions about her writing, and by association, her presumed membership into the discourse community of her writing classroom, suggest that Dana’s understanding of membership is based on belonging as a ‘full’ member who should only receive ‘A’s for her writing (Lave & Wenger, 1991). She does not seem to consider that there may be varying degrees of membership, not always designated by an ‘A,’ and is consequently “hurt” by her teacher’s assessment (Journal 1), which she believes has demoted her to the ranks of ‘B’ writers (Davies & Harré, 1990). Since such a grade does not represent legitimacy to someone like Dana, who seeks perfection based on family expectations, her repeated positionings as a ‘B’ student throughout secondary school make her believe that she will never be accepted as a writer of high standing (Davies & Harré, 1990). As she states, “I felt like since the moment I got my first ‘B’ my teacher just had this idea that a ‘B’ is always going to be my level in writing” (Journal 1).

Even though Dana repeats several times that she does not like writing, she appears to dislike rejection even more, whether imagined or real, from a discourse community that seems to validate the writing of others, such as her sister and former classmates, but not her own writing (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Yet, Dana does not consider that her secondary school teachers most likely *did* value her as a legitimate member in the discourse community of their writing classrooms, as demonstrated by their consistently above-standard assessments of ‘B’s on her writing. Instead, she attributes her static grades to her teachers’ lack of guidance and motivation, which seems to confirm in Dana’s mind that she is not a full member in the discourse community of her writing classrooms (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As a result, she positions herself based on the following belief (Davies & Harré, 1990): If her grades remained the same throughout her four years of secondary school, even as she sought outside help from her sister and peers, then by connotation, the written assessment linked to Dana's first 'B' is also the same: "Your writing is underdeveloped. Thoughts incoherent. Needs revision" (Journal 1). However, Dana's lack of respect for her secondary school teachers' gatekeeping practices and her overall dislike of academic writing as a discipline does not negate her own desire to embrace the discourse community of her writing classrooms (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Since English is a symbol of prestige to both Dana and her family, she craves the social standing and public recognition that it provides; as a result, Dana does not reject, or purposefully exclude, herself from such a prestigious community. Dana's particular issue is that she expected an 'A' after submitting her narrative assignment in tenth grade without taking into consideration the time and effort needed to learn how to write like a full member in a manner commensurate with the discourse community of her writing classroom.

Much like an apprentice would learn the disciplinary ways of meaning from an experienced mentor (Rogoff, 1991), Dana, as a newcomer to a community of practice, must earn admission into its discourse community only through increasing practice and use of the rules and conventions governing that specific kind of discourse (Lave & Wenger, 1991). If Dana wishes to become a 'full' member of the discourse community in her writing classrooms, she must first allow herself to start at the periphery of that community and, with greater knowledge and use of its discourse, gain increasing legitimacy into that community. Instead, Dana seems to discredit her peripheral role as apprentice, at least in secondary school, most likely ignoring that she was, indeed, practicing and acquiring particular writing strategies in her narrative assignments that helped her when transitioning into writing argument essays at university. She in turn praises her WRI 101 instructor for providing the necessary guidelines and materials to help her achieve an 'A,' thus attributing her success to the "proper background and practice" (Journal 3) she received at university rather than recognizing she had perhaps entered a different

peripheral stage of writing, one that was bringing her much closer to the center stage of legitimacy (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

While Dana does, indeed, acknowledge that her writing has improved through several stages of drafting and revising, which implies a growing understanding of how practicing at the periphery can lead to future mastery, she appears to consider this recently learned writing practice as just another example of the ample preparation she gratefully received in her WRI 101 course (Journal 2). In fact, by positioning herself as someone who finally feels equipped “for the first time in four years” to “compose good essays” (Journal 3), Dana seems to believe that she will enter WRI 102 as a proud, confident, and fully prepared writer, as based on her assumption that a few student sample essays, clear guidelines, and revision activities are all it takes to improve one’s writing (Davies & Harré, 1990). By ignoring other factors that may possibly contribute to her future success in WRI 102, such as a deeper interest in writing argument essays over narratives; finding a connection between academic writing and debating; or naturally improving as a writer through an additional year of peripheral practice in an academic discourse community, Dana willingly gives full credit to her WRI 101 course, and by default, me, her instructor at the time.

Such purposeful narrative inclusions, in which Dana believes her WRI 101 course is solely responsible for her future success as a writer, will be addressed further in Section III of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

In summary, Dana is positioned by her secondary school teachers in their role of gatekeepers who taught academic writing as a ‘hidden curriculum.’ This sociocultural experience, in Dana’s eyes, labels her as a ‘B’ student and makes her feel that she is not a legitimate member of her writing classroom’s discourse community. Dana is also positioned by her family, who uphold perfection as a familial obligation, which makes her compare her own writing to that of her sister’s,

the family's designated 'English expert.' This sociocultural experience also makes Dana feel that she is not a legitimate writer even though she desires to be a successful writer in both secondary school and university. In addition, Dana positions herself based on her own perceptions and expectations of what it means to be a legitimate member in the discourse community of her writing classroom. While Dana embraces the prestige of academic discourse, and willingly acquires its normative standards, she appears not to accept her own membership until she receives the only legitimate grade possible in her eyes: an 'A.' The several positionings that Dana experiences, as based on Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, culminate in Dana's eventual realization that continuous practice at the periphery can lead to future mastery, which, to Dana, is signified by an 'A.'

While Dana's narrative identity construction allows for an understanding of how she perceived her identity as a successful writer, it should be noted again that narratives are subjective constructions, not reflections of reality (Bruner, 1987). They are self-perceptions unique to one's own life. Therefore, in sections I through III of Chapter 8, I will analyze three major areas in Dana's written journal responses that represent contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions when Dana constructed her writer identity in written form. These are as follows: (1) contradictions in her narrative identity construction: blaming her secondary school teachers for their lack of preparation while simultaneously praising her current instructor for providing ample preparation; (2) omissions in her narrative identity construction: not describing the practice of academic writing even as she embraces the discourse community of her writing classroom; and (3) purposeful inclusions in her narrative identity construction: solely crediting her WRI 101 course for feeling ready and prepared for her future WRI 102 course.

In addition, the contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions apparent in Dana's narrative identity construction comprise to represent a specific type of narrative that Alexander (2011) refers to as the hero-narrative form, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.



**CHAPTER 6**  
**MUMIN'S WRITER IDENTITY:**  
**The Enforced Writer**

**6.1 Introduction**

In Section I of this chapter, the construction of Mumin's writer identity is based on a past-present-future story arc that follows three major stages in Mumin's life in which he constructs, interprets, and re-constructs his identity as an 'enforced' writer. Stage One describes Mumin's resistance to writing in academic English; Stage Two describes Mumin's discovery that academic writing can, indeed, involve choice on his part; and Stage Three describes Mumin's resolution to accept himself as an academic writer in English.

The narrative construction of Mumin's writer identity is further categorized into five chronological scenes, as follows: (1) his belief that writing in Arabic is emotionally fulfilling; (2) his dismay that academic writing in English is formulaic; (3) his perception that secondary school made him feel like 'less' of a writer; (4) his fears, motivations, and writing approaches as a first-year writing student at university: not wanting to fail his WRI 101 course again; realizing that academic essay topics can be based on a student's interests, not just his teacher's expectations; approaching academic writing for his own personal engagement; and finally (5), making 'peace' with himself as an academic writer in English.

In Section II of this chapter, I examine the motivations behind Mumin's learner, expected, and imagined identities and how they impact his overall identity as an enforced writer. This consists of Mumin's learner identity as a self-protector; his expected identity as an obligated writer; and his imagined identity as a blogger in both Arabic and English.

In Section III of this chapter, I examine how Mumin's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs impact him as a writer. This is based on the conflict Mumin associates with his secondary Discourse as an

academic writer; his generalized belief that all genre structures are formulaic practices of linguistic control; and his 'deep' approach to writing without 'surface' restrictions.

Last, in Section IV of this chapter, I explore how sociocultural positionings impact Mumin's negotiations within the discourse community of his writing classrooms, and subsequently, his overall identity as an enforced writer. This consists of positionings by Mumin's past teachers, in which they act as gatekeepers enforcing a discourse of 'power'; positionings by Mumin's family, in which they treat English as more important than his home language of Arabic; and positionings by Mumin, himself, in which he resists the discourse community of his writing classrooms because he lacks engagement with them.

**Appendix II** provides Mumin's three journal responses; **Appendix XI** provides Mumin's questionnaire data; and **Appendix VII** provides Mumin's interview transcript, all of which I refer to in this chapter.

The stages and scenes of Mumin's narrative construction are presented below and will address my first research question: *How do first-year writing students in an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*

## **6.2 Section I: Mumin's Narrative Identity Construction**

### ***Three Major Stages of Mumin's Writer Identity***

#### **6.2.1 Background Summary**

##### **Mumin's Linguistic and Educational Background**

Mumin is an 18-year-old Sudanese male who moved to the UAE two years prior with his family after graduating from secondary school. His native language is Arabic and it is the language he speaks at home with his family. During his first year in the UAE, Mumin took intensive English-language courses through the British Council in Dubai so that he could improve his TOEFL scores before applying to GAU. He was then admitted into the Bridge Program at GAU as a non-matriculated student so that he could increase his English-language proficiency to

a level suitable for full admission at university the following year (Interview). While living in Sudan, Mumin attended Arabic-instruction primary and middle schools, but at the age of seven he began attending English classes once a day that were provided as a foreign-language subject by his teachers (Questionnaire). Once he turned 14, he was obliged to follow his father's wishes of attending one of the top English-medium secondary schools in Sudan, but only considers himself "improving in English" at this point (Interview). Overall, Mumin still considers Arabic his most fluent spoken and written language (Questionnaire).

This is Mumin's second semester attending GAU as a fully matriculated student. As the oldest in his family, he feels pressure to set a good example for his younger brother who is also expected to attend GAU after he graduates from secondary school in Dubai (Interview). However, Mumin has been on academic probation since the previous semester, in which he failed at his first attempt at WRI 101. Failing is a great concern for Mumin since his parents specifically moved from Sudan to the UAE so that he could attend GAU (Interview). Mumin's identity as an academic writer is therefore shaped by his family's resolve that he develop his English-language skills to such an extent that he has felt forced to write in academic English throughout much of his schooling.

While Mumin's linguistic and educational background provide a brief understanding of his academic writer identity, the three major stages of Mumin's narrative identity construction, which are further divided into five chronological scenes, offer a much more detailed account of how Mumin perceives his identity as an 'enforced' writer.

### **6.2.2 Stage One: Mumin's Resistance (with Academic Writing in English)**

*Scene I:*

*Sense of Self as a Student Before Secondary School: "Writing Is Dear to My Heart"*

For Mumin, writing in Arabic was always a joyful experience that created a sense of closeness with those he loved. He recalls with fondness how he wrote birthday cards to his parents or wrote bedtime stories with his mother and brother when he was young. Back then, he explains, "Writing was not just a collection of words but it

was a way to describe my thoughts. It was an opportunity to explain more to others about myself” (Journal 1). In elementary school, his teachers also taught him that writing was about “expressing one’s thoughts between ourselves and a piece of paper” (Journal 1), which led him to enter short story contests and consider writing an “integral part” of who he was as a person (Journal 1).

Since writing in Arabic connected Mumin to others, especially his family, he continued to develop “a sincere affection” for it (Journal 1), believing it gave him “memorable quality time with [his] beloved ones” (Journal 1). Later, he began to write down his thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a diary because he enjoyed “dealing with emotions” and discovering his “spiritual and emotional side” (Journal 1). “This idea of writing,” he clarifies, is what “I hold dear to my heart,” but there was also a time in eighth grade when this very same idea had been “severely mutated due to contradictions [he] sensed in the way [he] was made to understand writing” (Journal 1).

*Scene II:*

*Negative Writing Experience: The ‘Truth’ About Academic Writing*

Mumin introduces this ‘contradiction’ in eighth grade as follows, “In my first encounter with proper academic writing, the truth struck me real hard” (Journal 1). This occurred when his English teacher was preparing students for secondary school by showing them how they would be expected to “write proper secondary school level essays” (Journal 1). As Mumin explains,

My English teacher opened his power point slides and went on explaining how to write an introduction, what to include in the introduction, what sort of things fit in the body, how to write a conclusion, how long should our essay be ... etc. To most of my classmates, this was an ordinary class that they forgot about as soon as the teacher went out of the class; but not to me. (Journal 1)

Mumin further describes his teacher’s “systematic and formulaic approach” (Journal 2) as a “mutation,” which “troubled [his] conception of writing even more”

(Journal 1). The 'formula' he was made to follow, based on his teacher's PowerPoint presentations, conflicted with his previous notions of writing for emotional fulfillment (Journal 1). However, Mumin especially disliked how his teacher would not allow him to choose his own essay topics. "Most of my friends in class," recalls Mumin, "we tried to tell him that we would like to choose our own topic. It was really hard to write about that topic at that time" (Interview). While Mumin could not remember the topic he was forced to write about, he definitely remembers how he felt: "It was one of the moments I started to hate writing" (Interview).

*Scene III:*

*Sense of Self as a Writer in Secondary School: Less of a Writer*

For secondary school, Mumin attended one of the top private schools in his country in which the Sudanese teachers from his country were trained overseas in English (Interview). This was a significant moment in Mumin's life because he had to transfer from an Arabic school, in which English was only relegated to one class a day, to that of an English-medium school, which required academic discourse in English at all times (Questionnaire). As Mumin explains further, "My father wanted it. I had to go there for English. And, my father wanted me to go to [GAU]" (Interview). Once there, he resented feeling forced to write for "good grades" and believes he was satisfying his "teachers' goals of writing properly," not his own interests and aspirations as a writer (Journal 1). While he does not specify any particular incident, Mumin provides a general overview of the four years he spent in secondary school:

I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in high school, especially in English and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed; they didn't care about what their students might be interested in writing about. (Journal 2)

This is when Mumin's disinterest in writing in English began to impact his interest in writing in Arabic. Specifically, he stopped writing in his Arabic diary and began to

focus on what he considered less-meaningful activities such as music and basketball (Journal 1). While these new activities made him feel “less connected to [his] spiritual and emotional side” (Journal 1), Mumin never once tried to write for personal reasons again whether inside or outside the classroom. Instead, he felt further and further removed from the meaning and purpose he felt when writing in Arabic and blamed the “sanctions forced on [him] by the education system” (Journal 1). He considers this part of his life “a big game changer” because for the very first time he felt “a bit shallow” and “like less of a writer” (Journal 1).

### **6.2.3 Stage Two: Mumin’s Discovery (when Choosing His Own Essay Topic)**

*Scene IV:*

#### *Fears, Motivations, and Approaches as a First-Year Writing Student at University*

##### *Fear: Failing WRI 101 Again*

While Mumin felt scared on his first day in WRI 101, it was not because of the upcoming tasks or assignments that would be expected of him. Instead, his fear lay in the fact that this was his second time taking the course. “I had a lot of negative experiences with writing,” he states, “and I was scared that I may not pass this course again” (Journal 2). These experiences, from secondary school up until his current WRI 101 course, also prompted Mumin to fixate on his grade for the first assignment of the semester:

Our first task for the course was a summary assignment; I tried to focus more on this assignment because it was really important for me to get a good grade. I tried to prepare because I was afraid I wouldn’t get a good grade. (Journal 2)

When Mumin was required to summarize an academic article, he was consumed by one main thought: “I was scared that I would fail and lose 5% of my final grade from the beginning of the semester” (Journal 2). This fear led him to “study a lot the night before” (Interview), but once he received his grade, he recalls,

To be honest, this grade disappointed me the most. It’s true that I got a C+ but I expected more, and I said to myself, Summary is easiest

part of the course, if I didn't get a good grade on it how am I going to do well on the other assignments and essays. (Journal 2)

While Mumin admits that he should have spent more time preparing for the assignment than just 'the night before,' especially since he was so concerned about failing, he ultimately believes he received a disappointing grade because he was not interested in the article he was required to summarize. "I didn't like the article. It was boring. That's why I got the grade even when I studied a lot the night before" (Interview). As a result, Mumin vowed to himself, albeit temporarily, to never write in English again, except when necessary, and only focus on Arabic (Interview).

*Motivation: Writing as a Choice*

However, when Mumin was allowed to *choose* his own topic for his argument essay, he describes a sense of purpose and self-motivation that appear to be absent from his previous academic writing experiences in English:

Since that day came I started thinking about a topic for my essay and spent hours reading articles. I was like why don't I write about child abuse in Sudan because it was from my country and important to me. (Journal 2)

After this experience, he began to feel "passionate" about writing again, mainly because he was allowed to write about a topic that was relevant to his own interests. "I could write about how other people feel, the children," he explains. "I wanted to write about this before" (Interview).

In fact, claims Mumin, for the first time since secondary school he desired to connect with an audience again, just like he did as a child when he wrote for his "beloved ones" and entered short story contests (Journal 1). As he explains, "I started sharing some tweets in Twitter about my writing and I created a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, like I did when I was younger" (Journal 2). Even more important, Mumin's interest in writing for an online community in Arabic

has become a potential source of inspiration for using English on his own terms, outside of a classroom context:

I was thinking if I can write more why don't I make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs in English as well. And it became one of new goals, and hopefully after finishing writing 102 I will start working on it. (Journal 2)

*Writing Approach: Writing for Oneself*

When Mumin realizes that academic writing is more than just a set of formulaic essays and pre-chosen topics to be forced upon him, he becomes more engaged with his WRI 101 assignment because, as he explains, "I prefer to write about things in my country" (Interview). Below, Mumin describes how he accomplishes the requirements for his argument essay without any of the excuses he once used when preparing for his summary assignment, such as lack of interest or last-minute preparation. As he explains,

I started doing a lot of research and I also emailed some of my friends back home to send me articles that contain ideas about this topic. And each day I started writing part of the essay till I completed it to the conclusion. (Journal 2)

However, it should be noted, feeling motivated to write academically does not necessarily equate to a higher grade for Mumin, as evidenced by his comment,

But I got disappointed again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn't make it out of Probation this semester. But I said to myself I don't care, whatever the results at the end I am not going to give up, I have to continue till the end. (Journal 2)

**6.2.4 Stage Three: Mumin's Resolution (as an Academic Writer in English)**

*Scene V:*

*Sense of Self as a Writer in University: "I've Made Peace with Myself"*

When Mumin reflects on his former feelings at the beginning of the semester, he recalls, "I was sure that I am not going to do well in the course because of the



struggles I have gone through with writing” (Journal 3). Even when he anticipates WRI 102 next semester, he expresses concern about future challenges:

Writing 102! Writing 102! This is the voice I have been hearing in my head for the last month that scares me a lot about writing, not because I can't do it but because I know there's another challenge I have to go through next semester. (Journal 3)

However, in the midst of such concerns, Mumin has discovered something invaluable about writing his argument essay, as he explains, “This gave me a sense that I should work hard for me—not to please someone else, like a professor or a parent, but to achieve to please myself” (Interview).

This sense of enjoyment, based on choosing a relevant essay topic, encourages Mumin to shift from his usual stance of resisting academic discourse in English to accepting its role in his life, as he explains, “I think I understand myself more in English” (Interview). He further adds, “No matter what people think of someone's writing, they must realize that their main focus is enjoying what they do. Once you do that, you make peace with yourself” (Journal 3). He describes with anticipation how he envisions WRI 102 the following semester:

Although, I know it will be hard, but to be honest I am also excited about it, because I know that I have another chance to improve my writing skills and disclose the thoughts I have in my mind about writing. And I know that I will spend a lot of time doing the assignments, but I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person's beliefs and feelings. (Journal 3)

By understanding that writing academically in English can allow him to share his views with others, Mumin has come to the following resolution: “I am more confident about writing in general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it” (Journal 3).

### 6.3 Conclusion

In summary, Mumin has constructed his identity as an enforced writer in English in Scene I of his narrative by first establishing himself as an Arabic writer who values self-reflection and sharing his views with others. In Scene II, Mumin's resistance to academic writing in English begins when he learns the 'truth' that it is based on a formulaic essay structure. In Scene III, Mumin stops writing in Arabic and resents writing in English, which makes him feel overall like 'less of a writer.' In the beginning of Scene IV, Mumin is fearful that he will fail his WRI 101 course again, but he starts to regain his interest in writing by the end of Scene IV when he discovers that academic writing in English can, indeed, be engaging, especially when he writes about his own interests. Finally, in Scene V, Mumin has made 'peace' with himself by resolving to accept the role of academic English in his life.

These scenes, which support the three major stages of Mumin's story arc (resistance, discovery, acceptance), also comprise to represent a specific type of narrative form that Alexander (2011) refers to as the rebel-narrative form. In order to adhere to this particular narrative form, certain contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions were present in Mumin's construction of his writer identity, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.

Below, I will examine the motivational strategies that impact Mumin's learner, expected, and imagined identities as a writer, as based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, which will address my second research question: *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*

### 6.4 Section II: Mumin's Motivational Strategies

#### *How Mumin's Learner, Expected, and Imagined Identities Impact Him as a Writer*

##### 6.4.1 Learner Identity: The Self-Protector

According to Covington's (1984, 1994) self-worth theory, learners who seek to protect their self-esteem in the face of potential failure by making excuses for their

behavior are considered 'self-protectors,' which is often reflective in Mumin's descriptions of himself as a student. Specifically, his internalized self-worth as a learner is fueled by his resistance to the expectations of his family and secondary school teachers who required Mumin to learn in English and use 'formulaic' academic writing at his private, English-medium school (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This learning context, in which Mumin feels forced to write in academic English, often influences him to avoid responsibility by using 'self-handicapping' behavior in the classroom (Covington, 1984, 1997; De Castella, et al., 2013), which is typical of self-protective behavior. This is evident when Mumin provides excuses for not performing well by deflecting the cause away from his writing abilities and blaming external reasons for his difficulties. For example, Mumin blames the "sanctions" of academic writing, and subsequently his secondary school teachers whom he believes forced him to write "properly," as the sole reason for shifting his interest from writing to that of "music and basketball," without taking into consideration that this was a personal choice on his part (Journal 2).

While blaming past writing experiences allows Mumin to avoid responsibility for his lack of motivation in secondary school, these same negative experiences are often used as an excuse for his poor academic performance at university when he fails his WRI 101 course for the very first time (Covington, 1984, 1997). "I had a lot of negative experiences with writing," Mumin explains about his past, "and I was scared that I may not pass this course again" (Journal 2). Once Mumin takes WRI 101 for the second time at university, he continues to find, and consequently blame, external reasons for his poor grades. Not only does he cite disinterest in the required reading for his summary assignment, but he also blames his lack of preparation for receiving such a "disappointing" grade (Journal 2).

By acknowledging that he should have studied more than the night before (Journal 2), Mumin implies that he is at least aware of some sort of responsibility on his part, but the overriding message is clear: He does not like being told what to read, which is why he put such minimal effort into his assignment. His sense of

Perceived Academic Control (PAC) at this point, based on not choosing his own article, influences Mumin to resist his assignment at the cost of his grade (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015).

Mumin's repeated practice of resisting his teachers' authority, including their assignments, further reveals that his self-protective behavior has found the ultimate culprit: "proper academic writing" (Journal 1). Perhaps this is why Mumin believed, out of his entire eighth grade class, that he was the only student who could see the "truth" within academic writing (Journal 1). In fact, he somehow immediately senses that its required rules and formulaic structures would make him "less of a writer" (Journal 1). However, once Mumin is provided the opportunity to choose his own essay topic for his argument assignment, his usual excuses give way to a newfound interest and emerging responsibility on his part: "This gave me a sense that I should work hard for me—not to please someone else, like a professor or a parent, but to achieve to please myself" (Interview). Not only does Mumin spend hours researching his topic and sharing ideas with his friends, but he works on a section of his essay each day instead of waiting until the last minute to write it (Journal 2).

Even more important, when Mumin is still "disappointed again" by his grade (Journal 2), he does not find external reasons for the cause, but rather, accepts his grade with a maturity not evident in his other writing experiences. As he explains, "I said to myself I don't care, whatever the results at the end I am not going to give up" (Journal 2). Thus, the context of Mumin's learning environment is significant to his identity as a self-protective learner, and in fact, his self-protective behavior seems to lessen once he does not feel forced to write (Covington, 1984, 1997). This awareness helps form the foundation for Mumin's expected and imagined identities, respectively, as he attempts to find freedom and choice as a writer outside of the confines of his academic writing classroom (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

#### **6.4.2 Expected Identity: The Obligated Writer**

Mumin's expected identity is shaped by external influences that stem from his family, specifically his father, and the sociocultural obligations they place on Mumin to learn English (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Since this identity is based on the obligations of external factors, such as Mumin's family, Higgins (1987) describes this trait as an 'ought-to' self because it is not only based on Mumin's needs and desires, but rather, the expectations of others. This is evident when Mumin's father makes him attend a private, English-medium school after eighth grade, without, apparently, any choice on Mumin's part. "My father wanted it," confirms Mumin. "I had to go there for English" (Interview). Subsequently, his approach toward writing is impacted the following way: Mumin writes "forcefully to get good grades" (Journal 2) in secondary school as opposed to wanting to write academically in English for his own self-interests. This approach, which is based on an *avoidance* of undesirable outcomes (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), negatively impacts Mumin's investment in learning because his obligations in the classroom bear little resemblance to his own desires and wishes (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

This is especially evident when Mumin states that he "started to hate writing" (Interview) because of the "systematic and formulaic approach" his teachers used in school (Journal 2), which led him to stop writing in his diary and pursue non-academic activities, such as music and basketball (Journal 2). Therefore, even though Mumin feels a sense of obligation to practice academic writing, based on the wishes of others, he does not actively approach writing in school with any interest on his part except to prevent negative outcomes, such as receiving poor grades or disappointing his parents and teachers (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). In fact, he ends up losing all interest in writing, even in Arabic, which was something that he once considered an "integral part" of who he was as a person (Journal 1).

By feeling obligated to follow the expectations of others, Mumin achieves what he is trying to prevent: failure (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This outcome eventually occurs

after Mumin's family moves from Sudan to the UAE with the expectation that he would attend GAU after graduating from secondary school (Interview). However, it takes Mumin several attempts before he can become a fully matriculated student at GAU: First, he must increase his TOEFL scores through the British Council before applying, suggesting that Mumin did, indeed, have "a lot of negative experiences with writing" in English during his secondary schooling (Journal 2). Then, he must partake in the university's Bridge Program for a year, which provides intensive English-language classes for students who still need additional help. Finally, once he becomes a fully matriculated student at university and takes WRI 101, he fails the course. This puts Mumin on academic probation, instilling him with a fear of failure once he enters WRI 101 for the second time. As he states, "I was scared that I may not pass this course again" (Journal 2). It is important to note, the one time Mumin disregards his fear of academic probation is when he feels a sense of engagement with his argument essay:

I got disappointed again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn't make it out of Probation this semester. But I said to myself I don't care, whatever the results at the end I am not going to give up. (Journal 2)

Once this occurs, Mumin stops fixating on his failure, which in turn, brings him closer to achieving his imagined identity at university (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

### **6.4.3 Imagined Identity: The Blogger**

Mumin's imagined identity as a blogger in Arabic, and eventually in English, is shaped by his intrinsic motivation to write based on his own self-interests while resisting the extrinsic motivations of his teachers whom he felt forced him to write formulaic essays during secondary school (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This is evident when Mumin states how much spiritual and emotional fulfillment writing in Arabic gave him (Journal 1) yet he chose to stop writing altogether, even in his personal diary, "because of the way [his] teachers in school forced [students] to write about what they want, and because of the systematic and formulaic approach they followed" (Journal 2). However, once Mumin is encouraged to choose his own

essay topic for his argument essay, he realizes that academic writing does not have to be solely based on what his teachers want, but rather, his own interests can also be considered of value, even in a classroom context where he has to follow the discursive expectations of his teachers. “I could write about how other people feel, the children,” he explains. “I wanted to write about this before” (Interview).

He in turn becomes more engaged in the actual writing process itself, as he explains about his argument essay, “This gave me a sense that I should work hard for me—not to please someone else, like a professor or a parent, but to achieve to please myself” (Interview). This realization also allows Mumin to stop fighting against his teachers’ requirements by *avoiding* academic writing and instead aim for his own personal interests by *approaching* a form of writing that does not involve his teachers at all (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009): blogging. As Mumin explains, “I started sharing some tweets in Twitter and I created a small blog that I write my feelings in Arabic in it, like when I was younger” (Journal 2). The digital self that Mumin creates in the virtual world, far removed from the regulations of school, helps him create his imagined self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), which he could not construct in the off-line world of his English classroom.

Markus and Nurius (1986) describe this type of identity as an ‘ideal’ self and it is based on vivid self-images for the future that are considered the driving force behind students’ internal motivations (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Thus, joining a virtual community based on his own personal interests becomes a possible source of inspiration for using English outside of a classroom context, in which Mumin wants to create a blog in the future for “writing small daily paragraphs in English about the experiences I’ve had” (Journal 2). When such goals are imagined as vivid self-images for the future, with a specific end-result (i.e., creating a blog in English), they can become the driving force behind students’ internal motivations (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This is evident when Mumin explains, “And it

is one of my new goals, and hopefully after finishing writing 102 I will be able to start working on it” (Journal 2).

At this point, Mumin has discovered the prospect of using English on his own terms by re-positioning his stance toward the language from that of a “sanction” (Journal 1) to that of a linguistic tool in which he can share his views with others:

And I know that I will spend a lot of time doing the assignments, but I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person’s beliefs and feelings. (Journal 3)

Even more important, Mumin’s imagined identity as a blogger appears to free him from his usual resistance against academic writing, and especially those who teach it, thus providing him a willingness to eventually engage with the discourse community of his writing classroom (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), as opposed to rejecting it for his oft-repeated reason: “because of the systematic and formulaic approach the schools and teachers followed” (Journal 1). His renewed sense of Perceived Academic Control (PAC), in which he finally feels that his own interests are being addressed in the classroom (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015), allows him to look toward WRI 102 the following semester with a sense of hopefulness absent from his other writing experiences:

Although, I know it will be hard, but to be honest I am also excited because I know that I have another chance to improve my writing skills and disclosed the thoughts that I have in my mind about writing. (Journal 3)

## 6.5 Conclusion

In summary, Mumin’s learner identity as a self-protector is based on internalized feelings of resistance toward academic English, which also relates to his expected identity as an obligated writer who must fulfill the sociocultural expectations of his family and teachers by writing in English. Thus, by feeling obligated to follow the expectations of others, Mumin achieves what he is trying to *avoid*: failure as an academic writer in English, specifically the first time he takes his WRI 101 course at university. Mumin’s imagined identity as a blogger in WRI 101 the second time



he takes the course, however, helps him overcome his resistance by *approaching* academic writing based on his own personal interests and choices. This occurs in the following way: First, by deciding to become a blogger in Arabic, and second, by imagining himself as a blogger in English after he becomes a WRI 102 student the following semester. The motivations surrounding Mumin's learner, expected, and imagined identities, as based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, also pave the way for Mumin's ideological and attitudinal beliefs toward academic discourse in English and eventual engagement with the discourse community of his writing classroom at university.

Below, I will examine how ideological beliefs about English impact Mumin's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and beliefs about writing, as based on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), which will address my third research question: *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes about writing?*

## **6.6 Section III: Mumin's Ideological and Attitudinal Beliefs**

### ***How Mumin's Attitudes Toward Academic Discourse, Genre Structures, and Writing Impact Him as a Writer***

#### **6.6.1 Academic Discourse: Symbol of Conflict**

When Mumin describes how his father transferred him from an Arabic school to a private, English-medium secondary school in Sudan, he highlights how English is a source of ideological conflict in his life (Fairclough, 2014). As Mumin states, "I had to go there for English. My father wanted it" (Interview). This conflict persists throughout Mumin's schooling for several reasons: Mumin's primary Discourse is Arabic and he associates the language, and the act of writing in his mother tongue, as an "integral part" of himself in which he can explore his "emotional and spiritual side" with others or through the pages of his diary (Journal 1). With his secondary Discourse in English, Mumin feels forced by his teachers and the overall educational system to "write proper secondary school level essays" (Journal 1),

which he finds “formulaic” and far removed from the type of writing he once enjoyed in Arabic (Journal 1).

When Mumin switches from an Arabic- to English-language school, and is subsequently required to use his secondary Discourse over his primary one, he resists to the point where he stops writing in his Arabic diary altogether and pursues non-academic interests like basketball and music (Journal 2) because, as he states, his teachers “didn’t care about what their students might be interested in writing about” (Journal 2). Finally, the clash between Mumin’s primary and secondary Discourses, at least in secondary school, seems to be based on a lack of agency that results in Mumin not wanting to invest in the dominant discourse of the academy: academic writing (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). As Mumin states,

Since 8th grade, I have gradually lost interest in writing because of the systematic and formulaic approach that schools and teachers followed which, to a great extent, made me write forcefully to get good grades and satisfy my teachers’ goals of writing properly.  
(Journal 1)

Mumin continues to experience conflict and struggle surrounding his secondary Discourse, and thus academic writing, when his family moves from Sudan to the UAE so that he can attend GAU after graduating from secondary school (Interview). It is here, especially, that Mumin’s self-protective behavior in secondary school, in which he made excuses for his lack of motivation, continues to create difficulty for him as an academic writer at university (Covington, 1984, 1997). This is evident when Mumin blames past writing conflicts for his failure to pass his WRI 101 course for the very first time:

I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in high school, especially in English, and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed. (Journal 2)

When Mumin takes WRI 101 for the second time, he continues to approach academic writing, at least in the beginning of the semester, as a source of conflict (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). This specifically occurs when Mumin is required to summarize an academic article but waits until the night before to prepare because, according to him, he did not find the article interesting (Journal 2). Furthermore, when Mumin feels “disappointed” by his grade of ‘C+’ (Journal 2), he creates yet another clash between his secondary and primary Discourses by stating that he will never write in English again and only focus on Arabic (Interview).

This statement signifies how Mumin views academic writing as a symbol of conflict in two ways: First, Mumin’s self-protective behavior portrays his secondary Discourse as the cause of his low grade rather than Mumin’s own lack of preparation on the assignment; and second, Mumin continues to fulfill his expected identity as an obligated writer in which he feels a lack of agency and choice in the classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). However, this conflict lessens considerably when Mumin is given the choice to write academically about a topic in English for his argument essay that is relevant to his own life (Journal 2). When this occurs, Mumin begins to realize that his personal interests and reasons for writing can actually be explored in an academic setting, as he states, “Now I have a lot of feelings about writing and I started to be passionate about it again” (Journal 3). He can begin to find a sense of agency and investment while writing in his secondary Discourse, as he once did in his primary Discourse of Arabic (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

### **6.6.2 Genre Structures: A Generalized ‘Formula’ of Linguistic Control**

While Mumin never mentions a particular genre structure that he was made to follow during secondary school, he generalizes the type of essays he had to write back then as “proper, academic writing” (Journal 1), which, for the most part, followed the same “formula” (Interview), as described below:

My English teacher opened his power point slides and went on explaining how to write an introduction, what to include in the

introduction, what sort of things fit in the body, how to write a conclusion, how long should our essay be ... etc. (Journal 1)

This formula, according to Mumin, is especially troubling because he believes it strips him of the “joy” and “memorable quality time” (Journal 1) that he once experienced when writing about his personal interests in Arabic. “This idea of writing, which I hold I hold dear to my heart, has been severely mutated due to contradictions I sensed in the new way I was made to understand writing” (Journal 1).

Academic writing, therefore, represents a form of ideological control to Mumin, in which the dominant discourse of the classroom constraints and delegitimizes the personal interests and freedoms that he once experienced as a writer in his primary Discourse (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000):

I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in high school, especially in English and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed; they didn't care about what their students might be interested in writing about. (Journal 2)

This generalized concept of academic writing also indicates that Mumin is unaware of the varied genre structures that comprise academic writing. Just like Dana, he views the discourse as a single set of generic skills but without the prestige and privileges that Dana believes using such a dominant discourse guarantees (Hyland, 2013). Instead, Mumin considers the practice of these skills, specifically in secondary school, as a loss of power, in which his agency as a writer is severely diminished by an institutionalized authority (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). As he explains, “This part of my life was a big game changer as the sanctions forced on me by the new education system made me feel like less of a writer” (Journal 1).

Mumin sets aside his generalizations about academic writing as a form of ideological control when he describes the significance of researching a topic for his WRI 101 argument essay. When he is provided the opportunity to write about a topic that is relevant to his own life, his typical resistance toward academic writing

as a whole turns into a newfound sense of enthusiasm, albeit for a particular genre structure, because he has found a purposeful and meaningful reason to write:

Since that day came I started thinking about a topic for my essay and spent hours reading articles. I was like why don't I write about child abuse in Sudan because it was from my country and important to me.  
(Journal 2)

However, while Mumin does, indeed, embrace a genre-specific characteristic of the assignment—researching academic articles—he seems more interested in researching the topic itself, most likely because it takes place in his home country, than reproducing all the required skills of his assignment's particular genre structure. As he explains, "I could write about how other people feel, the children. I wanted to write about this before. I prefer to write about things in my country" (Interview). This admission is significant, I believe, because it reflects how important it is for Mumin to write for personal meaning, in which he can share his views with others, rather than writing solely to "satisfy [his] teachers' goals of writing properly" (Journal 2).

Therefore, while Mumin appears to discard his generalized view that academic writing is a form of control, it seems that this only applies when he is allowed the freedom to choose, research, and write about essay topics that are meaningful to his own life (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). As he explains after writing his argument essay, "Now I have a lot of feelings about writing and I started to be passionate about it again" (Journal 3). Nonetheless, while Mumin seems willing to break free of his prior negative writing experiences and resentments as an enforced writer (Journal 2), he still maintains his stance that the overall discourse itself, whatever the genre structure, should offer students the opportunity to explore their own personal interests as academic writers: "No matter what teachers think of someone's writing, they must realize a student's main focus should be enjoying themselves" (Journal 3). With this thought in mind, Mumin can begin to approach his own sense of engagement and investment as a writer at university, even though it is within an institutional context (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

### 6.6.3 Writing Beliefs: A 'Deep' Approach Without 'Surface' Restrictions

Mumin's tendency to contrast the "joy" (Journal 1) he feels when writing in Arabic *outside* of an institutionalized context (Journal 1) with the enforcement he feels to produce academic English *within* the institutionalized "sanctions" he considers school (Journal 1) shapes his beliefs about writing and his desire to invest, or not invest, in academic discourse (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Specifically, when Mumin describes the act of writing in Arabic, it is with a 'deep' approach that involves writing for personal meaning and investment (Lavelle, 1993). This is especially evident when he states, "Writing was not just a collection of words but it was a way to describe my thoughts. It was an opportunity to explain more to others about myself" (Journal 1). Such an approach included entering short story contests and sharing "memorable quality time with [his] beloved ones" by writing birthday cards and bedtime stories with them (Journal 1). In addition, it allowed him to explore his "spiritual and emotional side" within the pages of his diary, which he considered an "integral part" of himself (Journal 1).

However, once Mumin is required to fulfill his expected identity as an obligated writer in secondary school, he loses the meaning and purpose that he once so cherished from deep writing:

I stopped writing in my diary and turned my interest into other things, such as music and basketball which made me less connected to my spiritual and emotional side and left me feeling a bit shallow and less connected to writing. (Journal 1)

Instead, he spends his secondary school years fighting against what Lavelle (1993) describes as 'surface' writing: fulfilling the requirements of a teacher's assignment by reproducing its rules, conventions, and strategies. While Dana finds that this writing approach provides her the guidance and assurance to potentially receive an 'A,' Mumin on the other hand resents writing for "good grades" in order to "satisfy his teachers' goals of writing properly" (Journal 2). For him, it seems that deep writing cannot exist within the constraints of an institution that demands surface writing: "This part of my life was a big game changer as the sanctions forced on me by the new education system made me feel less of a writer" (Journal 1).

While Mumin eventually finds a sense of ‘deep’ purpose and meaning as a writer at university, in which he feels “passionate” about exploring a socially relevant topic for his argument essay (Journal 3), he still appears to lack a sense of agency at this point because of the inescapable grading requirements that dictate how he should write (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). As he explains, “But I got disappointed of myself again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn’t make it out of Probation this semester” (Journal 2). He begins to realize, however, that these regulations, such as earning “good grades” (Journal 2), have nothing to do with the act of writing itself; they are just one of the many enforced requirements of ‘surface’ writing. As he explains, “No matter what teachers think of someone’s writing, they must realize a student’s main focus should be enjoying themselves” (Journal 3). When he separates the rules, conventions, and strategies that comprise ‘surface’ writing from his own understanding of ‘deep’ purposeful writing, he states the following: “This gave me a sense that I should work hard for me—not to please someone else, like a professor or a parent, but to achieve to please myself” (Interview).

However, it seems Mumin still believes that ‘deep’ writing exists best outside of the confines of the classroom, which is why his imagined identity as a blogger, in both Arabic and English, takes place in the virtual world, far removed from the negative influences of ‘surface’ writing:

I started sharing some tweets in Twitter about my writing and I created a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, and I was thinking if I can write more why don’t I make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs in English as well. (Journal 3)

By finding a connection between his primary Discourse of Arabic and his secondary Discourse of English, in which Mumin is able to explore ‘deep’ interests in both discourses, his prior conflict between the two discourses, and ultimately the ‘surface’ regulations of academic writing, disappears. He explains, “Once you do that, you make peace with yourself” (Journal 3). This helps Mumin find a sense of agency in the classroom, as he states, “Now I am more confident about writing in

general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it" (Journal 3). Even more important, this willingness to accept both discourses also helps Mumin to consider engaging with, rather than resisting, the discourse community of his writing classroom at university (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In summary, Mumin's belief that academic discourse is a symbol of ideological conflict is based on him feeling forced to write in his secondary Discourse of English, especially during secondary school, rather than his preferred primary Discourse of Arabic. Mumin determines that academic writing is a generalized 'formula' centered on linguistic control that prevents him from writing about his own personal interests. Rather, according to Mumin, it forces him to fulfil his teachers' expectations by writing according to the requirements of an institutionalized system. Mumin therefore associates a 'deep' approach to writing, based on his own sense of personal meaning and investment, with writing in his primary Discourse of Arabic outside of a classroom context; whereas, to him, a 'surface' approach to writing is based on the rules, conventions, and strategies required of him when writing in his secondary Discourse of English inside the classroom. Eventually, Mumin comes to terms with the conflict he experiences between his two discourses, and thus academic writing, by exploring 'deep,' socially relevant interests in both discourses, which in turn, increases his sense of agency in the classroom. Mumin's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs, as based on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), also highlight how he invests in particular writing practices based on his own sense of agency as a writer in academic English.

Below, I will examine how sociocultural influences, based on Mumin's teachers, his family, and himself, position Mumin and impact his negotiations within the academic discourse community of his writing classrooms. This is supported by Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, which will address my fourth research question: *How do*



*sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*

## **6.8 Section IV: Mumin's Sociocultural Influences**

### ***How Mumin's Positionings as a Writer Impact His Negotiations Within the Discourse Community of His Writing Classrooms***

#### **6.8.1 Positioned by Teachers: Gatekeepers Upholding a Discourse of 'Power'**

As previously mentioned, Mumin felt unjustly treated by the teachers at his private, English-medium secondary school because he believed they “forced” him to use “proper academic writing” (Journal 1) based on a ‘surface’ approach. This contrasted greatly with the ‘deep’ approach he preferred to use in Arabic that allowed him to express his “spiritual and emotional side” (Journal 1). However, based on Mumin’s past descriptions of his teachers, they did not seem intentionally unjust in their expectations of him, but rather, it seems they were functioning as ‘gatekeepers’ by providing Mumin the conventions of a particular genre style so that he could work within a discourse community that required academic discourse in English (Lave & Wenger, 1991; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Hyland, 2013).

This is first evident when Mumin’s eighth grade teacher provides a PowerPoint presentation of “proper secondary school level essays” (Journal 1) so that his students would have an understanding of how to employ its rules the following year as writers. While Mumin highlights how his classmates did not question the standardized rules deemed necessary to write a “proper” essay (Journal 1), even considering them an “ordinary” part of their writing curriculum (Journal 1), he construes his teacher’s rules as evidence of a hidden “truth” about academic discourse (Journal 1) based on the following belief: Most students are unaware that they are being coerced into using a dominant discourse (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013), whose rules, Mumin believes, are designed as “sanctions” imposed upon those who desire to write differently than the standardized norm (Journal 2). Consequently, the positioning Mumin seems to have experienced in secondary

school is based on the implicit assumption, established in eighth grade, that one discourse is more important than the other, which is the hidden ‘power’ behind dominant discourses that schools and teachers often maintain in their function as gatekeepers (Davies & Harré, 1990; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013; Fairclough, 2014).

The institutionalized assumption that academic discourse is somehow the only legitimate and “proper” way to write (Journal 1) is at the heart of Mumin’s resistance as an academic writer (Davies & Harré, 1990), which is evident in his two major criticisms of the power he believes that this particular discourse wields over him. First, its “systematic and formulaic approach” (Journal 2) is unappealing to Mumin because it denies him the agency to write the way he wants; instead, he feels pressured to follow standardized guidelines that are based on his “teachers’ goals” to achieve “good grades” without considering his own motivations to write (Journal 2). And second, Mumin appears to feel delegitimized as a writer because he was never allowed to write about his own interests, as he explains, “My teachers in school forced us to write about what they want” (Journal 2).

However, it is important to note, Mumin appears to confuse his dislike for the “formulaic” requirements of academic discourse overall (Journal 1) with feeling “forced” to write in his secondary Discourse in English (Journal 1). Specifically, while Mumin claims that his “negative experiences with writing in high school” were “especially in English” (Journal 2), he never cites any language-specific examples that convey his difficulty with using the English language. Rather, his journal responses describe his struggle against writing in an institutionalized discourse—that just happens to be in English—in which he appears positioned by his teachers, and thus, the standards of academic writing in general (Davies and Harré, 1990). This is evident in Mumin’s generalizations about his writing experiences in secondary school, which he describes as follows, “The sanctions forced on me by the new education system made me feel like less of a writer” (Journal 1).

In addition, when Mumin is disappointed by receiving a 'C+' for summarizing an academic article at university, his self-protective behavior not only finds fault with the assignment itself for being uninteresting, but even more noteworthy, he vows to never write in English again and only write in Arabic (Interview). This places blame on the English language rather than the discursive requirements of the assignment or his own responsibilities as a student (Covington, 1984, 1997). Therefore, while Mumin may have been subjected to positioning based on his teachers' gatekeeping efforts when promoting academic discourse, it seems that Mumin confuses their enforced requirements of writing academically with forcing him to write in English (Davies and Harré, 1990).

This narrative contradiction, in which Mumin blames his secondary school teachers for all his negative writing experiences in English, will be addressed further in Section I of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants' contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **6.8.2 Positioned by Family: Enforcing English over Arabic**

Mumin's self-protective identity as a student coupled with his 'self-handicapping' behavior in the classroom conveys how willingly he blames external reasons, such as feeling "forced" to write in English (Journal 1), for the conflict he experiences surrounding English versus Arabic (Covington, 1984, 1997; De Castella, et al., 2013). However, it appears that Mumin's family, by repeatedly enrolling him in English-medium schools, also enforces the idea that English is more important than Mumin's home language in Arabic, thus contributing to Mumin's conflict between both languages (Davies & Harré, 1990). This is evident based on two major events in Mumin's life: When Mumin's father transfers him from an Arabic school to a private, English-medium secondary school, and, when Mumin's entire family moves from Sudan to the UAE so that he can eventually attend GAU after graduating from secondary school (Interview). It appears that Mumin's purposeful removal from an Arabic context to that of an English-speaking one creates a dichotomous relationship between both languages because he seems to equate

appropriating English as a negation of his previous identity in Arabic (Davies & Harré, 1990; Hagood, 2014).

Specifically, Mumin's writer identity in his primary Discourse, which was constructed by "spending memorable quality time" with his family (Journal 1), clashes with his secondary Discourse, which was constructed by force, beginning when his father made him attend a non-Arabic school after eighth grade: "My father wanted it. I had to go there for English" (Interview). Therefore, it appears that Mumin fears his identification with his secondary Discourse may mean a complete loss, or transformation, of his primary Discourse (Hagood, 2014), as he explains, "This idea of writing, which I hold dear to my heart, has been severely mutated due to contradictions I sensed in the new way I was made to understand writing" (Journal 1).

When Mumin and his family move from Sudan to the UAE, he continues to describe a path of enforcement in which he appears positioned by his family because they want him to focus on academic English and thus, in Mumin's mind, disregard Arabic (Davies & Harré, 1990). First, this occurs when his parents enroll him in English-intensive courses at the British Council in Dubai in order to improve his TOEFL scores before applying to GAU. Then, Mumin must attend a year-long, intensive English-language course through the university's Bridge Program to further develop his academic English skills. When he is finally accepted as a fully matriculated student at university, not only does he fail WRI 101, but he is put on academic probation. As Mumin points out, this is an additional source of conflict, specifically surrounding English, because he feels pressure by his parents to set a good example for his younger brother who is also expected to attend GAU (Interview).

However, while Mumin highlights repeated situations in which his family obliged him to study in English, from secondary school up until university, there is no evidence, at least in his journal and interview responses, that they denied him opportunities to use Arabic as well. Not only does Mumin continue to speak Arabic

at home with his family, considering it his most fluent spoken and written language (Questionnaire), but there is no indication that the “memorable quality time” (Journal 1) he spent writing in Arabic was prohibited by his parents in their desire to have him study English at school. Rather, it appears that these meaningful writing experiences in Arabic were put to an end by Mumin himself. This is evident when he describes a purposeful decision on his part to stop writing in Arabic during secondary school, as he states, “I stopped writing in my diary and turned my interest into other things, such as music and basketball, which made me feel a bit shallow and less connected to writing” (Journal 1).

While this decision makes him feel like “less of a writer” (Journal 2), Mumin does not provide further explanation as to why he stopped engaging with his primary Discourse in Arabic in response to feeling forced to write in his secondary Discourse in English. While Mumin may have been subjected to positioning because his family required him to attend English-medium schools, there is no indication that they forced him to choose one discourse over the other (Davies & Harré, 1990). Therefore, based on Mumin’s resistance toward writing in his secondary Discourse, it comes as a surprise that he constructs his imagined identity as a blogger not just in Arabic—but also in English—as motivation for engaging with the discourse community of his writing classroom.

This narrative omission, in which Mumin provides very little detail as to his sudden willingness to blog in English outside of school as motivation to engage with academic discourse inside of school, will be addressed further in Section II of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **6.8.3 Positioned by Self: Resisting Discourse Community (Until Finding Engagement)**

When Mumin describes his resistance toward academic discourse in secondary school, it is always centered on feeling forced to reproduce the writing standards imposed on him by his teachers (Davies & Harré, 1990). As he states,

I've had a lot of negative experiences with writing in English in high school, and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed; they didn't care about what their students might be interested in writing about. (Journal 2)

This suggests that Mumin's understanding of 'membership' within such a discourse community is based on replicating the normative standards required to write "proper secondary school level essays" (Journal 1), which entails mastering a set of academic writing skills through very focused practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, it appears that the "formula" (Interview) his secondary school teachers provided, which Mumin describes as "what to include in the introduction, what sort of things fit in the body, how to write a conclusion" (Journal 1), alienated him from the very discourse community that his teachers, while functioning as 'gatekeepers,' wanted him to integrate within by providing the guidelines for its particular genre style (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Hyland, 2013; White & Lowenthal, 2011). This is evident when Mumin describes how his teachers "responded" to his writing in such a way that all his encounters "to get good grades" and "satisfy [his] teachers' goals of writing properly" culminated in him feeling "like less of a writer" in the classroom (Journal 1).

Therefore, providing students specific rules and examples for the conventions of academic discourse does not always guarantee that they will feel like legitimate writers, which Dana so fervently believed when she followed the guidelines and sample essays available in her WRI 101 course at university (Davies & Harré, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Instead, in Mumin's case, it seems that the repeated practice of writing academic essays in his secondary Discourse, based on the structure and content valued by the institutionalized authorities of his school, delegitimizes his own personal values when writing in his primary Discourse (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Mumin explains about Arabic, "This idea of writing, which I hold dear to my heart, has been severely mutated due to contradictions I sensed in the new way I was made to understand writing" (Journal 1). Based on this, Mumin positions himself against the discourse community of his writing classroom by

turning his “interest into other things, such as music and basketball” (Journal 1) as a form of resistance to his teachers’ normative writing standards (Davies & Harré, 1990). Even though he describes himself as “shallow” at this point (Journal 1), indicating a concern over his decision, it appears that resisting his teachers’ efforts by not engaging with academic discourse is more important than trying to engage with academic discourse when it is not on his terms.

Mumin’s continued difficulties with reproducing the standards of academic discourse are evident when he fails his WRI 101 course after his first attempt. This suggests that Mumin’s resistance against academic discourse is also a self-protective excuse (Covington, 1984, 1997) for his overall difficulty to write at the level deemed necessary for “proper academic essays” (Journal 1). Even more noteworthy, when Mumin is finally given the opportunity to write about a topic of his choice during his second attempt at taking WRI 101—a concern Mumin has been lamenting since the end of eighth grade (Journal 1)—he still receives a low grade for his argument essay: “But I got disappointed of myself again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn’t make it out of Probation this semester” (Journal 2). Thus, writing about his own interests, rather than those of his teachers, is not a surefire solution to becoming a member of his writing classroom’s discourse community as based on Mumin’s ‘disappointing’ grade (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, it does indicate to Mumin that academic discourse, which he once called a “mutation” (Journal 1), has the potential to engage him beyond trying to replicate its formulaic standards. As he states, “Now I have a lot of feelings about writing and I started to be passionate about it again” (Journal 3).

This engagement is significant, I believe, because it offers Mumin the possibility of peripheral participation within a discourse community that he once resisted (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, when Mumin begins to address his academic motivations inside the classroom as a writer, he is able to connect them to his personal motivations outside of the classroom. Specifically, Mumin considers writing in English as part of his imagined identity as a blogger, which fulfills his own personal needs as an online writer rather than writing in English to fulfill the

institutionalized requirements of academic discourse or his “teachers’ goals of writing properly” (Journal 1). As he states,

I started sharing some tweets in Twitter about my writing and I created a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, and I was thinking if I can write more why don’t I make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs in English as well. And it became one of my new goals, and hopefully after finishing writing 102 I will start working on it. (Journal 2)

Based on this, Mumin discovers that he can shuttle between two different discourse communities—one in his secondary Discourse in English and one in his primary Discourse in Arabic—as opposed to resisting one discourse community in favor of the other (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It also appears that the alliance Mumin has forged between his two clashing discourses has given him a sudden surge of confidence in his abilities as an academic writer in English. As he states, “But now I am more confident about writing in general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it” (Journal 3).

However, by positioning himself as a “good writer” (Journal 3) after years of feeling the opposite, Mumin seems to assume that an avid interest in one’s essay topic is all it takes to ensure his success the following semester. By ignoring other factors that may possibly contribute to his future success in WRI 102, such as his innate interest in sharing his writing with others; finding a connection between his primary and secondary Discourses; and an additional year of peripheral practice within the discourse community of his writing classroom, Mumin gives full credit to his WRI 101 argument essay for his transformation from a resistant writer in academic English to one who has “made peace with [him]self” (Journal 3).

Such purposeful narrative inclusions, in which Mumin suddenly claims to welcome writing in his secondary Discourse of English, will be addressed further in Section III of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.



## 6.9 Conclusion

In summary, Mumin feels positioned by his secondary school teachers in their role as gatekeepers who upheld academic discourse as a form of 'power' by making him follow the formulaic conventions of its genre style. This results in Mumin feeling delegitimized as a writer in his secondary Discourse in English because he feels forced to write the way his teachers want and not according to his own interests and motivations in his primary Discourse in Arabic. In addition, Mumin's family contributes to his linguistic conflict by enrolling him in English-medium schools for secondary school and university, thus enforcing the belief that academic discourse in English is more important than his home language in Arabic. Mumin positions himself based on his own perceptions of what it means to be a member of the discourse community in his writing classroom, which to him, entails replicating the normative standards required to write academic essays. This prompts him to resist academic discourse throughout his schooling until he has an opportunity to write about an essay topic of his choice for his WRI 101 assignment. After this experience, Mumin realizes that he can, indeed, engage with his writing classroom's discourse community, albeit at the periphery, beyond trying to replicate its formulaic standards. The several positionings that Mumin experiences, as based on Davies & Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, culminate in Mumin's eventual realization that engagement at the periphery can lead to a growing confidence in his abilities as an academic writer in English.

While Mumin's narrative identity construction allows for an understanding of how he perceived his identity as an enforced writer, it should be noted again that narratives are subjective constructions, not reflections of reality (Bruner, 1987). They are self-perceptions unique to one's own life. Therefore, in sections I through III of Chapter 8, I will analyze three major areas in Mumin's written journal responses that represent contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions when Mumin constructs his writer identity in written form. These are as follows: (1) contradictions in his narrative identity construction: confusing his secondary school teachers' requirements of writing in academic discourse with forcing him to write in

English; (2) omissions in his narrative identity construction: not describing his sudden willingness to use English outside of school as motivation to engage with the discourse community inside his writing classroom; and (3) purposeful inclusions in his narrative identity construction: claiming his argument essay is solely responsible for his future interest in WRI 102.

In addition, the contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions apparent in Mumin's narrative identity construction comprise to represent a specific type of narrative that Alexander (2011) refers to as the rebel-narrative form, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**PRASHANT'S WRITER IDENTITY:**  
**The Weak Writer**

**7.1 Introduction**

In Section I of this chapter, the construction of Prashant's writer identity is based on a past-present-future story arc that follows three major stages in Prashant's life in which he constructs, interprets, and re-constructs his identity as a 'weak' writer. Stage One describes Prashant's self-blame for his difficulties with academic writing in secondary school; Stage Two describes Prashant's avoidance of his own responsibility as an academic writer at university; and Stage Three describes Prashant's decision to rectify his mistakes as an academic writer in the future.

The narrative construction of Prashant's writer identity is further categorized into five chronological scenes, as follows: (1) the public shame he experiences by his secondary school teachers for his writing limitations in English; (2) his embarrassment that he is the 'weakest writer' in his class; (3) his attempt to write very carefully with the hope that his secondary school teachers stop treating him as 'weak'; (4) his fears, motivations, and writing approaches as a first-year writing student at university: having to write 'beyond the basic principles' of what is already familiar; blaming others for his writing mistakes; avoiding responsibility for not following his essay requirements; and finally, (5) his belief that he can learn from his mistakes by rectifying them in his future writing course at university.

In Section II of this chapter, I examine the motivations behind Prashant's learner, expected, and imagined identities and how they impact his overall identity as a weak writer. This consists of Prashant's learner identity as a failure-acceptor; his expected identity as an avoidant writer; and his imagined identity as a rectifier of all his writing mistakes.

In Part III of this chapter, I examine Prashant's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs and how they impact his overall

identity as a weak writer. This is based on his belief that academic discourse is a symbol of correctness based on the norms of Standard English; his belief that correcting his surface-level mistakes is more important than acquiring new genre structures; and his 'surface' approach to writing with 'surface' limitations.

Last, in Part IV of this chapter, I explore how sociocultural influences impact Prashant's negotiations within the discourse communities of his writing classrooms, and subsequently, his overall identity as a weak writer. This consists of positionings *by* Prashant's secondary school teachers, in which they act as gatekeepers upholding a pedagogy of 'teacher misbehavior'; positionings *against* Prashant's selfsame teachers, in which he endorses a 'bias of blame' by making them responsible for his grammar mistakes in English; and positionings *by* Prashant, himself, in which he excludes himself from the discourse community of his writing classrooms while still believing he can eventually join them in the future.

**Appendix III** provides Prashant's journal responses; **Appendix XI** provides Prashant's questionnaire data; and **Appendix XIII** provides Prashant's interview transcript, all of which I refer to in this chapter.

The stages and scenes of Prashant's writer identity construction are presented below in Section I and will address my first research question: *How do first-year writing students in an American-style university in the Gulf construct their narrative identities as writers?*

## **7.2 Section I: Prashant's Narrative Identity Construction**

### ***Three Major Stages of Prashant's Writer Identity***

#### **7.2.1 Background Summary**

##### **Prashant's Linguistic and Educational Background**

Prashant is an 18-year-old Indian male who moved to the UAE when he was one year old. His native language is Hindi and it is the language he speaks at home with his family (Questionnaire). He attended a bilingual Hindi and English school from age four up until age seven, and after that point, he attended a private Indian

school in Ras al-Khaima (an emirate in the UAE) from first grade up until the end of twelfth grade (Questionnaire). Prashant's elementary and secondary schools, which are reflective of the widespread 'national' schools in the UAE, are available to students whose homeland is India (Vora, 2013); thus, they are structured solely on an Indian curriculum that provides daily Hindi classes but the overall medium of instruction is in English (Interview). Based on this experience, Prashant considers English to be his most fluent spoken language, even though he "comes from a family where we don't speak English at all" (Interview). However, he still believes Hindi to be his most fluent written language (Questionnaire), although, as he points out, "I'm never writing in Hindi these days" (Interview).

This is Prashant's first semester attending GAU, and unlike Dana and Mumin, he does not discuss his parents' intentions for him to attend this particular university. Instead, he highlights the influence of his secondary school teachers who made him feel blamed, ashamed, and criticized for being the "weakest in [his] English class" (Journal 1). Prashant's identity as an academic writer is therefore shaped by his previous teachers' customary practice to "embarrass" him in the classroom (Journal 1) to such an extent that he felt inadequate and incompetent when writing in academic English throughout much of his schooling.

While Prashant's linguistic and educational background provide a brief understanding of his academic writer identity, the three major stages of Prashant's narrative identity construction, which are further divided into five chronological scenes, offer a much more detailed account of how Prashant perceives his identity as a 'weak' writer.

### **7.2.2 Stage One: Prashant's Self-Blame (for His Difficulty with Academic Writing)**

*Scene 1:*

*Sense of Self as a Student in Secondary School: Embarrassed by His Limitations*

Prashant recalls that he always felt criticized by his teachers during secondary school for various limitations on his part regarding his writing skills, which resulted

in “most of [his] high school experiences containing embarrassing moments” (Journal 1). However, he never felt angry or offended by his teachers’ comments, nor did he believe that their assessments were unjustified. Instead, Prashant acknowledges that his writing abilities, and overall English-language proficiency, did, indeed, warrant criticism:

My way of writing was to some extent criticized by my teachers. My essays were sometimes written more than the limit or sometimes less. But my most common mistakes are my grammar mistakes.

(Journal 1)

Yet, even with such recurrent moments of embarrassment, Prashant claims that he “appreciated” his teachers’ criticism because he felt such comments made him a better student (Journal 1). “I studied in schools where teachers would like to embarrass the students to teach them a lesson,” explains Prashant, “so that they don’t repeat it and remember it forever” (Journal 1). While he does not go into detail regarding how he improved as a student, Prashant firmly believes that the criticism he received from his teachers was necessary. As he states,

In all of the embarrassing moments I have come across, I have always learned something very important from my mistakes and I have always tried to improve my writing skills as it is very important to get good grades. (Journal 1)

Scene II:

Negative Writing Experience: “Weakest in the Class”

Prashant describes a time in ninth grade that he characterizes as “the most embarrassing moment in my life” after his teacher told him he “was dumb” in front of Prashant’s entire class (Journal 1). This occurred because Prashant was not able to accurately convey the main idea of the book he was assigned to read (Journal 1). As he explains further,

We had to read a few chapters in our novel and based on those chapters, write an essay on what we learnt from the chapter and what is the message the writer is trying to convey. (Journal 1)

While he believes the assignment was easy for others, it “just turned out to be a blunder” for him because his essay did not relate to the teacher’s assignment question (Journal 1). When his teacher told him to read his essay out loud in front of the class, Prashant says he “became a laughing stock” (Journal 1). As he explains further,

At first I thought that my teacher liked my project very much but when I read it in the class, I was ashamed of myself. I had wished that why did the teacher even give me the project and even if she did why did she tell me to read it out loud. (Journal 1)

When Prashant describes his teacher’s motivation for such an action, he echoes his previous comment that it was very common for teachers at his secondary school to use public humiliation as a way to encourage their students to learn. “Maybe she was trying to embarrass me,” he explains, “or maybe, let’s embarrass him so he can improve himself” (Interview). Upon further reflection, he states,

That was when I figured out the question which was disturbing me. Every teacher has its own way of teaching their students and that was her way. My teacher wanted me to understand my mistake in the best possible way and never wanted me to forget about it. (Journal 1)

However, while Prashant provides a rationale for his teacher’s actions, even referring to her teaching style as the ‘best possible way’ for him to learn, his next comment belies such compassion: “After that, everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class” (Journal 1).

### *Scene III:*

#### *Sense of Self as a Writer in Secondary School: “Super Careful” yet Still Weak*

Prashant continued to be criticized by his teachers throughout secondary school for his overall style of writing; going above or below the word limit of an assignment; being “completely out of topic” on his essays (Journal 1); and most commonly, for his “grammar mistakes” (Journal 1). He responded to these never-ending comments by trying to be “super careful on [his] essay or article writing” (Journal 1), which included the following:

I started reading each and every question more than a thousand times. I kept reading a question until it got stuck in my head. This helped me think more about my writing due to repeated readings of the question.

(Journal 1)

However, even after making these adjustments when approaching his essay assignments, he “still made lots of errors due to which many teachers made fun of [him]” (Journal 2). He admits, though, that he never took the initiative to ask his teachers for help so he could understand how to follow their directions; he would just wait for their comments after he submitted his essay assignments in the hope that he would learn “something very important from [his] mistakes” (Journal 1). Waiting for his teachers’ feedback with the assumption that he would learn from his mistakes for future essay assignments did not seem to improve Prashant’s academic writing during secondary school. Instead, he continued to make a series of endless “mistakes” (Journal 1), which he describes as a collection of his “most embarrassing moments” (Journal 2). This “weakness in writing,” according to Prashant, “followed him around” throughout secondary school and up until the moment he entered WRI 101 at university (Journal 2).

### **7.2.3 Stage Two: Prashant’s Avoidance (of His own Responsibility as an Academic Writer)**

*Scene IV:*

*Fears, Motivations, and Approaches as a First-Year Writing Student at University*

*Fear: Writing “Beyond the Basic Principles” of What Is Already Familiar*

When Prashant first entered his WRI 101 course, he says that he did not feel prepared for “the most advanced writing course I will be doing in my life” (Journal 2). As he explains further,

I’m not saying I haven’t learnt English in high school. I have, but writing 101 is something beyond the basic principles of writing and it is quite difficult as it is something really new for me. (Journal 2)



He points out that even though he faced writing difficulties during secondary school, it “was completely different as we could write in whatever way we wanted to” (Journal 2). However, “the university level course changes that,” according to Prashant, because he is now required to find academic sources for his essay assignments (Journal 2). Based on this new expectation, Prashant states that “it took [him] time to understand what this course is actually about,” which in turn, made his “first essay experience not go as good as [he] dreamt it” (Journal 2).

While Prashant does not describe how he envisioned the outcome of his first writing experience, he is much more precise about the difficulties he experienced during the writing process itself. First, he asks rhetorically, “How could it go well as I was completely new to this course?” (Journal 2). Then, he discusses his mistaken assumption that “the first essay would be fun as I had decided to write something which interested me a lot” (Journal 2). Instead, he quickly realizes,

Here comes the main drawback of this course. When writing for an academic course you simply cannot write something on your own like before. You need the support of good academic sources. If one lacks good academic sources, you are put into a dilemma. (Journal 2)

Therefore, while Prashant is concerned about using unfamiliar genre structures once at university, he seems even more troubled by the expectation itself in which he will have to write “beyond the basic principles” of what he already knows (Journal 2). Prashant instead appears to view these new requirements as a “dilemma” he would much rather avoid (Journal 2) and reaffirms his previous beliefs about his writing abilities: “I sometimes feel like I will always be weak in English” (Journal 2).

#### Motivation: Blaming Others for His Mistakes

While Prashant previously depicted his secondary school teachers in an understanding light, even claiming that he “appreciated” their criticism because it helped him “improve” as a writer (Journal 1), he now begins to shift his stance about their teaching capabilities. Once at university, he blames his secondary

school teachers for his current difficulties in WRI 101, specifically regarding his ongoing struggle to further develop his grammar skills. As he states, “Sometimes I think if my teachers were much better in English I might have already improved now” (Journal 2), citing the fact that they were Indian and therefore not native-English speaking teachers (Interview). According to Prashant, a clear indication of their English-language limitations was their use of “common grammar mistakes, like saying ‘threwed’ instead of ‘threw’” (Interview). Thus, Prashant appears to blame his own grammar mistakes on his former teachers, somehow forgetting that he once accepted their criticism and agreed to their assessments that his “most common mistakes” as a writing student were, indeed, his “grammar mistakes” (Journal 1). He further explains that he found it difficult to gain fluency in English because, as he stresses, “I come from a school where even the teachers have weak English” (Interview).

*Writing Approach: Avoiding Responsibility for the Requirements*

Before Prashant wrote his argument essay, he claims to have “read each and every direction more than a thousand times to avoid making mistakes” (Journal 2). However, his writing approach, upon discussing the outcome of his first major assignment, seems to contradict such detailed attention to the requirements:

Important parts of my essay like the ‘Thesis Statement’ and the ‘Introduction’ were really weak since they didn’t follow the directions. My essay should have mainly focused on the audience, according to my Professor, but it didn’t. Even I sometimes now think that I should have directed my essay’s focus towards the audience. (Journal 2)

In addition, Prashant’s habitual practice of finding excuses for his writing “mistakes” (Journal 1) is apparent when he tries to blame his “difficult” topic for his inability to find “good sources” (Journal 2). As he states,

I had chosen a difficult topic, but I thought if I spend time on my research, I might get good sources. Unfortunately it did not happen as my way as I didn’t choose a common topic which can give you academic sources very easily. (Journal 2)

Such observations, while specific to his argument essay, echo previous comments by Prashant in which he admitted to being “completely out of topic” on his essay assignments in secondary school (Journal 1). While Prashant is indeed aware of his tendency to disregard certain requirements of an assignment, as evident by his discussion of these occurrences on two separate occasions in his journal responses, he does not seem to consider his past motives in secondary school or explain why he continues to disregard his current instructor’s essay requirements at university. Instead, his only clarification is as follows: “Midway, I even thought of changing the topic but I had come way too far and I saw no way of rectifying my mistake” (Journal 2).

#### **7.2.4 Stage Three: Prashant’s Rectification (of His Academic Writing Mistakes)**

*Scene V:*

*Sense of Self as a Writer in University: “I’ve Learned a Lot from My Mistakes”*

Prashant attributes the many mistakes he has made during his WRI 101 course for helping him understand what he has been “missing” as an academic writer throughout his schooling (Journal 3). As he states,

My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. (Journal 3)

However, it is unclear what Prashant actually believes he was “missing” as a writer, and, even more important, how this “missing” element has prevented him from writing “in a much better way” during secondary school or at university (Journal 3). This is further evident in the following statement when Prashant claims he can improve on all his future assignments without specifying how: “I can always improve myself, if not on this essay, then definitely on the second essay, and I can improve in the exact same way for my third essay as well” (Journal 3).

In fact, Prashant is still quick to acknowledge that he is a “weak” writer (Journal 3), especially when envisioning his upcoming writing course the following semester:

“Writing 102 will be something really advanced, well at least for me as my background in writing studies is quite weak” (Journal 3). At the same time, Prashant’s tendency to provide excuses for his writing difficulties, while also imagining himself as a more-improved writer, helps him look toward the future on a hopeful note. As he states,

I will be able to handle my writing 102 course in a much better way than I did on my first semester for writing 101 because I was very new to this course and I was still learning. (Journal 3)

This ability to envision himself as an academic writer in the best possible light also allows Prashant to take something quite undesirable—his mistakes—and turn them into something advantageous: a chance to “rectify” all his past writing weaknesses (Journal 3). He explains,

My future self for writing 102 next semester will be way better than the one in the current semester because he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester for a much more advanced academic writing course. (Journal 3)

### **7.3 Conclusion**

In summary, Prashant has constructed his identity as a weak writer by first establishing himself as a student embarrassed by his writing limitations in Scene I of his narrative. In Scene II, he further establishes his sense of humiliation by highlighting how his secondary school teachers publicly shamed him for being the ‘weakest’ writer in his class. In Scene III, Prashant describes how he tried to write carefully, but even he agreed with his teachers’ assessments that he was still indeed a ‘weak’ writer. However, in Scene IV, after entering university, Prashant begins to avoid responsibility for his writing difficulties, even blaming his secondary school teachers for his prolific grammar mistakes. In Scene V, Prashant’s tendency to imagine himself as a more-improved writer, even when unfounded, helps him believe that he will be able to ‘rectify’ all his writing mistakes the following semester at university.

These scenes, which support the three major stages of Prashant's story arc (self-blame, avoidance, rectification), also comprise to represent a specific type of narrative form that Alexander (2011) refers to as the victim-narrative form. In order to adhere to this particular narrative form, certain contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions were present in Prashant's construction of his writer identity, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.

Below, I will examine the motivational strategies that impact Prashant's learner, expected, and imagined identities as a writer, as based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, which will address my second research question: *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*

#### **7.4 Section II: Prashant's Motivational Strategies**

##### ***How Prashant's Learner, Expected, and Imagined Identities***

##### ***Impact Him as a Writer***

##### **7.4.1 Learner Identity: The Failure-Acceptor**

According to Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, learners who are largely fueled by the desire to protect their self-esteem in the face of ongoing difficulty are considered 'failure acceptors,' which is often reflective in Prashant's behavior as a student. Specifically, his internalized self-worth as a learner is often heightened by the continuous criticism and public shaming of his secondary school teachers who belittle Prashant for his inability to write academically according to their standards (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). As he states about his teachers' pedagogical practices, "I studied in schools where teachers would like to embarrass their students to teach them a lesson" (Journal 1). This learning context, in which Prashant feels like the "weakest" writer in his class (Journal 1), influences him to use a form of 'self-handicapping' behavior that is similar to the self-protective behavior displayed by Mumin; however, failure-acceptors are distinct from self-protectors because of their 'learned helplessness' in which they feel that there is little hope to alter their situation when facing impending failure (De Castella, et al., 2013). This is evident when Prashant recounts various factors that

interfered with his writing abilities at university, as well as his reasons for not taking any action to prevent a negative outcome on his argument essay:

When writing for an academic course you simply cannot write something on your own like before. You need the support of good academic sources. If one lacks good academic sources, you are put into a dilemma. I had chosen a difficult topic, but I thought if I spend time on my research, I might get good sources. Unfortunately it did not happen as my way as I didn't choose a common topic which can give you academic sources very easily. (Journal 2)

Specifically, even though Prashant admits he did not perform well on his argument essay because he chose a topic that did not render enough sources, he also did not take the initiative to change his topic to one that would have actually provided the sources he needed for a more positive outcome. Instead, he passively accepts his failure, as he states, "Midway, I even thought of changing the topic but I saw no way of rectifying my mistake" (Journal 2). His sense of Perceived Academic Control (PAC), based on impending mistakes, influences him at this point to not make the necessary corrections because he assumes his outcome, no matter his efforts, will still remain the same (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015).

By anticipating that he would do poorly on his argument essay, and even blaming his status as a new university student for his poor performance, Prashant appears to maintain the perception of himself as a weak writer. As he states about his first writing assignment, "It didn't go as good as I dreamt of it to be. How could it go well as I was completely new to this course?" (Journal 2). He even tends to view his "weakness in writing" (Journal 2) as something that follows him around, almost independent of himself, from secondary school up until university (Journal 1). And, once at university, Prashant continues to treat his writing difficulties as akin to an outside force, just beyond his control, which he can only dream about improving in the future rather than amend in reality. He explains further, "I can always improve myself, if not on this essay, then definitely on the second, and I can improve in the exact same way for third essay as well" (Journal 3). Thus, the context of Prashant's

learning environment, and his subsequent identity as a failure-acceptor, help form the foundation for Prashant's expected and imagined identities, respectively, as he continues to create self-handicapping excuses and maintain a form of learned helplessness when he writes academically (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; De Castella, et al., 2013).

#### **7.4.2 Expected Identity: The Avoidant Writer**

Prashant's expected identity is shaped by sociocultural influences that continue to stem from the derogatory demands of his secondary school teachers who "like to embarrass the students to teach them a lesson" (Journal 1). Since this identity is based on the obligations of external factors, such as Prashant's highly critical teachers, Higgins (1987) describes this trait as an 'ought-to' self because it is not based on Prashant's needs and desires, but rather, the expectations of others. However, while Prashant tries to prevent further embarrassing "mistakes" (Journal 1) that he is accused of making over and over again by using an *avoidance* approach (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), the opposite outcome occurs: "After that, everything I did was a mistake" (Journal 1).

To explicate, Prashant's efforts to *avoid* negative outcomes, such as his various grammar mistakes or his continuous practice of being "completely out of topic" on his essay assignments (Journal 1), only perpetuate his feelings of "weakness" as a writer (Journal 2). This occurs in the following way: In his attempt to avoid his 'feared' self, or rather, the person he is afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Higgins, 1987), Prashant does not seek out strategic approaches that would help him improve as a writer because he is too busy *fearing* what he does not want to become: weak. Rather, he waits for his "mistakes" (Journal 1) to occur so that he can endeavor to "rectify" them after his teachers' feedback (Journal 3), but this only results in a continuous cycle of criticism. As he affirms, "I still made lots of errors due to which many teachers made fun of me" (Journal 1).

While 'fear' can indeed be a powerful source of motivation, as in the case of Dana and her over-striving behavior, with Prashant, as a failure-acceptor, he passively

accepts his teachers' assessments that he is a 'weak' writer and positions himself according to this view. As he states, "I sometimes feel like I will always be weak in English" (Journal 2). His sense of Perceived Academic Control (PAC) is therefore based on an 'externally imposed responsibility,' as opposed to an 'internally accepted responsibility,' which is the difference between 'being held responsible' by outside expectations forced upon him and 'feeling internally responsible' for his own learning outcomes (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Fishman, 2014; Collie, et al., 2015). Based on this lack of internal responsibility, Prashant seems to believe there is nothing he can do to change his academic outcomes, which is perhaps the reason he does not ask his secondary school teachers for help to ensure that he is not "completely out of topic" before submitting his essay assignments (Journal 1).

While this may be a result of his damaged student-teacher relationships based on shaming practices in the classroom (Kearney, et al., 1991), it is also an indication that Prashant does not have a sense of academic control to approach his teachers for help during the writing process (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015). Instead, he depends on his teachers to tell him what is wrong with his writing only after it has been submitted, which impacts the way he perceives his imagined identity at university (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

#### **7.4.3 Imagined Identity: The Rectifier**

Prashant's imagined identity as a rectifier of all his writing mistakes is shaped by his intrinsic motivation to avoid being perceived as a weak writer while still trying to deflect the extrinsic motivations of his secondary school teachers who have criticized him for his writing difficulties (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). However, it appears that Prashant can only perceive himself based on the extrinsic obligations of his teachers even when visualizing his imagined self as a writer (Higgins, 1987; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Markus and Nurius (1986) describe this type of identity as an 'ideal' self and it is based on vivid self-images for the future that are considered the driving force behind students' internal motivations (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Since ideal selves conceptualize a person's unrealized potential by drawing on one's hopes and fantasies, they are often considered a 'prerequisite' for future success,



and when they are absent, as in Prashant's case, there is little chance for students to create and define their own personal motivations in the classroom (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This is evident when Prashant states,

My future self for writing 102 next semester will be way better than the one in the current semester because he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester for a much more advanced academic writing course. (Journal 3)

While Prashant does, indeed, visualize himself as a more-improved writer in the future, he lacks the vivid self-image that exemplifies Dana's personal desire to debate for her university or Mumin's personal desire to be a blogger in Arabic and English. Instead, Prashant's vision of his imagined self appears to still be linked to his 'feared' self, or rather, the person who will continue to be a "weak" writer (Journal 1) with repeated "mistakes" that need "rectifying" (Journal 2). As he states,

My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. (Journal 3)

While this fear, as previously stated, can ostensibly be a motivating factor to high-achieving students such as Dana, it should also be coupled with a positive self-image—rather than a negative one—in order for students to envision their hypothetical imagined selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that Prashant does not envision a 'positive' imagined self since he also does not produce 'positive' academic outcomes in the classroom. This is evident when he states, after years of schooling in English, "I sometimes feels like I will always be weak in English" (Journal 2).

To further explain, if Prashant were to take more responsibility for his academic setbacks and attribute them to something internal and controllable, such as not following the directions of his essay assignment (Journal 1), then he would potentially follow his assignment's directions in the future in order to avoid a repetition of the outcome (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Fishman, 2014; Collie, et al.,

2015). In contrast, since he mainly perceives his academic setbacks as being external and uncontrollable, such as being labeled “weak” by his teachers (Journal 1), he appears to feel there is nothing he can do to change his academic outcomes in the future (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015). Prashant’s lack of Perceived Academic Control (PAC) in the classroom seems to hinder his ability to envision and construct an imagined self in which he is, indeed, in control of his own self-image. Instead, he has defined himself against the external and uncontrollable views of his highly critical teachers. Therefore, the parallels between Prashant’s expected identity and his imagined identity continue to negatively impact his beliefs about his own competences as a writer, including his future negotiations within the discourse community of his writing classrooms (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

## 7.5 Conclusion

In summary, Prashant’s learner identity as a failure-accepting student is based on internalized feelings of weakness and shame that are influenced by his secondary school teachers’ overly critical feedback and use of public humiliation in the classroom. Moreover, Prashant’s expected identity as an avoidant writer is motivated by trying to *avoid* the very mistakes that he is constantly accused of making. However, this results in Prashant fearing what he does not want to become—a weak writer—which only contributes to his continued mistakes as an academic writer at university. As a result, Prashant’s imagined identity appears to still be linked to the ‘feared’ self embedded within his expected identity, or rather, the person he fears will continue to make repeated mistakes that need rectifying the following semester in WRI 102. The motivations surrounding Prashant’s learner, expected, and imagined identities, as based on Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Covington’s (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, also pave the way for Prashant’s ideological and attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English as he struggles with his negotiations and membership within the discourse community of his writing classroom at university.

Below, I will examine how ideological beliefs about English impact Prashant’s attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and beliefs about writing,

as based on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), which will address my third research question: *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes about writing?*

## **7.6 Section III: Prashant's Ideological and Attitudinal Beliefs**

### ***How Prashant's Attitudes toward Academic Discourse, Genre Structures, and Writing Impact Him as a Writer***

#### **7.6.1 Academic Discourse: Symbol of Correctness**

Prashant highlights how his secondary school teachers privileged standard-language ideologies about English, common in the UAE, which uphold English as a symbol of 'correctness' (Fairclough, 2014; Goodwin, 2016; Solloway, 2016). While his teachers enforced written accuracy in the classroom, as evident by their criticisms of his "grammar mistakes" (Journal 1), Prashant explains that he "still made lots of errors due to which many teachers made fun of me" (Journal 1). As his secondary Discourse, Prashant does not consider himself a fluent writer in English, even though he has attended English-medium schools since first grade (Questionnaire). Yet, perhaps this lack of confidence in his own abilities as an academic writer was aggravated by his secondary school teachers' focus on his grammar mistakes, which seems to impact Prashant till this day: "I still make lots of grammatical errors due to which many people make fun of me" (Journal 1).

In fact, it appears that this enforced precision backfired in Prashant's case because his failure-accepting behavior made him feel that there was little hope in ever improving his writing and grammar mistakes during secondary school (Covington, 1984, 1997). As he affirms, "Everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class" (Journal 1). In addition, Prashant's perceived sense of failure as a 'correct' writer in his secondary Discourse is further exacerbated by his teachers' reliance on public-shaming techniques (Kearney, et al, 1991), which is evident in the following statement: "I have studied in schools where teachers would like to embarrass the students to teach them a lesson so that they don't repeat it and remember it forever" (Journal 1). Unlike Mumin, he was capable enough to achieve the TOEFL scores required by GAU for acceptance as a fully matriculated

student, but he still felt inadequate as a writer when he entered his WRI 101 course for the very first time. As he states, “My weakness in writing skills has been following me from elementary to high school and even in the university level” (Journal 1).

Even though surface-level mechanics are deemed necessary to write academically, they are rarely taught—or re-addressed—based on the assumption that they were previously learned in other classes (Goodwin, 2016). With Prashant, for example, it appears that he never learned how to be a ‘correct’ writer in secondary school since it was already assumed by his teachers that he should be aware of all his “grammar mistakes,” and even more important, never “repeat” them (Journal 1). Instead, by highlighting his mistakes “so he can improve himself” (Journal 1), Prashant’s teachers negatively impacted his investment in learning by making him believe that he would always be the “weakest” (Journal 1) in his English class (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

Even worse, by consistently judging his abilities as ‘incorrect,’ Prashant not only believes, but eventually performs, according to his teachers’ expectations (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015). As he explains,

The worst was with my English teacher to the extent that she once told me I was dumb because I didn't know how to write an essay. After that, I felt I was the weakest in English in my class. Everything I did was a mistake. (Journal 1)

Based on this, Prashant continues to fulfill his expected identity as an avoidant writer in which he feels a lack of agency in the classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), and, in his quest to finally feel ‘correct,’ his imagined identity as a rectifier of his all writing mistakes is pursued with even more intensity while at university.

## **7.6.2 Genre Structures: Less Important than Correcting Surface-Level Mistakes**

Prashant never mentions a particular genre structure he was made to follow during secondary school, perhaps because he was so consumed by his secondary school teachers' focus on his surface-level errors and their need to correct his "mistakes" (Journal 1). However, when comparing the essay requirements between his teachers' expectations in secondary school and those of his writing instructor at university, Prashant makes the following observation: "It was completely different as we could write in whatever way we wanted" (Journal 2). As such, Prashant's understanding of his teachers' writing expectations in secondary school seem to contradict his previous descriptions of their rigid adherence to accuracy and his own dependency on their criticism as a way to "always learn something very important from [his] mistakes" (Journal 1). Based on his past descriptions, Prashant had to respond to very specific questions for each essay assignment, as evident in the following statement in which he vowed to be "super careful" (Journal 1) with all his future writing:

I started reading each and every question more than a thousand times. I kept reading a question until it got stuck in my head. This helped me think more about my writing due to repeated readings of the question. (Journal 1)

In fact, the negative writing experience that Prashant encountered in ninth grade "just turned out to be a blunder" (Journal 1) because, according to him, he was "completely out of topic" (Journal 1) and did not adhere to the specific requirements of his teacher's assignment. The requirements are specified by Prashant as follows: "Write an essay on what we learnt from the chapter and what is the message the writer is trying to convey" (Journal 1). Therefore, it seems that Prashant's teachers did, indeed, assign explicit, genre-specific essay assignments that required much more than letting students "write in whatever way [they] wanted" (Journal 2); rather, it appears that Prashant was unaware of the particular genre structures he had to practice during secondary school because his teachers tended to highlight his "mistakes" regarding grammar and his overall English-

language proficiency (Journal 1). As he states about that time, “Everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class” (Journal 1). Just like Dana and Mumin, he seems to view academic discourse as a single set of generic skills (Hyland, 2013), but whereas they focused on its prestige or dominance, respectively, Prashant does not see past the surface-level mechanics of its genre structures—and especially, its ability to make him feel a lack of agency in the classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

Once at university, Prashant is better able to recognize a major, genre-specific difference between his secondary school essays and the argument essay required for his WRI 101 course. As he explains,

Here comes the main drawback of this course. When writing for an academic course you simply cannot write something on your own like before. You need the support of good academic sources. If one lacks good academic sources, you are put into a dilemma. (Journal 2)

While he is also able to identify other genre-specific features of the argument essay, such as the “thesis statement,” “introduction,” and “audience” (Journal 2), he has difficulty producing them or following the assignment’s directions, as he states, “Midway, I even thought of changing the topic but I had come way too far and I saw no way of rectifying my mistakes” (Journal 2). Unlike Dana who wants to master this new genre, or Mumin who begins to value its relevance to his personal interests, Prashant is “put into a dilemma” (Journal 2) because he is expected to acquire these additional, genre-specific skills. Instead, he longs for the “basic principles of writing” (Journal 2), which are admittedly difficult but at least familiar to him:

I’m not saying I haven’t learnt English in high school. I have, but Writing 101 is something beyond the basic principles of writing and it is quite difficult as it is something really new for me. (Journal 2)

His habitual practice of focusing on surface-level mistakes, rather than attempting to acquire new genre structures, is evident when he envisions himself in WRI 102 the next semester as an academic writer who will “overcome the mistakes”

(Journal 3) of his past without anticipating the future demands of a higher-level writing course:

My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. (Journal 3)

In fact, it appears that the only time Prashant feels a sense of engagement and investment in his own writing is when he attempts to “rectify” (Journal 2) his past, present, and imagined-future mistakes (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

### **7.6.3 Writing Beliefs: A ‘Surface’ Approach with ‘Surface’ Limitations**

As a failure-accepting student who relies on his teachers’ criticisms to improve his writing “mistakes” (Journal 1), Prashant does not pursue the ‘deep’ approach to writing (Lavelle, 1993) that Dana is able to achieve through the drafting and revision process of her argument essay, or Mumin, who writes for personal meaning and engagement about topics that are relevant to his own life. This lack of Perceived Academic Control (PAC), in which Prashant feels little or no ‘internal responsibility’ for his learning outcomes (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Fishman, 2014; Collie, et al., 2015), shapes his beliefs about writing and his desire to invest, or not invest, in academic discourse (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

Specifically, Prashant believes that a ‘surface’ approach to writing (Lavelle, 1993), in which he relies on his teachers’ corrections to improve his essay assignments, is an effective strategy because he feels that he has “always learned something very important from [his] mistakes” (Journal 1).

However, once at university, Prashant’s continued reliance on a ‘surface’ approach only encourages him to ignore the additional, genre-specific skills he needs to learn and acquire in order to write his WRI 101 argument essay, such as identifying an appropriate audience or creating a strong thesis statement (Journal 3). While Dana is able to transition from narrative writing in high school to argument writing at university by still using a ‘surface’ approach, it is because she re-creates the same structured format and discursive conventions as the student sample essays

provided in her WRI 101 course; with Prashant, however, he attempts to address the normative standards of his argument essay only *after* it has been submitted and assessed by his instructor. As he explains,

My essay should have mainly addressed a specific audience, according to my Professor, but it didn't. Even I sometimes now think that I should have directed my essay's focus towards an audience. My 'Thesis Statement' was also weak because it didn't address an audience. (Journal 3)

Even though Prashant claims to have read "each and every direction more than a thousand times" (Journal 2), it seems that his over-reliance on his teachers' feedback, as established in secondary school, prevents him from trusting his own judgments and capabilities *during* the writing process while at university. This suggests that Prashant's dependency on a 'surface' approach, no matter its limitations, is based on the belief that academic writing is an innate skill and his potential to become a better writer is beyond his natural abilities (Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio, Jr., & Newman, 2014). As Prashant confirms, "I sometimes feel like I will always be weak in English" (Journal 2). However, it is important to note, Prashant's dogged determination to "overcome the mistakes" of his past (Journal 3) while envisioning himself as a writer "way better than the one in the current semester" (Journal 3) seems to challenge his propensity to depict himself as solely reliant on the criticisms and corrections of his teachers.

In fact, his implicit belief that correcting his surface-level mechanics will somehow lead to a form of improvement (albeit vague and undefined), may shed light on Prashant's conflicts as a writer. On one hand he presents himself as limited by his 'surface' approach to writing, whereas on the other, he portrays this approach as the only method possible to free him from all his writing "mistakes" so that he can ultimately tackle "a much more advanced academic writing course" (Journal 3). As a result, Prashant's sense of agency as a writer and negotiations within the discourse community of his writing classrooms are also rife with contradictions (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).



## 7.7 Conclusion

In summary, standard-language ideologies that uphold academic discourse as a symbol of correctness contribute to Prashant's difficulties overcoming his writing and grammar mistakes during secondary school. Based on this experience, Prashant determines that correcting his surface-level mistakes is more important than learning how to acquire the genre-specific skills deemed necessary to write academic essays at university. Moreover, Prashant's reliance on his teachers' corrections to improve his essay assignments *after* receiving their assessments, without trusting his own judgments and abilities *during* the writing process, encourages him to use a 'surface' approach to writing, in which Prashant believes that correcting all his 'mistakes' will eventually lead to his improvement and development as an academic writer. Prashant's attitudes toward academic discourse, genre structures, and writing beliefs, as based on Norton's theory of identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), highlight his struggles investing in particular writing practices based on his own sense of agency as reflected in his conflicting negotiations within the discourse community of his writing classrooms.

Below, I will examine how sociocultural influences, based on Prashant's positionings by his teachers, against his teachers, and of himself, impact his negotiations within the discourse community of his writing classrooms. It is important to note that I will not examine positionings by Prashant's family regarding English, as I have done for Dana and Mumin, since Prashant does not provide any information about his family throughout his journal responses and only offers one comment about his family during his interview, as follows: "I come from a family where we don't speak English at all" (Interview). As a result, I will examine two different types of positionings with Prashant's teachers, in lieu of positionings by his family, as well as positionings of himself. This is supported by Davies and Harré's (1991) theory of positioning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, which will address my fourth research question: *How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*

## 7.8 Section IV: Prashant's Sociocultural Influences

### *How Prashant's Positionings as a Writer Impact His Negotiations Within the Discourse Community of His Writing Classrooms*

#### 7.8.1 Positioned by Teachers: Gatekeepers Upholding a Pedagogy of 'Teacher Misbehavior'

As Prashant frequently depicts throughout his journal responses, he was positioned by his secondary school teachers for not being able to follow their directions or standardized norms of academic writing (Davies & Harré, 1990), which resulted in his repeated "mistakes" (Journal 1), "errors" (Journal 2), and overall feelings of "weakness" (Journal 2) in English. However, unlike Dana and Mumin, he did not seem to view himself as 'unfairly' positioned, but rather, deserving and appreciative of his teachers' recurrent reliance on public humiliation as an effective way to help him improve as a writer (Kearney, et al., 1991). As he states,

In all of the embarrassing moments I have come across, I have always learned something very important from my mistakes and I have always tried to improve my writing skills as it is very important to get good grades. (Journal 1)

Based on these experiences, it appears that Prashant's teachers followed an ideological assumption that correctness in English is the "best possible way" to write (Journal 1), which schools and teachers often maintain in their function as gatekeepers of academic discourse (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Looker, 2012; Goodwin, 2016). This notion of 'correctness' plays a powerful role in the maintenance of standard-language ideologies, and all too often, this form of standardization is unquestionably enforced by teachers who believe that anything different than the norm, especially regarding basic mechanical features, is somehow substandard and deserving of criticism (Goodwin, 2016; Solloway, 2016). As Prashant confirms,

My way of writing was to some extent criticized by my teachers. My essays were sometimes written more than the limit or sometimes

less. But my most common mistakes are my grammar mistakes.  
(Journal 1)

While Prashant justifies his teachers' intentions to help him obtain a level of standardized correctness in English, he also depicts a pedagogical practice brought to light in Kearney et al.'s (1991) seminal study on 'teacher misbehavior' in which students are deliberately shamed by their teachers in the classroom. As Prashant states, "I studied in schools where teachers would like to embarrass the students to teach them a lesson so that they don't repeat it and remember it forever" (Journal 1). Such deliberate embarrassment can be debilitating to a student's self-esteem, motivation, and ability to perform in the classroom, which is evident in Prashant's description of his writing abilities during secondary school: "After that, everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class" (Journal 1).

In addition, when teachers 'misbehave' in front of primary or secondary school students, who are more emotionally vulnerable than older students, they tend to fashion their identities over time based on the way their teachers treated them (Kearney, et al., 1991; Linnenbrink-Garcia, et al., 2011; Zhou & Urhahne, 2013). This, perhaps, explains Prashant's belief that he is a "weak" writer (Journal 1) up until the time he enters his WRI 101 course. As he states, "My weakness in writing skills has been following me from elementary to high school and even in the university level" (Journal 1). However, in the midst of Prashant's repeated exposure to teacher misbehavior during secondary school, which impacts his belief that he is, indeed, a "weak" writer when he first enters university (Journal 1), Prashant continues to reason that an awareness of his "mistakes" (Journal 1) is what will make him improve as a writer:

My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. (Journal 3)

In fact, he asserts this point about all three of his academic essays in WRI 101 without any evidence or explanation regarding how he will improve, as follows: “I can always improve myself, if not on this essay, then definitely on the second essay, and I can improve in the exact same way for my third essay as well” (Journal 3).

This narrative contradiction, in which Prashant claims he has learned from his mistakes while he continues to make them, will be addressed further in Section II of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **7.8.2 Positioned Against Teachers: Endorsing a ‘Bias of Blame’ for His English Mistakes**

As previously mentioned in Section III, Prashant barely addresses his family’s beliefs or interactions regarding English, unlike Dana and Mumin, except to explain that his parents “don’t speak English at all” (Interview), and instead, only speak Hindi in the home (Questionnaire). While his parents did, indeed, enroll him in English-medium schools after first grade, they were solely based on Indian curriculums that still required daily Hindi classes (Interview), which implies their desire for Prashant to remain connected to his home language—something ‘national’ schools are able to provide to families from foreign countries who are raising their children in the UAE (Vora, 2013). In contrast, Dana’s parents enrolled her in American-style schools since the age of four, and Mumin’s parents moved from Sudan to the UAE just so he and his brother could obtain an education at GAU, which suggests an elevated importance placed upon English that seems missing from Prashant’s upbringing.

However, I believe the absence of English in Prashant’s household is significant for another reason, and even adds another dimension to his over-reliance on his teachers’ criticisms and corrections in their attempt to help Prashant “improve himself” as a writer in English (Journal 1). While he ostensibly displays little or no ‘internal responsibility’ for his learning outcomes as a failure-accepting student, and

instead relies on an ‘externally imposed responsibility’ based on his teachers’ judgments and assessments (Perry, 1991; Covington, 1984, 1997; Pekrun, 2006; Fishman, 2014; Collie, et al., 2015), I believe that this dependency is also because he considers his teachers solely responsible for his English-language proficiency, whether justified or not, since he cannot acquire and develop these same language skills at home. To explicate, as his secondary Discourse, which is not reinforced at home, Prashant does not consider himself fluent in written English, but instead, in written Hindi (Questionnaire); therefore, he “appreciates” his teachers’ efforts to “improve [his] writing skills” in English (Journal 1), even if their teaching practices involve the following: “Let’s embarrass him to help him improve” (Interview).

This ‘appreciation’ of his own positioning as an academic writer in English eventually turns to blame in which he positions the selfsame teachers for their inability to improve his “common grammar mistakes” (Journal 1), which Prashant also believes has hindered his development as an academic writer at university (Davies & Harré, 1990). This is evident by the following statement once Prashant begins his WRI 101 course: “Sometimes I think if my teachers were much better in English I might have improved” (Journal 2), citing the fact that they were Indian and therefore not native-English speaking teachers (Interview). By specifying “common grammar mistakes, like saying ‘threw’ instead of ‘threw’” (Interview), as an indicator of their limitations in English, Prashant also highlights a ‘bias of blame’ that is often imposed upon teachers whose first language is not English (Wilkinson, 2014, 2016). Specifically, this occurs when students blame their own mistakes on non-native-speaker (NNS) teachers of English, whereas they would have accepted more responsibility for their mistakes with native-speaker (NS) teachers of English (Wilkinson, 2014, 2016).

It is therefore not surprising that Prashant, who exhibits the tendency to self-handicap and deflect responsibility away from his “mistakes” in English (Journal 1), considers his identity as a weak writer to be a product of his experiences with teachers whom he also considers weak in English grammar (Davies & Harré, 1990; Covington, 1984, 1997). However, the conflicting representation that Prashant

displays about his secondary school teachers, in which they positioned him about his “weakness in writing” (Journal 2) while he positions them for their “common grammar mistakes” (Interview), reveals yet another narrative contradiction, in addition to the one discussed above: If Prashant truly felt his teachers were not capable enough to teach him English, which he asserts at university, then it seems surprising he so readily accepted their judgments that he was “weak” (Journal 1) during secondary school.

This narrative contradiction, in which Prashant blames his secondary school teachers for all his writing “mistakes” in English (Journal 1), will be addressed further in Section II of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

### **7.8.3 Positioned by Self: Excluding Himself from Discourse Community (yet Still Hopeful to Join)**

When Prashant describes his negative writing experiences in secondary school, he presents himself as very inept and deeply ashamed about his abilities as a writer in English, which he associates with his numerous “mistakes” (Journal 1) and “errors” (Journal 2) with surface-level mechanics, especially his “grammar mistakes” (Journal 1). As he states about that time, “I felt I was the weakest in English in my class” (Journal 1). However, Prashant’s concerns about his English-language proficiency, and overall legitimacy as a writer (Lave & Wenger, 1991), appear linked to his belief that difficulties with academic writing equate to one’s level of mastery in English (Sanders-Reio, et al., 2014). For example, even though Prashant provides various reasons for his secondary school teachers to “criticize” his writing (Journal 1), from not following the word limit (Journal 1) to being “completely out of topic” on his essay assignments (Journal 1), the major writing-related issue that he constantly highlights about himself, as based on his teachers’ comments, is as follows: “My most common mistakes are my grammar mistakes” (Journal 1).

The 'bias of blame' (Wilkinson, 2014, 2016) that Prashant places upon his secondary school teachers for their own "common grammar mistakes, like saying 'threw' instead of 'threw'" (Interview), also signifies his seeming belief that 'better English' leads to 'better writing,' which he implies in the following statement after submitting his WRI 101 argument essay: "Sometimes I think if my teachers were much better in English I might have already improved" (Journal 2). While it is standard for teachers of English to focus on the 'micro-issues' of writing (i.e., grammatical systems, patterns, and rules) before addressing the 'macro-issues' deemed necessary for academic essays (i.e., rhetorical forms, conventions, and critical thinking), especially with students whose first language is not English (Stapleton & Wu, 2015), it seems Prashant has interpreted his difficulty to overcome his "common" grammar mistakes (Journal 1)—and those of his teachers'—as reason for his exclusion from the discourse community of his writing classrooms (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As he confirms, "Everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class" (Journal 1). This, perhaps, explains Prashant's difficulty at university to transition from the micro-issues of his past writing assignments in order to practice the macro-issues of his current WRI 101 argument essay, such as finding "good sources," creating a "thesis statement," and "focus[ing] on the audience" (Journal 2).

In fact, the following excuse reveals how Prashant's failure-accepting behavior encourages him to position himself when faced with new writing challenges (Davies & Harré, 1990; Covington, 1984, 1997): "Writing 101 is something beyond the basic principles of writing and it is quite difficult as it is something really new for me" (Journal 2). Moreover, when Prashant "decided to write something which interested [him] a lot" (Journal 2) for his argument essay, he does not summon the engagement that inspired Mumin to practice at the periphery when he wrote about a topic of his choice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); instead, Prashant uses the 'potential' engagement of writing about his own interests as further reason for his inability to gain legitimacy as an academic writer (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As he states,

I had chosen a difficult topic, but I thought if I spend time on my research, I might get good sources. Unfortunately it did not happen

as my way as I didn't choose a common topic which can give you academic sources very easily. (Journal 2)

Additionally, while Dana expected 'full' membership in the discourse community of her secondary school's writing classroom without wanting to practice at the periphery (until she discovered the process of revision at university), Prashant instead appears to believe the following: No matter how much he practiced during secondary school, acceptance into the discourse community of his writing classrooms always eluded him, thus, when faced with "new" expectations at university (Journal 2), all the practice in the world will not help him gain acceptance as a peripheral member, let alone one with the potential to gain full membership (Davies & Harré, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As a result, he disregards the requirements of his WRI 101 argument essay (Journal 2) because he anticipates failure based on his past "mistakes" (Journal 1) and his current inexperience: "How could it go well as I was completely new to this course?" (Journal 2).

However, amid the continued difficulties that Prashant experiences with academic discourse, and by proxy, his legitimacy as a writer proficient in English, his sense of hopefulness for future improvement in WRI 102 somehow prevails:

My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. (Journal 3)

Perhaps, Prashant's intentions to "overcome" his "mistakes" (Journal 3) is an attempt to re-shift his learning process based on an 'externally imposed responsibility,' which relies on his teachers' awareness of his mistakes, and instead, aim for an approach based on 'internal responsibility,' which relies on his *own* awareness of his mistakes (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Fishman, 2014; Collie, et al., 2015). However, considering Prashant's failure-accepting behavior, and inability to improve in the past after claiming to "have always learned something very important from [his] mistakes" (Journal 1), this seems highly unlikely. In addition, in order for Prashant to become a member of the discourse community of



his writing classroom at university, he can only make his way in slowly—from the periphery to the center—through increasing practice and use of its rules and conventions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Imagining his improvement in the future, based on the assumption that he “has learned from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester” (Journal 3), does not provide the practice, knowledge, or acquisition to gain increasing legitimacy into that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

While the act of ‘imagining’ in and of itself as a form of motivation, can, indeed, lead to improvement if based on a hypothetical ‘possible’ self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), Prashant seems to lack the necessary vision of a ‘positive’ future outcome since he has not managed to resolve the ‘negative’ outcomes of his past. This narrative omission, in which Prashant does not describe how he will learn from his past mistakes in order to improve in the future, will be addressed further in Section II of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

In addition, by ignoring other factors that may possibly contribute to his future success in WRI 102, such as following the directions of his essay assignments or seeking help *during* the writing process rather than waiting for *after*, Prashant relies instead on a form of ‘positivity bias’ (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996) that is based on positive illusions about the future without any proven results from the past or present. Such purposeful narrative inclusions, in which Prashant repeatedly states that his writing will improve in the future just because he imagines it during the present, will be addressed further in Section III of Chapter 8 when I analyze the participants’ contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

In summary, Prashant feels positioned by his secondary school teachers who use a form of ‘teacher misbehavior’ in their attempt to humiliate him when he does not

follow the standardized norms of correct academic discourse in English. However, while Prashant claims to appreciate their repeated criticisms and public-shaming techniques, he also positions himself against the selfsame teachers by practicing a 'bias of blame' for their own weaknesses in English grammar, which he believes has hindered his academic writing, especially since his secondary school teachers are not native speakers of English. Although Prashant does not mention any positionings by his own family, who do not speak English in the home, their lack of involvement with his secondary Discourse suggests why Prashant considers his secondary school teachers solely responsible for his English-language proficiency. In addition, Prashant positions himself based on his numerous mistakes with the 'micro-issues' of writing, such as grammar, which he believes he must overcome before tackling the 'macro-issues' deemed necessary for writing his argument essay at university. As a result, he excludes himself from the discourse community of his writing classrooms by not practicing or engaging with academic writing at the periphery, yet at the same time, he relies on a form of 'positivity bias' to imagine his potential membership in the future. The several positionings that Prashant experiences, as based on Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, culminate in his attempts to rectify his past and present mistakes as a writer with the belief that this will someday lead to his potential membership in the future.

While Prashant's narrative identity construction allows for an understanding of how he perceived his identity as a weak writer, it should be noted again that narratives are subjective constructions, not reflections of reality (Bruner, 1987). They are self-perceptions unique to one's own life. Therefore, in sections I through III of Chapter 8, I will analyze three major areas in Prashant's written journal responses that represent contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions when Prashant constructed the chronology of his writer identity in written form. These are as follows: (1) contradictions in his narrative identity construction: believing he will learn from his mistakes even as he continues to make them—while at the same time—putting the blame on his secondary school teachers for making the selfsame grammar mistakes; (2) omissions in his narrative identity construction: not

describing how learning from his mistakes will improve his academic writing so he can potentially avoid exclusion from the discourse community of his writing classroom at university; and (3) purposeful inclusions in his narrative identity construction: using 'positivity bias' in which he envisions himself as an improved academic writer for his future WRI 102 course.

In addition, the contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions apparent in Prashant's narrative identity construction comprise to represent a specific type of story arc that Alexander (2011) refers to as the victim-narrative form, which will be explored in more depth in Section IV of Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE NARRATIVE MOTIVES OF DANA, MUMIN, AND PRASHANT

#### 8.1 Introduction

In the previous narrative chapters, I aimed for clarity between the participants' perceptions of their writer identities and my own interpretations of those experiences, but I still cannot ignore the overall influence of myself, as both teacher and researcher, when the participants constructed their writer identities in narrative form. The very presence of myself in the research may have influenced what the participants chose to reveal or exclude about themselves when they were specifically asked by me to write three journal responses for my fall 2015 WRI 101 course about their past, present, and imagined-future experiences as writers (Goffman, 1959; McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). As Mazzei (2013) points out, we, as researchers, ask participants to be selective in what they tell, how they interpret those experiences, and what they assume about themselves within the construct of our research questions, but we often treat those modifications as representations of an absolute 'truth' of their lived experiences within our research.

Moreover, there is the potential to ignore the unequal power dynamics between our participants and ourselves, especially when we possess the dual role of teacher-researcher (Berger, 2013). This can easily influence participants to position themselves in certain ways based on particular narrative motives and narrative forms when constructing their identities. My interest in how the participants chose to present themselves as writers is reflected in my fifth, and final, research question: *How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*

In Chapter 8, I examine three distinct narrative motives, evident in the participants' written journal responses, which reveal contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions that are present in the construction of their narrative identities as writers. I have chosen to do this by solely examining the participants' written journal responses, as opposed to their interview responses, because I am interested in

how they reached their own understandings about themselves as writers based upon open-ended journal prompts rather than their responses to much more guided questions based upon semi-structured interviews. I also examine a fourth narrative motive, also evident in the participants' written journal responses, which reveals how the participants followed particular narrative forms when constructing their narrative identities as writers in a past-present-future story arc. With these four motives in mind, I have contextualized and thematized my narrative analysis with the following frameworks:

In Section I through Section III, I use Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, Higgins' self-worth theory of achievement (1987), and Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible-selves theory to examine the participants' narrative motives, referred to in my study as contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions, when constructing their narrative identities as writers based on my presence as their teacher-researcher. Goffman's (1959) theory highlights how identities are shaped in social interactions by trying to create a desirable impression on others. This reflects how audience-pleasing behavior and self-construction behavior are significant factors in identity construction (Goffman, 1959). Higgins' (1987) theory highlights how the ought-to self, based on what one should become, and the ideal self, based on what one would like to become, are representative of a future-self state. Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory highlights how identities are a construct of desired or undesired selves, based on past and present experiences, which impact how people imagine their possible future selves.

For the intent of my study, I consider 'audience pleasing' behavior as matching one's self-presentation to Higgins' (1987) notion of an 'ought-to' self, which stems from the external expectations of others. I consider 'self-construction' behavior as matching one's self-presentation to Higgins' (1987) notion of an 'ideal' self, which stems from internal desires that are influenced by the expectations of others. An additional motivational behavior, reflected in Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible-selves theory, derives from past and present representations of the self that impact one's imagined future possibilities, which culminate into a 'possible future' self.

Since the theories of Goffman (1959), Higgins (1987), and Markus and Nurius (1986) are grounded in one's perception of the self in relation to others, they help highlight the external and internal factors that motivated the participants to present their 'ought-to' selves, 'ideal' selves, and 'possible future' selves in particular ways within their three journal responses.

Below, Section I addresses narrative contradictions in relation to the participants' ought-to selves as writers; Section II addresses narrative omissions in relation to the participants' ideal selves as writers; and Section III addresses purposeful narrative inclusions in relation to the participants' possible future selves as writers.

In Section IV, I use McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model to examine the participants' writer identities based on specific narrative forms reflected in the past-present-future story arcs of their narrative identity constructions. McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) theory highlights how narrative identity is based on the construction of an internalized coherent life story, which is reflective of a much larger story arc that is grounded in both 'master' and 'little' narratives (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). These narratives, in relation to specific literacy experiences, reveal how students construct common, often generalized, identities about themselves as writers (the master narrative), which also have a tendency to segment into more individualized, situated identities (the little narrative) that are more varied and nuanced in their telling (Alexander, 2011).

Furthermore, these narratives provide coherence to the participants' identity constructions and offer additional insight into how they understand their identities as academic writers in English. It is important to note, the little narrative forms that I examine below in Section IV of Chapter 8 differ from my previous examinations of the participants' narrative writer identities in Section I of chapters 5-7, as those also include the participants' questionnaire data and in-depth interview responses. My specific focus in Section IV of Chapter 8 is to analyze how the participants framed their narratives in a past-present-future story arc that can only be examined through their written journal responses.

The participants' narratives, expressly in little narrative form, are categorized into three major types: (1) Dana: hero-narrative form; (2) Mumin: rebel-narrative form; and (3) Prashant: victim-narrative form.

**Appendix I** provides Dana's three journal responses; **Appendix II** provides Mumin's three journal responses; and **Appendix III** provides Prashant's three journal responses, all of which I refer to in this chapter.

## **8.2 Section I: Narrative Contradictions**

### ***What Narrative Contradictions Reveal About the Participants' Writer Identities***

#### **8.2.1 Narrative Contradictions and the Participants' 'Ought-to' Selves**

Through self-presentation, people try to match their public performances to audience expectations, which are based on motivations derived from the evaluative presence of others (Goffman, 1959). Students, therefore, who are specifically asked to write about literacy moments in their lives have a tendency to adopt particular identities within their narratives when their evaluative audience is composed of teachers (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). This form of self-presentation also influences students to present themselves based upon conventional, master narratives that reflect the dominant values within society (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996).

The most common master narrative that identity researchers have observed among students is the literacy success story since students are commonly defined throughout their educations by how well they perform and succeed, making them quite aware of the value that narratives of 'success' have in society (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). The participants, when constructing their writer identities for my study, also displayed an underlying awareness of the archetypical role that defines what a student is and how that student should act. This is evident when describing their ought-to selves, or the type of academic writer they felt they 'should' have been in the classroom: successful. Dana, Mumin, and Prashant,

although vastly different in their experiences, approaches, and beliefs about writing, desire to present themselves as ‘successful’ students in their three journal responses even as they struggle with or against this societally valued role.

As their teacher-researcher, and sole audience to their narratives, the importance of presenting their ought-to selves as ‘successful’ students may have increased their motivations to depict their experiences with past teachers in a certain negative light so as to perpetuate the image of their current selves in a positive light. Such audience-pleasing motives can produce inconsistent or contradictory presentations of the self (Goffman, 1959), but this actually occurs when individuals try to maintain a continuous image of themselves over narrative time, especially for an audience they are trying to please, such as myself, a teacher-researcher (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). In relation to the participants, in order to explain past behavior that is inconsistent with their self-presentations as ‘successful’ students, their narrative constructions often focus on why external circumstances prevented their consistent selves from flourishing.

Below, I will examine how Dana, Mumin, and Prashant depicted their ought-to selves when describing how specific moments from their past prevented them from succeeding as academic writers.

#### **8.2.1.1 Dana: Appearing Helpless, not Strong**

In Dana’s first journal response, she immediately highlights her strengths as a student by stating, “I have always worked really hard in school and I have always strived to achieve high scores in my classes.” However, this contrasts sharply with the helplessness she conveys when not achieving ‘A’s on her writing assignments during secondary school. Dana’s presentation of herself as the archetypical successful student, as someone who always achieves high marks, leads to a depiction of one of her past teachers as someone who purposely did not want Dana to succeed as a writer: “I couldn’t believe she managed to tear down the first piece I truly composed with honesty” (Journal 1). She portrays her teacher, and subsequent secondary school teachers, as the cause for her not receiving ‘A’s



because, according to Dana, they never explained *how* to write academically (Journal 3) or they just did not like her writing (Journal 2). Moreover, it appears in Dana's mind that a teacher 'liking' or 'not liking' her essay is how she earns a grade, regardless of the quality of her work, which conflicts with the description of herself as confidently deserving her hard-earned success as a student. This displays a socio-emotional dependency on the personal opinions of Dana's teachers, which not only discounts the significance of Dana's own efforts, especially on this particular assignment, but it also belies the confident student Dana claims to be in the past and desires to be in the present and future.

While Dana favors the "honest" and heart-felt writing she composed in secondary school, even describing her narrative essay as "a piece I was proud to call my own" (Journal 1), she appears to favor academic writing even more, based on the descriptions in her second and third journal responses, which helps her construct an overall image as 'successful' student. Dana begins to construct this image during her second journal response in which she continuously stresses the importance of being perceived as a successful debater to such an extent that it appears she immediately embraces academic writing upon entering university: "In order for me to debate for Model United Nations at university, I need proper writing and researching skills. Therefore, I realized that my writing 101 class is what will help me improve" (Journal 2). And, as a result, she turns her back on the writing she seemed to enjoy in secondary school, in which she poured her "heart out on the pages of a notebook," in order to produce the "solid" academic writing she believes is required of her at university (Journal 1).

Such a decision reflects that Dana values what she believes her academic institution tells her to value, which again, portrays her as dependent on the standards of others, especially those who maintain the prestige of the academy. While this contrasts with her image as an independent student who "stands up for what [she] believes is right" (Journal 1), it is important to remember that Dana is an over-striving student, as discussed in Chapter 5, who will do whatever it takes to

achieve high grades, even if it means choosing a rules-based approach to writing over her previous ways of writing.

Finally, while Dana makes it clear that she was only able to embrace academic writing at university because she was provided the tools to do so by me, her instructor (Journal 2), such an admission, I believe, falls into the trap of portraying her past teachers as ineffective (Journal 3) while not acknowledging the possible following scenarios: Perhaps Dana's secondary school teachers actually did explain how to write academically but Dana did not understand or attempt to follow their guidance. Perhaps Dana could have asked her secondary school teachers for additional help but she chose not to so. Or, perhaps Dana was indeed writing academically at a 'B' level. Therefore, while Dana desires to present herself as strong and successful, she often contradicts herself by presenting herself as helpless, at least in relation to her secondary school teachers, whom she says made her feel incapable of improving as a writer (Journal 1).

Yet, once Dana is in my own classroom, she cannot blame external conditions so easily, at least not without my own perception of those conditions as her teacher-researcher, so it seems inevitable, at least from a self-presentation frame, that she would, indeed, describe herself as embracing academic writing even though she often mentions throughout her journal responses that she does not enjoy writing at all. Her audience-pleasing behavior, based on an image of her ought-to self as a 'successful' student, is evident when Dana blames her past teachers for her writing failures and credits her present teacher for helping her achieve the image of a successful academic writer.

#### **8.2.1.2 Mumin: Creating the Conflict, not Fighting It**

In Mumin's first journal response, he describes in detail the joy he felt when writing in Arabic, in which his past teachers taught him that "writing is expressing one's thoughts between ourselves and a piece of paper." However, this image of Mumin as a writer in Arabic contrasts sharply with the image he constructs of himself as a writer in academic English: "I have gradually lost interest in writing because of the

systematic and formulaic approach that schools and teachers followed” (Journal 1). Such a contrast, I believe, appears almost too-perfect, or rather, presents a simplified explanation as to why Mumin temporarily lost interest in writing without addressing other such issues that may have been at play: Upon entering eighth grade, Mumin was expected to “write proper secondary school level essays” in English (Journal 1). However, if he had been forced to use a “systematic and formulaic approach” (Journal 1) while writing essays in Arabic, then perhaps Mumin would have lost interest in writing in Arabic, as well. Additionally, being forced to transfer from an Arabic-speaking school to that of an English-speaking school in ninth grade could have easily been another factor that led Mumin to view academic writing with resentment since he felt he had no choice in the matter.

Instead, Mumin portrays writing in English, as well as his English teachers, as a “sanction,” highlighting the concept of academic writing as an enforced act (Journal 1). However, if writing in Arabic gave Mumin such a sense of satisfaction, even contributing to a “spiritual and emotional side that is integral to who [he is]” (Journal 1), then I wonder why he did not continue to use Arabic at home as a way to escape the enforcement he felt when writing in English at school. Instead, Mumin claims that writing in academic English made him stop writing in Arabic, in which he shifted his “interest into other things, such as music and basketball” (Journal 1), yet there is a big possibility that Mumin was just at an age when basketball and music became more interesting than his academic subjects. His desire to present himself as a once-inspired writer, who wrote in his diary and even entered short story contests (Journal 1), conflicts with his decision to turn his back on Arabic, while at the same time, resist writing in academic English.

The depiction Mumin presents of himself as resentful and resistant to academic writing also conflicts with his obvious concern for his grades. For example, even in secondary school, when Mumin describes how he was forced to write in academic English, he still claims that he tried to “get good grades and satisfy [his] teachers’ goals of writing properly” (Journal 1). Additionally, at university, Mumin is disappointed when he receives a ‘C+’ on his summary assignment even though he

admits to not preparing adequately enough (Journal 2). And, when Mumin is presented with the opportunity to choose his own essay topic in his WRI 101 course, which he described as a great motivating factor, he still felt “disappointed in [him]self again” when he did not receive a higher grade (Journal 2). Therefore, Mumin’s supposed disregard for academic writing appears to be more a display of self-protective behavior, as discussed in Chapter 6, in which he blames external reasons for his failures. To explicate, I believe if Mumin had found writing in academic English an easier task then he might not have highlighted its oppressive attributes so readily as reason for his negative writing experiences. I also believe this affirms his overall desire to be seen as a ‘successful’ student, just like Dana, who needed an external cause, such as her secondary school teachers, to explain why she was not successful as a writer.

Finally, Mumin’s decision in his second journal response to describe how he overcame his many “negative experiences with writing in English in the past” could have easily been motivated by my own presence as his teacher-researcher, especially since I was the one who gave him the option to choose his own essay topic, as opposed to his previous teachers, who “didn’t care about what their students might be interested in writing about” (Journal 1). This also represents Mumin’s narrative style of pitting ‘good’ against ‘evil,’ such as Arabic versus English, or, in relation to me, a teacher who offers choice versus no choice at all. Again, I believe Mumin’s conflict lies in his simplified version of academic discourse as a “sanction” (Journal 1), which belies another possible reason: Academic writing, in whatever language, is difficult, especially for students who are still learning to acquire its discursive norms.

Moreover, once Mumin is in my own classroom, he could not cast me as the ‘enforcer’ of academic writing, at least not without my own knowledge of such a negative, one-dimensional description, so he instead places me in the more flattering, audience-pleasing role of ‘liberating’ teacher. From a self-presentation frame, in which Mumin desires to depict his ought-to self as a ‘successful’ writer, he attempts to make it clear that he can, indeed, succeed once he is away from the

restrictions of an institutionalized discourse: in Arabic, when his “spiritual and emotional side” flourished in the pages of his diary (Journal 1), and now, possibly in English, when he plans to “make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs” in the online world (Journal 2).

### **8.2.1.3 Prashant: Wanting to Appear Responsible, not Weak**

In Prashant’s first journal response, he consistently mentions how he was ridiculed and embarrassed by his secondary school teachers to such an extent that he felt like “the weakest in English in [his] class.” At the same time, he displays a surprising sense of understanding by accepting that this form of deliberate embarrassment was the preferred method to teach lessons at his school. He even claims that these moments helped him learn “something very important from [his] mistakes,” and stresses several times how often he tried to improve his writing skills throughout secondary school (Journal 1). Therefore, even though Prashant presents himself as a “weak” student through his teachers’ eyes, he also displays the need to be perceived as a ‘successful’ student, just like Dana and Mumin, by describing how he attempted to improve his writing in the past (Journal 1).

At the same time, while Prashant claims to have learned from his teachers, he also contradicts himself by criticizing their own weaknesses in English, especially regarding their grammar, as the possible reason he could not improve as a writer (Journal 2). If Prashant felt his teachers were not capable enough to teach him English, then it seems paradoxical that he would so readily accept their judgments that he was weak. This contradiction implies that Prashant desires to be seen as potentially ‘successful,’ but unfortunate circumstances out of his control—such as teachers who should have been “better in English” (Journal 2)—prevented his improvement.

Once Prashant is in my own classroom, he cannot fault my teaching abilities so easily, at least not without my knowledge of such criticism, so he instead focuses on other external causes that hindered his success as a writer, such as choosing a difficult topic for his argument essay, which in turn, prevented him from finding

adequate sources (Journal 2). While this self-handicapping behavior is common in failure-accepting students, as discussed in Chapter 7, it also belies other behavior that Prashant highlights in his journal responses: the desire to appear responsible for his writing while not taking action to prevent foreseeable mistakes. For example, instead of changing his essay topic, based on his awareness that he could not find sources, he instead states the following: “Midway, I even thought of changing the topic but I had come way too far and I saw no way of rectifying my mistake” (Journal 2).

This admission contradicts numerous assertions in Prashant’s first and third journal responses in which he claims that he is, indeed, quite capable of rectifying his mistakes. Furthermore, his continued focus at university to rectify the ‘surface’ features of his writing, such as mechanical mistakes, suggests that he is not ready to develop the ‘deeper,’ more genre-specific issues in his writing, such as audience awareness or constructing a thesis statement (Journal 2). Therefore, while Prashant claims to be a self-improved writer, it seems he has not advanced beyond his level of writing in secondary school.

Finally, Prashant tries to maintain his ought-to image of a ‘successful’ student by insisting that he has “learnt a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them” once he attends WRI 102 the following semester (Journal 3). However, evidence of both—learning and rectifying—is missing from his journal responses. In addition, while Dana and Mumin both appealed to audience-pleasing behavior in their journal responses by acknowledging that I had helped them improve as their instructor, this acknowledgment, whether deserved or not, is missing from Prashant’s journal responses. I find this particularly interesting since Prashant wrote such detailed accounts about the influence of his secondary school teachers; yet, once in my course, Prashant shifts the focus to himself in both positive and negative ways.

On the plus side, perhaps this is Prashant’s attempt to appear like a more responsible student and credit himself for trying to improve. Or, on the negative

side, perhaps Prashant feels that he cannot put the blame on an instructor who has access to his journal responses, so he instead takes the blame for his own writing difficulties. Either way, from a self-presentation frame, it seems that Prashant is quite aware of my audience presence as his teacher-researcher by attempting to appear more in control of his academic outcomes than he really is, especially by the end of the semester in his WRI 101 course. Therefore, by focusing on 'rectifiable' mistakes, such as grammar issues, it appears that Prashant is attempting to alter his image as dependent and 'weak' to that of responsible, even in the face of his admitted irresponsibilities as a writer.

### **8.3 Section II: Narrative Omissions**

#### ***What Narrative Omissions Reveal About the Participants' Writer Identities***

##### **8.3.1 Narrative Omissions and the Participants' 'Ideal' Selves**

Through self-construction, people try to match their ought-to selves with their ideal selves because internal desires are often influenced by the presence of others, especially an evaluative audience they want to please (Goffman, 1959; Higgins, 1987). The relationship between self-construction and audience-pleasing behavior is therefore based on the continuous interaction between what the self's own motives and behaviors are and how those are shaped by the influence of external factors (Goffman, 1959). Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) highlight the sometimes-blurred distinction between the ought-to self and ideal self by suggesting that what individuals consider their genuine desires are in fact compromised by their audience-pleasing need to conform to and be accepted by the societal expectations of others.

Students, therefore, who are asked to write about their literacy practices in the classroom tend to construct their internal motivations and understandings of writing based on the external expectations of their teachers and academic discourse communities in general (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Fivush, et al., 2011; Alexander, 2011). This form of self-construction can influence students to envision their ideal

selves as writers based on their individual writing experiences and sense of legitimacy negotiating within the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

In relation to Dana, Mumin, and Prashant, I believe the narrative self-construction of their ideal selves as writers depends on how they regarded their own legitimacy as peripheral members within the discourse community of their writing classrooms. Such membership, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), is difficult to describe, because peripheral participants lack the experience to explain the very practice they have only just begin to perform. With the participants, for example, they are only at the beginning stages of acquiring the institutionalized norms, conventions, and genres specific to academic discourse in English as first-year students at university. Hence, their attempt to write about their discursive practices, or even ideal selves as writers, can easily lack the detail or awareness of more experienced writers.

This may further be exacerbated by difficulties negotiating previous understandings of academic writing with their new experiences as writers at university. Based on this, I believe the participants' three journal responses lack narrative detail when describing their motivations behind embracing, resisting, or excluding oneself, respectively, from the discourse community of their writing classroom at university. This lack of detail, which I refer to as narrative omissions, may have impacted my own understanding of the participants' motivations in chapters 5-7, as I have had to make certain assumptions about their ideal selves based on these omissions.

Below, I will examine how Dana, Mumin, and Prashant omitted narrative details about their ideal selves as writers when discussing how they embraced, resisted, or felt excluded from the discourse community of their writing classrooms.

#### **8.3.1.1 Dana: Embracing Discourse Community**

In Dana's second journal response, her desire to embrace the discourse community of her writing classrooms is evident when she describes how important it is for her to write a 'proper' academic essay that will ultimately earn her an 'A.'



Her connection between the word 'proper' and an 'A' grade signifies that Dana's sense of legitimacy is based on achieving the highest grade possible, not necessarily an avid interest in academic writing, since she also admits that "writing might not be [her] favorite thing in the world" (Journal 2). However, this can only be assumed on my part since her over-striving behavior, as discussed in Chapter 5, influences her to pursue academic success in her all subjects no matter their appeal or connection to her personal interests, such as math and science (Journal 2). Furthermore, while Dana specifies that her academic writing class will help her "excel at debating" once at university (Journal 2), it is not clear why Dana needs to drastically improve as a debater at this point. She already mentions that she was head of her debate club in secondary school, as well as a participant in Model United Nations (Journal 2), implying a certain amount of success by these past activities.

To further explicate, since she already established herself as a successful debater, then it is unclear why she believes academic writing—something in which she has not yet achieved an 'A' in at this point—will further improve her debating skills. If anything, it seems that Dana's skills as a debater, in which she is capable of having "a proper debate about a serious topic that includes references, proof, statistics and facts" (Journal 2), would benefit her academic writing skills. Without further explanation, it seems that Dana's concept of her ideal self as a writer is based on replicating the selfsame success that she is already capable of achieving as a debater. This also signifies how willingly Dana embraces a discourse community for its potential to grant her the prestige of academic success.

Moreover, Dana omits narrative detail when describing 'how' proper research and writing skills have helped improve her overall writing at university beyond achieving an 'A' (Journal 2). This could be attributed to Dana only just becoming a legitimate participant in a community of practice in which she lacks the knowledge and experience to describe her newly acquired abilities. As previously stated, students who are only just becoming legitimate participants are often unable to describe the very practice they want to embrace because they do not have the experience yet

that is gained from several years of study (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In relation to Dana, it seems it is only possible for her to talk *about* the practice, not *within* it. This is evident by Dana's decision to pursue what Hounsell (1997) calls 'essay as arrangement' in which specific rules and formulaic structures help guide students who are often new to the discursive skills of academic writing. In essence, it appears that Dana describes a 'surface' approach to writing, which includes finding sources and formatting one's ideas, because this is how she perceives what academic writing should look like (Lavelle, 1993). She does not provide the narrative detail to explain what a "solid" (Journal 1) and "proper" (Journals 2-3) piece of writing entails, only that she aspires to write in such a way.

Or, perhaps, Dana feels it is necessary to tell her teacher-researcher, as an evaluative audience she wants to please, that her academic writing has improved because reference to improvement, or at least some sort of transformation, is what she believes is expected of her as a participant in my study on writer identity. If so, this would explain why Dana does not discuss further as to why her writing has improved beyond her excitement over receiving an 'A' on her argument essay, which she describes as follows: "Getting that score boosted my self-esteem and made me believe more in my abilities and in my writing skills" (Journal 2). The socio-emotional focus on her grade, but not on the acquired skills that led to her 'A,' implies that Dana's understanding of success, or improvement, rests on the positive grade she receives from her teachers.

Hence, Dana does not include specific examples from her argument essay that represent improvement because, to her, a one-letter grade says it all: She is now a "solid" (Journal 1), "proper" (Journal 2) writer who has essentially gained legitimacy by proof of her 'A.' From a self-construction framework, in which Dana's ideal self as a writer embraces the prestige of her writing classroom's discourse community at university, her satisfaction at receiving such a high grade establishes how her own self's motives are heavily influenced by the ideology of academic discourse, yet her narrative omissions reveal that she is unaware of this relationship.

### 8.3.1.2 **Mumin: Resisting (yet Eventually Engaging with) Discourse Community**

In Mumin's second journal response, his resistance toward joining the discourse community of his writing classrooms is evident by his criticism of formulaic essay writing and his teachers who enforced such writing in secondary school. Hence, when he discusses his newfound desire to write in English, specifically as a blogger (Journal 2), there is no indication that Mumin is concerned if his ideal self as a writer will boost his academic achievement at university. Additionally, while Mumin shares that he already tweets and blogs in Arabic, he makes a point to specify that his "new" goal is to eventually blog in English after completing his subsequent WRI 102 course the following semester (Journal 2).

Yet, it is unclear why Mumin finds it desirable to blog in English at all. If he felt that academic English was forced upon him when he entered secondary school, but that Arabic gave him "joy" (Journal 1), it would seem more plausible that Mumin would want to only continue writing in Arabic outside of school. He does not provide enough detail as to what caused his shift from disliking academic writing in English, which he claims also killed his love for writing in Arabic, to regaining his "passion" for writing, even acknowledging that writing in school can and should be a joyful experience (Journal 2). While he does mention that choosing his own topic for his argument essay was a positive and meaningful experience (Journal 2), I can only infer on my part, as Mumin's teacher-researcher, that this is what gave him the confidence to see himself as a "good writer" toward the end of the semester in WRI 101 (Journal 3).

As a result, such brief references to his ideal self as a writer in English (Journal 2) indicate to me that Mumin is only just considering the possibility of engaging with the discourse community of his writing classroom at university. He does not say much more than he will "hopefully" start working on his goal as an English blogger after his WRI 102 course (Journal 2) because it appears that this is the first time in Mumin's academic career that writing in English is deemed attractive and plausible. This lack of narrative detail about Mumin's academic writing is also evident when

he chooses to describe the grades he received on his writing assignments in WRI 101 as opposed to his *abilities* when writing those assignments. For example, at the beginning of the semester in WRI 101, Mumin spends time describing how much his summary assignment will impact his overall final grade, with special emphasis on the 'C+' he received, instead of how his writing was impacted from the assignment itself (Journal 2). Additionally, even though Mumin provides more detail when describing the step-by-step process of how he wrote his argument essay, he still places great importance on the grade he received—one in which he states, "I got disappointed of myself again" (Journal 2). This supports Mumin's self-protective behavior, as discussed in Chapter 6, in which he attributes external reasons for his sense of self as an academic writer based on the assessments of his teachers rather than his own understandings of himself as an academic writer.

It is therefore not surprising that the only detail Mumin provides when discussing his ideal self as a writer is in reference to what Lavelle (1993) considers 'deep' writing, or rather writing for personal meaning and investment, such as creating a blog with a virtual audience (Journal 2). Hence, Mumin does not include specific examples from his argument essay that represent how he "started to be passionate about [writing] again" (Journal 2) because to him, the "joy," "affection," and "interest" (Journal 1) that occurred from writing in the past always took place outside of the classroom, specifically in Arabic. Additionally, since Mumin often displays a conflict throughout his journal responses between his primary Discourse in Arabic and his secondary Discourse in English (Journals 1-2), it is understandable that he does not have the experience to talk *about* the practice of academic writing, especially at the level of a legitimate participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991), because he was always so resistant to joining the discourse community of his writing classrooms in secondary school (Journal 2).

As a student who is just beginning to engage within the writing community of his university, it appears that Mumin does not possess the knowledge and experience to describe his academic writing abilities beyond how he views writing for his own personal engagement: "I know that I have another chance to improve my writing

skills and disclose the thoughts I have in my mind about writing” (Journal 3). Unlike Dana, who desires to embrace academic writing, Mumin instead is only just beginning to engage with its standards, and as a result, he does not describe the type of academic writing that he currently produces or the type of academic writer he might become in WRI 102. From a self-construction framework, in which Mumin’s ideal self is linked to writing for personal meaning rather than fulfilling the academic requirements of his teachers, his narrative omissions reveal that he is just at the cusp of peripheral participation within his writing classroom’s discourse community.

### **8.3.1.3 Prashant: Excluding Himself from Discourse Community**

In Prashant’s second journal response, his feelings of exclusion from his university’s academic discourse community are evident when he describes himself as trying to “overcome” or “rectify” his writing mistakes. In fact, while he provides ample detail throughout his journal responses describing his faults, from how he is “weak” in English or “embarrassed” by his mistakes (Journal 1), he does not include any examples to support that he is capable of fixing his mistakes beyond saying he “read each and every direction more than a thousand times to avoid making mistakes” on his argument essay in WRI 101 (Journal 2). While one can argue that ‘rectifying’ one’s mistakes is a positive goal (as opposed to making no attempt at all), it is unclear how Prashant believes he is capable of correcting his writing when he considers himself so “weak” (Journals 1-2).

Additionally, I see little difference between Prashant’s description of himself throughout his journal responses as he describes his past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences, since, in all instances, he continues to emphasize that he is trying to “improve” (Journal 1) or “overcome” (Journal 3) his mistakes without any evidence that he has actually “learned something very important” from them (Journal 3), even though he claims to have done so. If he had, indeed, learned from his mistakes, then ostensibly he would not continue to make them, or at least, not make as many. Based on these omissions, I can only assume that Prashant

does not have any personal motivations to write in English beyond having to complete his required academic writing courses at university.

This lack of narrative detail is significant in understanding how Prashant perceives his ideal self as a writer in relation to the discourse community of his writing classroom at university. While Dana embraces and Mumin eventually engages with the discourse community of their WRI 101 classroom, respectively, as evidenced by the narrative detail regarding their ideal selves as writers, Prashant instead does not include any detail because it appears he does not envision himself as a legitimate member of that particular discourse community. This is apparent when Prashant discusses his writing abilities in a negative light (Journals 1-2), with an emphasis on what he did wrong, without acknowledging anything positive about his past or present writing. In fact, never once, throughout all of his journal responses, does Prashant include his own opinions about his writing; all of his descriptions are based on what his past and present teachers have told him, with an emphasis on the negative.

This failure-accepting behavior, as discussed in Chapter 7, in which Prashant compliantly accepts his mistakes and almost willingly expects them, indicates to me that Prashant lacks the experience and confidence to feel like a legitimate member of his writing classroom's discourse community at university. Even legitimate participants in a community of practice, as based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory, are often unable to describe the very practice they want to embrace, so it is not surprising that Prashant, who feels excluded, cannot talk *within*—or even *about*—his writing without depending on the assessments of his teachers. Moreover, students who feel overly concerned about surface-level mistakes, such as Prashant, often do not have any clearly defined writing strategies of their own (Lavelle, 1993; Stapleton & Wu, 2015). In Prashant's case, he focuses on the 'micro-issues' of writing, such as grammar, and ignores the macro-issues deemed necessary to write academic essays. While Dana wants to write 'proper' essays and Mumin wants to regain his 'passion' for writing, it is not clear what Prashant

wants to attain through his academic writing, and hence, I can only assume from his omissions that he also does not know himself.

Since Prashant lacks an ideal vision of himself as a writer based on his own goals and interests, and instead, only envisions what he is not, this indicates to me that Prashant's motivations in the classroom are fueled by his 'feared' self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), or rather, the person he is afraid of becoming. This assumption on my part is two-fold: First, Prashant never discusses any positive experiences with his writing throughout his three journal responses, and second, when Prashant does envision his ideal self as a writer in WRI 102, he still only mentions how he will learn "from his mistakes and will rectify all of them" (Journal 3), which was the same line of reasoning he used during secondary school and in his WRI 101 course.

While students, in general, ostensibly face obligations in the classroom to improve and develop their writing, as based on the sociocultural expectations of their teachers and the academy, in Prashant's case, these external 'obligations' are not balanced by any of his own, internal motivations for improvement as evidenced by any lack of detail regarding Prashant's ideal self as a writer. From a self-construction framework, in which Prashant's feared self is linked to his weaknesses as a writer, Prashant's narrative omissions indicate that he does not envision his ideal self as an academic writer because he feels that he does not belong to the discourse community of his writing classroom at university.

#### **8.4 Section III: Purposeful Narrative Inclusions**

##### ***What Purposeful Narrative Inclusions Reveal About the Participants' Writer Identities***

###### **8.4.1 Purposeful Narrative Inclusions and the Participants' 'Future' Selves**

While self-presentation and self-construction are both dependent on the evaluative presence of an audience in which people try to construct themselves in the best possible light (Goffman, 1959), imagined upcoming events are also often characterized by positive, even idyllic, imaginings about the future. This 'positivity

bias' for the future, as opposed to past events, is characterized by pronounced, uncorrected positive illusions that have the potential to occur, whereas remembered past events are typically constrained by the reality of what has actually happened (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). In this regard, the future can be fashioned however people want in order to please themselves while also fulfilling the master narratives they try to follow, which are based on positive major life events, such as getting an education, getting married, or having children (Fivush, et al., 2011).

Since these positive major life events usually happen at specifically fixed time slots, whereas negative major life events are less fixed in time (i.e. sudden death or divorce), people tend to rely more on positive master narratives when attempting to construct their imagined future events (Rasmussen & Bernsten, 2013). In addition, since positive events tend to correlate more with the norms of master narratives, as opposed to negative events that deviate from societal norms, there is a consistently higher occurrence of positivity bias in narratives about the future than negativity bias (Rasmussen & Bernsten, 2013).

It does not seem surprising, then, that Dana, Mumin, and Prashant, when envisioning themselves in WRI 102 the following semester, each depicted their future possible selves as a better, more improved writer since it is commonly 'expected' that students will improve each semester until they successfully graduate from school (Alexander, 2011; Fivush, et al., 2011). In fact, it can be argued that I did not leave the participants much of an option but to conform to societal norms and tell me what any teacher would like to hear from one's student: I have learned from your course and will do even better in the future. While such audience-pleasing motives cannot be ignored, and in fact, play a significant role in how the participants chose to present their future possible selves, they do not fully explain why all three participants, though vastly different in their experiences and behaviors as students, each presented themselves as overcoming past obstacles with the assuredness of a more triumphant future.



The schematic representation of master narratives follows a very specific formula as it helps guide individuals to present and construct their identities in a certain way (Fivush, et al., 2011). One of the most common forms, the redemption narrative, is when a negative experience is transformed into a positive one (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In regard to Dana, Mumin, and Prashant, whom I believe were each influenced by positivity bias and my own presence as their teacher-researcher, they chose to follow the theme of a redemption narrative in which their past negative writing experiences have the potential to lead to growth and improvement as a writer in the future.

Below, I will examine how Dana, Mumin, and Prashant included positivity bias and examples of redemption resolutions when depicting their future possible selves.

#### **8.4.1.1 Dana: ‘I’m Finally Ready to Improve’**

In Dana’s third journal response, her use of positivity bias for the future as a WRI 102 student is closely linked to how she constructed her past and present experiences as an academic writer: one who felt positioned by her teacher as a ‘B’ writer in secondary school yet who eventually triumphed at university by earning an ‘A’ on her argument essay with hard work and determination. As she points out, “The reason for me not liking English class wasn’t my fault” (Journal 3), which implies that it was someone else’s fault, specifically her secondary school teacher who did not praise her writing nor explain how to improve her writing (Journal 1). Only when Dana receives an ‘A’ on her argument essay at university does she feel “proud” of her writing again, which in turn, she explains, “boosted my self-esteem and made me believe more in my abilities and in my writing skills” (Journal 2). As such, when Dana envisions the future, she says, “I’m ready to enter my WRI 102 class, knowing that I had the proper background and practice” (Journal 3).

The need to feel ‘ready,’ or academically prepared, as a writer plays such a significant role in Dana’s journal responses—from not feeling prepared in the past (Journal 1) to becoming prepared in the present (Journal 2)—that it is not surprising her positivity bias for the future is fueled by the belief that the “proper

background” (Journal 3) will make her a successful academic writer in WRI 102. By selectively interpreting and imagining the causes and consequences of past and future events, Dana has found a way to reflectively connect her episodic experiences so that she can make sense of her identity and create an overall sense of unity and purpose in her life, specifically as someone who “always strived to achieve high scores in [her] classes” (Journal 1).

However, in order to achieve this meaning, unity, and purpose, Dana must first set the stage for a redemption narrative by purposefully including details that explain why she was unable to achieve high scores as an academic writer in secondary school (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). Otherwise, her ideal self would not fit with her overall sense of self as a successful writer in academic English. Therefore, by depicting her secondary school teacher as an adversary, whom she describes as the main cause for her inability to improve as an academic writer (Journal 1), Dana is able to maintain her identity as an over-striving student—and eventually—academic writer, by overcoming such adversity once she leaves secondary school. It is only at university, claims Dana, that she is able to achieve her ideal self as an academic writer because she was provided the resources to improve, such as “bullet points and tips the professor mentioned in class,” as well as “sample essays” to use as guidance (Journal 2). In fact, Dana credits the available resources in her WRI 101 course as the catalyst for improvement, along with her desire to improve, even stating that academic writing “would be considered easy” as long as students learned how to correctly research and format their ideas (Journal 2).

This depiction of herself as a determined writer, capable of taking charge of her learning with available resources, supports Dana’s portrayal of herself as “someone who always worked really hard in school” to achieve high grades (Journal 1), yet at the same time, when she is incapable of achieving high grades in secondary school, Dana does not question her own abilities and determination, but rather, her secondary school teacher’s assessment of her abilities: “Although my approach and style in writing improved throughout the year, my grades never

got better. I felt that [my teacher] didn't think I'd ever improve" (Journal 1). As a result, Dana avoids responsibility for her lack of success in secondary school but takes full responsibility for her success at university, while at the same time, she is able to maintain her ideal image as a capable, hard-working student to both herself and her teacher-researcher. With a redemption resolution such as this, in which Dana casts herself as the victor by feeling capable to "compose good essays" for "the first time in four years" (Journal 3), she is able to satisfy her need to succeed by depicting her future possible self as a better, more improved writer, thus fulfilling a master narrative in which one is expected to successfully progress as a student.

Dana's purposeful inclusions of positivity bias for the future are closely linked to her over-striving behavior, as based on Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, in which her worth as a student is largely measured by her ability to achieve. For example, in light of her perceived *un*success as an academic writer in secondary school, Dana purposefully counters this with narrative inclusions in which she strives, overall, as a student in all her classes, and, in even more detail, as a debater (Journals 1-2). Such inclusions about debating, in particular, appear purposeful since the prompts for the journal responses only asked participants to write about their experiences with academic writing.

As such, I can only assume that Dana felt the need to display her success in a closely related field—not only to show her teacher-researcher that she is, indeed, capable of achievement—but also to maintain her over-striving identity, as discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, Dana's purposeful inclusion of the rules and regulations required for debating, such as "references, proof, statistics, and facts" (Journal 2), signifies her overall desire for an adherence to the standards and conventions of academic writing. Such a rules-based 'surface' approach to writing (Lavelle, 1993) indicates that Dana values the guidance of a formulaic, acceptable structure to which she can conform because it represents the prestige of the academy.

While master narratives, embedded with positivity bias for the future, provide a conventional norm for individuals to follow, so too does surface writing for Dana, because it reflects a normative standard with the potential of making her feel like a 'legitimate' member of her writing classroom's discourse community at university. As a result, she does not question the standards of academic writing, even when it contrasts with her previous standards of "great" writing, which she describes as follows: "As soon as I started writing, I found it difficult to stop. Words and memories flowed out of me uncontrollably. Before I knew it, I had come up with a piece I was proud to call my own" (Journal 1). Instead, she foregoes her preferred way of writing because a sense of academic legitimacy is important to an over-striver such as Dana. As she explains, "I learned that pouring my heart out on the pages of a notebook without any consideration for the details does not make it a solid piece of writing" (Journal 1).

The desire to embrace the discourse community of her university's writing classroom influences Dana's redemption resolution in the following way: She redeems herself by achieving an 'A' based on the standards that once prevented her success as an academic writer, and not only is she "happy" and "proud" of this transformation, she believes it will lead to her future success as a writer: "I'm ready to enter my writing 102 class, knowing that I had the proper background and practice" (Journal 3). Thus, Dana's redemption narrative, in which she portrays herself as a champion, fighting against all odds to be accepted by the discourse community of her writing classroom, not only fulfills her own self-construction as a dedicated writer, but it also conforms to a master narrative in which she presents herself as a student capable of success in the future.

#### **8.4.1.2 Mumin: 'I've Made Peace with Myself'**

In Mumin's third journal response, his use of positivity bias for the future as a WRI 102 student is closely linked to how he constructed his past and present experiences as an academic writer: one who positioned himself against the institutionalized discourse of academic English in secondary school, pitting it against his love for Arabic, yet eventually transforming this view at university when

discovering that academic writing in English can, indeed, be used as a form of self-expression and joy. As Mumin explains when envisioning WRI 102, “I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person’s beliefs and feelings” (Journal 3). However, this idea of writing as a form of ‘self-expression’ plays a recurring theme throughout Mumin’s journal responses, especially as the reason for previously rejecting academic writing in English: “Since 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I have gradually lost interest in writing because of the systematic and formulaic approach that schools and teachers followed which, to a great extent, made me write forcefully” (Journal 1).

His depiction of clashing discourses, in which Arabic provides a chance to express himself (Journal 1) and English only stifles his views (Journal 1), represents how Mumin perceives his writing experiences in binaries, leaving no room for a middle ground. Writing is either fulfilling or unfulfilling, depending on the discourse, which is why writing in Arabic “contributed to the spiritual and emotional side that is integral to who [he] is” (Journal 1) but academic English only made him feel a “bit shallow” (Journal 2). As such, in order for Mumin to envision himself as a successful writer in WRI 102, his positivity bias for the future must attribute academic writing in English with the qualities he once so cherished when writing in Arabic: passion and joy (Journal 1). In this way, Mumin’s identification with his secondary Discourse in English does not mean a complete rejection of his primary Discourse in Arabic; instead, the joy he felt when writing in Arabic is purposefully attributed to academic English so that Mumin can “make peace” with his decision “to be passionate about [writing] again” (Journal 2).

In order to make sense of these narrative constructions, however, Mumin must purposefully include details in his redemption narrative to help explain why he “gradually lost interest in writing” during secondary school (Journal 2) even though he claims that writing was such an “integral” (Journal 1) part of who he was as a person (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Otherwise, his overall identity as an enforced writer in English would not fit with his identity as a writer in Arabic who shared “memorable quality time with [his] beloved ones” by

writing bedtime stories with his mother and brothers; enrolling in short-story contests; and keeping a diary in order to understand his emotions (Journal 1). As such, he intentionally includes descriptions of academic writing in English as a “mutation” and “sanction” of his previous understandings of writing in Arabic (Journal 1) without considering another, more plausible reason for rejecting academic writing when he was in secondary school: Academic writing is a difficult discourse to acquire and master, even more so for students whose home language is different from that of the academy.

By faulting the “systematic and formulaic approach that schools and teachers followed” (Journal 1), Mumin is able to justify why he turned his “interest into other things, such as music and basketball” during secondary school (Journal 1). In fact, he demonizes academic writing to such an extent that he blames it for lessening his “spiritual and emotional side” and leaving him “a bit shallow” (Journal 1), which not only suggests that Mumin would still be spiritual, emotional, and full of depth if allowed to write in Arabic, but it also deflects attention from the fact that he never once was prevented from doing so. It is only at university, claims Mumin, that he regained his passion for writing—and only because he was finally offered the chance to choose his own essay topic (Journal 2). However, even though he admits that he enjoyed writing about an issue that was “important” to him, he also shares that he was “disappointed” by his essay grade (Journal 2), which supports Lavelle’s (1993) claim that writing in a ‘deep’ and meaningful way does not necessarily equate with masterful academic writing.

This inclusion is important because Mumin cannot blame his disappointing grade on the formulaic constraints of academic writing, nor me, his teacher-researcher, for making him “write forcefully” (Journal 1). Instead, Mumin makes a point to mention that he began sharing tweets and using “a small blog” in order to “write [his] thoughts in Arabic” (Journal 2), which not only maintains his identity as a writer who enjoys connecting with others through Arabic, but it also maintains his stance that writing is a personal pursuit, best practiced outside the confines of the classroom where one is in complete control of his preferred language and

thoughts. In this way, Mumin does not need to feel enforced by academic writing, but rather, he can construct himself as more accepting of its role in his life, especially if he is allowed the chance to enjoy himself during the writing process.

With a redemption resolution such as this, in which Mumin integrates his love for self-expression in Arabic with the requirements of academic writing in English, he discards his feelings that he is “less of a writer” (Journal 1) and, instead, looks toward the future in WRI 102 with the “confidence” that he is a “good writer,” as based on his own conditions and requisites, not those of the academy (Journal 3). Hence, by depicting his future possible self as a more capable and confident writer, Mumin is able to fulfill a redemption narrative in which one is expected to develop and mature as a student.

Mumin’s purposeful inclusions of positivity bias for the future are closely linked to his self-protective behavior, as based on Covington’s (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, in which he deflects the cause away from his poor performance by blaming external reasons. As such, Mumin constructs his identity and possible future as a writer based on how he imagines and perceives his sense of self in the following ways: First, Mumin creates a detailed account of how joyful, spiritual, and emotionally significant writing in Arabic is to him (Journal 1), even though my prompts for the journal responses only asked participants to write about their experiences with academic writing in English. Such purposeful inclusions about his identity as an Arabic writer are in clear-contrast to his identity as an uninspired, “shallow,” and spiritually depleted writer in English (Journal 1), thus reflecting his need to be perceived as an enforced academic writer. This intentional duality of ability and inability, motivation and demotivation, wrought into life whenever Mumin writes in Arabic or English, respectively, indicates that Mumin desires to create meaningful work but is unwilling to accept responsibility for when he does not produce anything of significance. As a result, Mumin takes pains to portray himself as a target of enforced circumstances: prey to a rigid classroom context; the dominance of his writing teachers; and most specifically, the dominant discourse of the academy in which he is required to write (Journal 1). Never once does he seem

to question his own abilities and motivations as an academic writer in secondary school, but instead, he presents external reason after external reason for his failure, thus supporting his self-protective behavior.

Second, Mumin's purposeful inclusions about his Twitter account and blog (Journal 2), both of which exist outside the realm of academia, signify how much writing for personal motivation and meaning outweigh his desire to conform to the normative standards of academic writing. This 'deep' approach to writing (Lavelle, 1993), often based on an emotional understanding of the self and others, is in stark contrast to the 'surface' writing favored by Dana, who desires a normative standard of writing because it reflects legitimacy and membership into the discourse community of her university's writing classroom. However, for Mumin, who makes it clear throughout his journal responses that he dislikes conforming to the standards of the academy, finding his own sense of enjoyment within his writing classroom's discourse community at university is a definite possibility now, and one that seems to appeal to his own sense of self as a writer. As he explains, "No matter what teachers think of someone's writing, they must realize a student's main focus should be enjoying themselves" (Journal 2).

Finally, his decision to engage with the discourse community of his writing classroom at university, as opposed to resisting it, influences Mumin's redemption narrative as follows: In order to overcome the normative constraints of academic writing, Mumin has stopped portraying Arabic and English as binaries, and instead, he has made "peace" (Journal 2) between himself and academic writing by realizing that he can, indeed, feel "passionate" and joyful (Journal 2) about such a discourse. Thus, Mumin's redemption narrative, in which he once portrayed himself as caught in between the combative demands of his primary and secondary Discourses, has now come to a peaceful end. By imagining his future in WRI 102 with confidence, assured of his abilities to handle the expectations of a discourse (Journal 3) that he formerly found prohibitive and uninspiring (Journal 1), not only adheres to Mumin's self-construction of himself as overcoming his struggles in the



classroom, but it also conforms to a master narrative in which Mumin transforms himself into a competent, capable student in the future.

#### **8.4.1.3 Prashant: 'I've Learned from My Mistakes'**

In Prashant's third journal response, his use of positivity bias for the future as a WRI 102 student is closely linked to how he constructed his past and present experiences as an academic writer: one who felt positioned by his former teachers for his weak writing skills, and as a result, positioned himself by believing that he was, indeed, a weak writer in comparison to his classmates. However, even though Prashant continues to berate himself for not improving as an academic writer at university, he looks toward the future in WRI 102 with optimism, believing he will be able to "rectify" all of his writing mistakes at that time (Journal 3). Prashant includes numerous examples throughout his journal responses of ridicule by his secondary school teachers, his peers, and even himself, as he states, "My weakness in writing skills has been following me from elementary to high school and even in the university level" (Journal 1).

These inclusions are purposeful, I believe, for their very abundance. Specifically, it appears Prashant wants his teacher-researcher to know about his 'embarrassing' experiences because he makes no attempt to hide them. In fact, Prashant readily provides example after example of his weaknesses so that there is no doubt in his mind, as well as his teacher-researcher's, that he "will always be weak in English" (Journal 2). Nevertheless, when Prashant envisions the future, he believes that "he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them" (Journal 3). While it may seem surprising that Prashant envisions a positive future, especially in light of his recurrent negative experiences, the inclusion of the words 'mistakes' and 'rectify' reveal that Prashant does not necessarily feel that his future self will be "way better than the one in the current semester" (Journal 3), as he claims; his hopeful prediction seems more like a coping mechanism than a transformed belief about his improved writing abilities. This type of coping mechanism, by imagining a positive future, helps maintain motivation, especially when past and present

difficulties occur (Thomsen, Olesen, Schnieber, & Tønnesvang, 2014); as a result, the possibility of Prashant just 'giving up' in the future is therefore lessened.

Instead, positivity bias provides Prashant with a sense of control, as he can create a future with any positive outcome of his choosing, as opposed to a past that cannot be changed and is already cemented in negativity. Yet, even in light of this positivity bias for the future, the continual image of Prashant as a "weak" writer (Journals 1-2) who constantly tries to correct his "mistakes" (Journals 1-3) is ever-present throughout his episodic experiences. In order to create meaning and coherence in his life from narrative constructions that are based on criticism and shame, Prashant purposefully includes details in his redemption narrative that justify his teachers' criticism and explains why he was unable to improve as a writer over the years (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). Otherwise, his overall sense of himself as a "weak" writer (Journals 1-2) cannot be maintained.

This desire for stability and coherence in people's lives, even when based on negative experiences, contributes to how students understand, perceive, and maintain their identities in the classroom, as well (Hirano, 2009). Thus, when Prashant depicts how his secondary school teachers used public embarrassment to make students learn, he rationalizes that their behavior was appreciated and necessary because he made so many mistakes, grammatical or otherwise (Journal 1). However, claiming to 'learn from his mistakes' never once detracts from his maintained identity as a weak writer, as he reminds both himself and his teacher-researcher: "My weakness in writing skills has been following me around from elementary to high school and even in the university" (Journal 1). Therefore, Prashant purposefully includes further justification for his inability to improve as a writer: not following the assigned directions in secondary school (Journal 1) and not following the assigned directions in his WRI 101 course at university (Journal 2). While he is, indeed, aware that "you simply cannot write something on your own as you have to follow the essay directions" (Journal 2), he fails to follow his own advice.

This portrayal of himself as a student inexplicably powerless at following directions appears to support a much larger belief about Prashant's own writing abilities: "I sometimes feel like I will always be weak in English" (Journal 2). As a result, his positivity bias for the future in WRI 102, although more optimistic than any of his past or present descriptions of himself as a writer, is still overshadowed by his feelings of weakness and inadequacy, so much so that he envisions himself as only a slightly more-improved version of his writer self in WRI 101 and secondary school: "My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well" (Journal 3). While his faith in the platitude, 'If at first you don't succeed—try, try again' fulfills a redemption narrative in which students should never give up, the resolution of his redemption narrative is less triumphant than Dana's or Mumin's resolutions. This allows Prashant to maintain his identity as a weak writer but with the hopeful possibility—as required for redemption resolutions—that at some point in his life he will actually be able to "learn from his mistakes" and "rectify all of them" (Journal 3).

Prashant's purposeful inclusions of positivity bias for the future are closely linked to his failure-accepting behavior, as based on Covington's (1984, 1997) self-worth theory, in which he often acts incapable of altering negative academic outcomes. Not only does this failure-accepting behavior influence how Prashant perceives his past and present identity as a writer, but it also plays a large part in how he constructs his future possible self as a writer. This is especially apparent when Prashant makes a point to reference his mistakes in each of his three journal responses: While talking about his past experiences with writing teachers, Prashant concludes, "I have always learned something very important from my mistakes" (Journal 1); while talking about his present experiences in WRI 101, he also claims that his "mistakes" have helped him "realize what I have been missing all this time" (Journal 2); and finally, when imagining his possible future self in WRI 102, Prashant yet again claims that "he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester" (Journal 3).

However, these repeated inclusions about 'learning' from his mistakes appear purposeful to me since there is no actual evidence of such learning taking place; there is only evidence of Prashant's many-cited 'mistakes' throughout his journal responses. As such, I can only assume that Prashant, in an effort to avoid humiliation in front of himself and his teacher-researcher, has tried to put a positive spin on his mistakes by referring to an age-old proverb about the benefits of learning from them. At the same time, Prashant's decision to provide so many examples of his 'mistakes' indicates to me that he is purposefully including them as a way to confirm his own doubts about his writing abilities, which in turn, helps to maintain his failure-accepting behavior. It is therefore understandable that Prashant, as compared to Dana and Mumin, does not purposefully include other examples of academic success (such as Dana and her accomplishments in debating) or personal achievement (such as Mumin and writing meaningfully in Arabic) since feelings of overwhelming inadequacy characterize his failure-accepting behavior.

As a result, the only positive outcome that Prashant provides about his writing experiences is based on his pledge that he has and will 'learn' from his mistakes, just like positivity bias for the future is based on a possible idyllic illusion, not a concrete reality. In addition, Prashant's 'surface' concern over mechanical mistakes in his writing (Journals 1), as opposed to a 'deeper' interest in the more complex requirements of academic writing, such as finding academic sources, addressing a specific audience, and creating a strong thesis statement (Journal 2), indicates that Prashant does not believe he has the potential to become a better writer, as those who only focus on surface issues often believe they lack the innate abilities of more-skilled writers (Sanders-Reio, et al., 2014).

Thus, Prashant's feelings of inadequacy as a writer, and his struggles with acquiring and practicing academic writing throughout secondary school, have excluded him from the discourse community of his university's writing classroom. This feeling of exclusion has influenced Prashant's redemption narrative in the following way: He can only redeem himself with the *possibility* of improving as a

writer in the future because his past and present experiences have so clearly proven otherwise. Therefore, he holds firmly to the belief that his “future self for writing 102 next semester will be way better than the one in the current semester” (Journal 3). However, this redemption narrative, whether accurate or not, is essential to Prashant’s self-construction as a writer who is continuously learning from his mistakes in order to improve in the future.

Without positivity bias for the future—the one place where Prashant has not yet made a mistake—he could easily lose all motivation as a writer, which highlights why positivity bias for the future is often used as a coping mechanism in the face of current difficulties (Thomsen, et al., 2014). Even more important, positivity bias for the future allows Prashant’s redemption narrative to conform to a master narrative in which he will one day be rewarded with success for never giving up, no matter how challenging and impossible the obstacle.

## **8.5 Section IV: Little Narrative Forms**

### **8.5.1 ‘Little’ Narrative Forms in the Participants’ Story Arcs**

While the participants’ collective reliance on a ‘success’ master narrative with a redemption theme, along with my own presence as their teacher-researcher, helps explain the various contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions found in their narrative identity constructions, an additional motivation, the little narrative form, provides a further layer of understanding as to how each participant wanted their writer identity to be perceived. This motivation, to present their own unique journeys within the normative ‘master’ narrative commonly made available to them by schools and educators (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011), provides an alternative way to representing the participants’ experiences and identities as writers. Since little narratives are more individualized and situated within the participants’ own unique experiences and perceptions, they also avoid some of the simplifications and overgeneralizations grounded in master success narratives (Lyotard, 1999), thus allowing for greater insight into the participants’ varied, shifting, and nuanced identities embedded within the story arcs of their narrative constructions.

Moreover, little narratives allow the participants to frame their identities and notions of success according to their own internalized and evolving life stories (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996), which can lead to further understanding of how they view academic writing, classroom practices, and most important, what it means to be a writer based upon their own beliefs and values. Below, I will explore how Dana, Mumin, and Prashant chose to represent their writer identities according to little narrative forms by examining the past-present-future story arcs that comprise their three journal responses.

**Table 8.1** illustrates how the participants' shared master narratives of 'success' develop into more individualized little narrative forms: Dana as Hero; Mumin as Rebel; and Prashant as Victim.

**Table 8.1: 'Success' Master Narratives and Their 'Little' Narrative Forms**

'Success' Master Narrative	A conventional, dominant view that students are expected to succeed, in this case, as academic writers; encompasses several variations on the meaning of success, specifically as 'little' narrative forms; three common 'little' narratives exhibited in the participants' writer identity constructions are detailed below.
'Little' Narrative Forms	Description of 'Little' Narrative Forms
<p><b>DANA: Hero</b></p> <p><u>Story Arc:</u>  <b>Stage One:</b> Struggle  <b>Stage Two:</b> Search  <b>Stage Three:</b> Success</p>	( <b>Stage One</b> ): encounters difficulty when usual methods of academic success no longer garner expected rewards, such as high grades; ( <b>Stage Two</b> ): emphasizes individual strengths, even in the face of academic writing difficulties: perseverance, self-reliance, and determination to find a solution; ( <b>Stage Three</b> ): equates self-worth as a writer with academic achievement and future success; establishes self as hero of story.
<p><b>MUMIN: Rebel</b></p> <p><u>Story Arc:</u>  <b>Stage One:</b> Resistance  <b>Stage Two:</b> Discovery  <b>Stage Three:</b> Resolution</p>	( <b>Stage One</b> ): attacks established beliefs about academic writing; includes tales of resistance to what is typical and conventional in school; ( <b>Stage Two</b> ): engages with academic writing based on personal self-interests; seeks a solution that fulfills

	individual needs as a writer; <b>(Stage Three)</b> : creates own definition of success as a writer either inside or outside the classroom; establishes self as rebel of story.
<p><b>PRASHANT: Victim</b></p> <p><u>Story Arc:</u></p> <p><b>Stage One:</b> Self-Blame</p> <p><b>Stage Two:</b> Avoidance</p> <p><b>Stage Three:</b> Rectification</p>	<p><b>(Stage One)</b>: accepts blame for negative writing experiences; internalizes feelings of shame based on assessments of teachers;</p> <p><b>(Stage Two)</b>: avoids responsibility for writing difficulties; provides external reasons for recurrent writing mistakes;</p> <p><b>(Stage Three)</b>: claims to find help or some sort of solution but is unsuccessful in the process; establishes self as victim of story.</p>

### 8.5.1.1 Dana's Hero-Narrative Form

#### Stage One: The Struggle

The hero-narrative form is very similar to the success master narrative with a redemption theme in that both view academic writing as leading to success by grounding the story in a form of struggle that needs to be overcome (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). However, Dana contextualizes this very general, master narrative by portraying herself as a hero within each stage of her story arc. In Stage One, when Dana depicts her struggle, it is based on the premise that her usual, successful methods of responding to an assignment are no longer garnering the same reward that she once assumed and expected, such as praise for her efforts or the highest grade possible:

*I poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great. This was my first time taking such a school assignment with a lot of heart.*

Therefore, she establishes her secondary school teacher as an 'adversary' within Stage One of her story arc to promote the point that something else, certainly not Dana's own writing abilities, is preventing her success. This is achieved when Dana describes how her teacher 'hurt' her rather than explain why she received a low grade:

*I didn't understand why she didn't like it. I felt hurt. Her comments made me feel that none of my writings would ever be good enough.*

Dana's particular focus on grades in the below passage also highlights how she associates her hero-status with obtaining the highest grade possible. To be unjustly labeled as a 'B' student, therefore, seems to rob Dana of what she believes to be her rightful place in the hierarchy of grades: that of an 'A' student. As she states,

*After that my writings in school would always get a score of either B- or B. To some people those grades might be considered really good, but I was personally never proud of what I got. Sadly, I was able to do that in all my subjects, except for writing. Although my approach and style in writing improved throughout the year, my grades never got better. I felt like since the moment I got my first 'B' my teacher just had this idea that a 'B' is always going to be my level in writing.*

The last two lines allow Dana to continue to present herself as a hero, albeit one who is unfairly challenged. She does so by emphasizing that her writing has indeed improved, which is to be expected of someone skilled at achieving, but it is the actual reward itself—her grade—that is tarnished, which makes her appear as a 'B' student to the general public even though she believes she deserves so much more. By depicting herself as misunderstood, especially by the average person who believes that 'B's are worthy, she ends Stage One as a hero struggling to reclaim her former glory in the face of supposed indifference by those around her.

### Stage Two: The Search

In Stage Two of Dana's story arc, she is able to display her heroic qualities by embarking on a journey to solve her writing difficulties. This entails that she leave a symbolic version of 'home'—in this case, the writing classroom of her secondary school days—so that she can acquire the additional skills needed to hone her abilities as an academic writer. While such heroic journeys are usually laden with obstacles, Dana leaves most of her frustrations, fears, and anxieties behind, allocating only two short lines to her inner turmoil in Stage Two of her story arc: *"When I first entered my writing 101 class, I was honestly afraid. I didn't know what to expect, I was afraid of not doing well."*



After this disclosure, she appears to immediately improve once she enters the new domain of her WRI 101 classroom. Here, she has found the ideal environment, one conducive to her needs, which enables her to thrive as a writer. The below passage explains, in somewhat repetitive detail, the arsenal of skills Dana acquires in order to regain her status as a successful writer:

*I made sure to write down all the notes, bullet points and tips the professor mentioned in class. I followed the sample essays and sometimes used the same vocabulary. I used [the sample] essays to cite and make references. The first essay assignment I had to submit taught me how to properly find suitable sources, references and proof. I learned how to cite and how to efficiently find the needed information for my topic.*

Dana's use of repetition, especially when discussing the resources made available to her and the specific skills she acquired from such accessible help, implies that she was unable to triumph in secondary school because she was previously subjected to an unsupportive learning environment. Anyone, even those capable of great accomplishments, would feel ill-prepared to succeed without the necessary resources, and Dana makes sure to highlight this point by describing what she was once denied in secondary school: guidance. This devotion to detail accomplishes an even more important task in Dana's quest to reestablish her hero-status. It conveys her self-reliance and determination to find a solution by painstakingly following each and every suggestion made available to her in WRI 101. As a result, her due reward, the sought-after 'A,' is venerated within the below passage:

*I devoted my entire week to writing [my essay] and I was actually really proud of what I wrote. I thankfully got an "A." When I saw my grade I started jumping and running around the house because of how happy and proud I felt. Getting that score boosted my self-esteem and made me believe more in my abilities and in my writing skills.*

By the end of Stage Two Dana has begun to reclaim her former glory, but with the pride of a hero who has earned her battle scars. She cites her 'devotedness' as the reason for her success, yet lacks any other personal insight or awareness gained from her experience as a writer. She instead revels in her long-last acquisition of an 'A,' since for Dana, it is the ultimate symbol of success.

### Stage Three: The Success

Finally, in Stage Three of Dana's story arc, she firmly establishes herself as a victorious hero again, but one who is greater than before. She now has an arsenal of writing skills, which she feels confident to use, and her rightful place in the hierarchy of grades has been restored to that of an 'A' student. When she touts her praises in the passage below, it is with the assuredness of one who has persevered after four long years of struggle and hardship:

*I'm gladly going to admit, that for the first time in four years I actually think that I got what it takes to compose good essays. Writing 101 class taught me different techniques and different research approaches that I'm sure will help me later on. I am finally proud and confident in myself and in my abilities to write and win a debate. I'm ready to enter my writing 102 class, knowing that I had the proper background and practice.*

However, absent from this passage, or any other discussion of academic writing in Stage Three of her story arc, is insight into how Dana values academic writing. Instead, she catalogues what academic writing can do for her, from improving her self-worth to ensuring future academic success, but these are just the accolades to be obtained from any achievement; they tell us nothing about the role of writing in Dana's life beyond her need to master the necessary steps to gain an 'A.' Instead, it seems that Dana would rather focus on the source of her suffering, if only to remind others of how she was able to triumph and overcome such adversity:

*After looking back at my high school years I realized that my teachers were never passionate about teaching. It felt like they dealt with teaching as a task they just had to get over with. They would never sit*

*down and ask their students if they had questions about their essays. They would just come in, lecture for 50 minutes then leave. The reason for me not liking English class wasn't my fault. All what was lacking was some motivation and support.*

This is a crucial inclusion as it implies that academic writing is something for Dana to overcome, just like any challenge, and at the expense of any analysis of her own perceptions as a writer. She questions the motivations and passions of her previous teachers, even faulting them for lacking such sentiments, but she never once questions her own motives for wanting to be a successful writer beyond achieving an 'A.' Instead, it appears Dana still believes that outside forces were what prevented her initial success, mainly in the form of her secondary school teachers, and now that she has removed herself from further threat to her grades, she is confident in her reign as an 'A' writer, ending Stage Three with a prideful look toward the future in WRI 102.

### Synopsis

While Dana begins her story arc from persecuted hero to one who has discovered newfound knowledge about academic writing during her pursuit of the all-elusive 'A,' she ends her story arc much as she was before: concerned about the glories and successes that academic writing can provide her. Since little hero-narrative forms are so similar to master success narratives, this ending might not be surprising, but it also conveys something telling about how Dana views her own writing experiences within a sociocultural context (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). Academic writing represents power to Dana, and the mastery of such a powerful discursive tool elevates her self-worth, guarantees academic achievement, and ultimately, promises future success, which she so desperately craves.

Furthermore, Dana's implicit faith in such a generalized narrative about academic writing leading to success suggests how much she is influenced by the narratives that guide her life (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996): the narratives of gatekeeping

teachers who equate 'success' with obtaining 'A's' on her essays; the narratives of Dana's parents who demand academic perfection from her; and the narratives that Dana tells herself, in which she believes her over-striving behavior will guarantee success, which is the ultimate achievement for any self-proclaimed hero in a story of her own making.

#### **8.5.1.2 Mumin's Rebel-Narrative Form**

##### *Stage One: The Resistance*

The rebel-narrative form shares a parallel premise to the success master narrative with a redemption theme in that both result in endings with a change for the better (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). However, Mumin contextualizes his narrative in Stage One by depicting academic English as a rigid, institutionalized discourse that is somehow flawed, especially in comparison to his previous ways of writing in his primary Discourse in Arabic: "*This idea of writing, which I hold dear to my heart, has been severely mutated due to contradictions I sensed in the new way I was made to understand writing.*" When Mumin describes his resistance, therefore, he does so based on the premise that the new way he is expected to write in secondary school is in violation of his rights as a writer. While others, such as Dana, may be impressed by the power and prestige that academic discourse wields, Mumin is able to recognize its imperfections and oppressive conventionality:

*I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in high school, especially in English and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed; they didn't care about what their students might be interested in writing about.*

In the following passage, Mumin depicts his actions as a form of protest against the discourse community of his secondary school's writing classroom. However, while he refuses to conform to the standards of academic writing, he also appears to

rebel against *all* forms of writing, whether they are essays in English or diary entries in Arabic:

*This part of my life was a big game changer as the sanctions forced on me by the new education system made me feel like less of a writer. I stopped writing in my diary and turned my interest into other things, such as music and basketball which made me feel a bit shallow and less connected to writing.*

By highlighting a sense of injustice within Stage One of his story arc, it appears that Mumin is trying to justify his defiant behavior; however, he does so at the expense of his own enjoyment and agency as a writer. His willingness to sacrifice Arabic in opposition to academic English also reveals how much he considers his rebel-status an important cause. While he endures a great loss, from feeling “*shallow*” to ultimately “*less*” as a writer, he seems to believe that rebelling against his “*new education system*” is preferable to accepting its “*sanctions*.”

### Stage Two: The Discovery

In Stage Two of Mumin’s story arc he begins to reassess his previous rejection of academic discourse. This occurs at university when Mumin realizes, for the very first time since secondary school, that he can write about topics that are meaningful to his own life as opposed to ones that stifle his views in their function to fulfill the normative standards of his teachers. This newfound awareness transforms his customary resistance to that of unexpected engagement:

*Since that day came I started thinking about a topic for my essay and spent hours reading articles. I was like why don’t I write about child abuse in Sudan because it was important to me. I started doing a lot of research and I also emailed some of my friends from my country to send me articles that contain ideas about this topic.*

However, while Mumin gains a liberating sense of agency by personalizing some of the requirements of his essay assignment—from choosing a topic about his *own* country to emailing his *own* friends for ideas—he is still unable to extricate himself from the one remaining power that has ruled his life since secondary school: the

grading system. As he declares, “*But I got disappointed of myself again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn’t make it out of Probation this semester.*”

Therefore, Mumin realizes by Stage Two that resisting the powers of academic discourse is not how he will win the overall battle against oppressive writing standards. Rather, Mumin must find a way to disempower the very control that academic discourse has maintained over him throughout his schooling. Thus, he relinquishes his concern for grades and frees himself from the constraints of academic convention by creating his own personal domain in which he can rule as a writer in both Arabic and English:

*But I said to myself I don’t care, whatever the results at the end I am not going to give up I have to continue till the end. I started sharing some tweets in Twitter about my writing and I created a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, and I was thinking if I can write more why don’t I make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs in English as well.*

Mumin ends Stage Two with a strengthened rebel-status by claiming a virtual space of his own that cannot be controlled by his teachers’ normative writing standards or a grading system that has dominated and oppressed him since secondary school. This victory also unearths a new discovery on Mumin’s part: He does not need to resist academic English in favor of Arabic, but rather, he can unite these two very distinct discourses in his life for an even stronger sense of engagement as a writer.

### Stage Three: The Resolution

Finally, in Stage Three of Mumin’s story arc, he returns to the very place of his former struggle: the academic writing classroom. It is here that he establishes himself as a rebel of action by confronting the very discourse community he had once rejected by challenging teachers to respect his writing and treat him as more than a mere assessment based on normative writing standards. With this

declaration, Mumin also attains a sense of justice that somehow eluded him during secondary school, and his need to demonize academic writing and depict it as a flawed discourse disappears. Instead, he begins to recognize its potential for good—if used to engage students—and he resolves to end his resistance and accept the terms of its standardizations once and for all:

*No matter what teachers think of someone's writing, they must realize a student's main focus should be enjoying themselves. Once you do that, you make peace with yourself.*

Nevertheless, while he has, indeed, begun to join forces with academic English, he still seems quite wary of the struggles that lay ahead, as based on his concern regarding the time and effort he will need to complete his upcoming assignments, no matter the amount of excitement they potentially offer:

*Although, I know it will be hard, but to be honest I am also excited about it, because I know that I have another chance to disclose the thoughts I have in my mind about writing. And I know that I will spend a lot of time doing the assignments, but I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person's beliefs and feelings. But now I am more confident about writing in general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it.*

The last line in particular reveals how much Mumin feels the need to build up his own confidence by exhorting his abilities to succeed even though he does not have a strategy in place to support his claims. In fact, he seems to believe that stating he is a good, confident writer is enough to overcome future obstacles within a discourse community that he is skilled in resisting and rejecting but certainly not embracing as of yet. Such bravado, however, provides Mumin the pluck and self-confidence he needs to sustain his rebel-status, and even more important, end Stage Three on a fearless note of resolution, convinced in his belief that he will succeed in WRI 102 in the near future.

### Synopsis

While Mumin begins his story arc as a brash, young rebel, intent on resisting a dominant discourse in English in order to maintain his loyalty to Arabic, he eventually learns that he can become an even more engaged writer by accepting both discourses in his life, whether inside or outside the classroom. His brief taste of freedom when choosing his own essay topic at university inspires Mumin to end his resistance, and by the end of his story arc, he presents himself as a much more mature rebel, resolved in his decision to join the academic discourse community of his writing classroom. Since Mumin's rebel narrative must end on a note of triumph, as based on the master success-narrative form (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011), he emboldens himself with future predictions of success in his belief that academic writing will now provide the engagement he once so enjoyed when writing in Arabic.

Mumin's approach to his own writing experiences, however, provide something telling about how he views academic discourse as a source of ideological conflict. His need to challenge such a dominant discourse suggests how much Mumin resents the narratives that guide his life by upholding academic discourse in English over his primary Discourse in Arabic (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996): the narratives of gatekeeping teachers who promote academic discourse as a form of power; the narratives of Mumin's parents who encourage him to learn in English rather than Arabic; and the narratives of Mumin, the self-proclaimed rebel in a story of his own making, who would rather join a discourse community in English for the potential promise of freedom rather than continue to resist academic discourse for no freedom at all.

#### **8.5.1.3 Prashant's Victim-Narrative Form**

##### Stage One: The Self-Blame

The victim-narrative form, which at first glance appears contradictory to the success master narrative, does in fact bear a resemblance in that both result in redemption themes grounded in salvation and recovery from past consequences (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006;



Alexander, 2011). However, Prashant contextualizes his narrative in Stage One by accepting the blame for his 'weak' writing skills from teachers who publicly shame him during secondary school: *"Most of my high school writing experiences contain embarrassing moments but there have been moments where it was appreciated."* By sympathizing with his victimizers, Prashant in turn deflects responsibility away from his own weaknesses as a writer since he claims to want—and even benefit from—the same outcome that his teachers' mistreatment is intended to cause: good grades. This is confessed in the below passage:

*In all of the embarrassing moments I have come across, I have always learned something very important from my mistakes and I have always tried to improve my writing skills as it is very important to get good grades.*

Since Prashant's victim-status absolves him of responsibility for whatever harm or embarrassment he has suffered, he must continue to maintain his innocence by acting surprised by the very victimization that is inflicted upon him. This first occurs when Prashant describes how his secondary school teacher made him a *"laughing stock"* in ninth grade, but her intentions for doing so were unbeknownst to Prashant until after the shameful event took place:

*At first I thought that my teacher liked my project very much but when I read it in the class, I was ashamed of myself. I had wished that why did the teacher even give me the project and even if she did why did she tell me to read it out loud.*

By depicting his teacher's actions as a form of ensnarement, Prashant firmly establishes that he has been harmed by forces beyond his control, which excuses him from not defending himself during the event in question. Moreover, he continues to believe that he deserves his mistreatment by rationalizing and even validating the reason for his secondary school teacher's intentional cruelty:

*That was when I figured out the question which was disturbing me. Every teacher has its own way of teaching their students and that was her way. My teacher wanted me to understand my mistake in the best possible way and never wanted me to forget about it.*

Although Prashant's willingness to accept his victimization damages his self-esteem as a writer, it also provides him the excuse he needs to remain blameless for his failure at preventing further mistakes, thus keeping his innocence intact: *"After that, everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class."* He ends Stage One haunted by his weaknesses that seem to stalk him as he helplessly stands by: *"My weakness in writing skills has been following me from elementary to high school and even in the university level."*

### Stage Two: The Avoidance

In Stage Two of Prashant's story arc, he modifies his victim-status from one who justifies his victimization to one who blames his victimizers for their inability to help him improve as an academic writer. Such a decision, it seems, is based on Prashant's conflicting positionings concerning his secondary school teachers, whom he regards as authority figures upholding the norms of Standard English, yet also disregards, for their novice-like attempts to use correct English grammar: *"Sometimes I think if my teachers were much better in English I might have already improved now."* However, now that he is at university, and finally free from his tormentors, Prashant's desire to maintain his victim-status—and thus continue to avoid responsibility for his own learning—requires that he must find another source of damage to incriminate and blame for his weak writing skills: his WRI 101 course. As he states,

*Here comes the main drawback of this course. When writing for an academic course you simply cannot write something on your own like before. You need the support of good academic sources. If one lacks good academic sources, you are put into a dilemma.*

The last line in particular, with special emphasis on the word *"dilemma,"* allows Prashant to construct another demeaning situation in which he is found lacking the appropriate academic sources. Moreover, while Prashant attempts to evoke a sense of sympathy by plaintively asking the question, *"How could it go well as I was completely new to this course?"* he also presents an alternative scenario to the

one in secondary school in which he shifts the blame from individual oppressors zeroing in on his mistakes to that of a vast, oppressive writing environment demanding unfamiliar rhetorical skills from him. By doing so, Prashant is able to seek refuge in his victimhood as he depicts himself as disoriented and lost, unable to follow the directions of his professor, which ultimately, releases him from any responsibility as an academic writer:

*Important parts of my essay like the 'Thesis Statement' and the 'Introduction' were really weak since they didn't follow the directions. My essay should have mainly focused on the audience, according to my Professor, but it didn't. Even I sometimes now think that I should have directed my essay's focus towards the audience.*

While Prashant acknowledges his instructor's advice, and even agrees that his essay lacked focus, his attempt at accountability is perfunctory at best since it is stated as something he *should* do rather than something he *will* endeavor to fix. By continuing to avoid his own culpability as a writer and blame external sources for his failure, Prashant reinforces his victim-status even as he affects concern for his circumstances:

*I had chosen a difficult topic, but I thought if I spend time on my research, I might get good sources. Unfortunately it did not happen as my way as I didn't choose a common topic which can give you academic sources very easily.*

He ends Stage Two in a remorseful state, claiming to care about the outcome of his assignment, but seemingly relieved to pinpoint his writing troubles on anything else but himself.

### Stage Three: The Rectification

Finally, in Stage Three of Prashant's story arc, he attempts to overcome his victim-status by imagining what would happen if he took the initiative to actively approach his learning rather than blame his secondary school teachers or his WRI 101 course for his difficulties with academic writing. As a result, the below passage is missing the self-blame and deprecating descriptions that Prashant often relies on

to evoke sympathy for his weaknesses, and instead, he depicts a future world in which he is a fully recovered and functional writer:

*My future self for writing 102 next semester will be way better than the one in the current semester because he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester for a much more advanced academic writing course.*

However, it is important to note, when Prashant envisions himself as a better writer in the future, he does so from the perspective of an outsider describing someone else in the third person. This suggests that Prashant is still unable to shake his victim-status even as he desires a new-and-improved self-image. Instead, he can only imagine a version of himself that is so detached from his present state of mind that he feels compelled to use the pronouns “*he*” and “*his*” when referring to himself. Moreover, the inclusion of Prashant’s mistakes while envisioning his upcoming writing course implies that he still considers them uncontrollable factors, which follow him around against his will, even into the realm of future possibilities that Prashant hopes to reach, once and for all, after years of rejection and reproof for his writing difficulties:

*My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well.*

It is therefore not surprising that Prashant seeks support from the very mistakes that have traumatized him throughout his schooling. He seems unable to detect the difference between an ally or adversary, and his belief that a past failure will help guide him to future success—rather than himself—reflects his victim mindset. His desire to be rescued by his mistakes as he strives to “*rectify all of them*” also suggests a co-dependent cycle in which Prashant wants to help that which has made him helpless. Since he cannot extricate himself from the self-defeating habits of his past, he remains stuck in a state of denial, believing he is capable to

withstand the unknown challenges that lay ahead in WRI 102 without any substantive evidence from his WRI 101 course to support his claims:

*I will be able to handle my writing 102 course in a much better way than I did on my first semester for writing 101 because I was very new to this course and I was still learning.*

He ends Stage Three oblivious to his victim-status, convinced by a belief of his own creation that rectifying his past mistakes will lead to salvation and success in his future WRI 102 course.

### Synopsis

While Prashant begins his story arc justifying the victimization he experienced as a writing student in English, he eventually avoids responsibility by shifting the blame for his difficulties onto his secondary school teachers and WRI 101 course. In an attempt to overcome his victim-status, Prashant ends his story arc convinced that rectifying his past and present mistakes will lead to his future improvement as an academic writer. However, Prashant's denial regarding his victimhood is crucial; without it, Prashant cannot attain the sense of redemption he needs to end his victim narrative confident in his own writing abilities, as based on the master success-narrative form (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011).

Prashant's tendency to avoid responsibility for his own writing, and thus blame others for his mistakes, conveys something telling about how he views the sociocultural context of his learning experiences. His implicit belief that external factors control the outcome of his writing suggests how much he is influenced by the narratives that guide his life (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996): the narratives of gatekeeping teachers who shame him for not using academic English correctly; the narratives of Standard English that make Prashant blame his secondary school teachers for his own grammar mistakes; and the narratives that Prashant tells himself, forever the victim of academic circumstances of his own making, who would rather imagine his mistakes to be rectified in the future than resolve to fix them now, during his present state of mind.

## 8.6 Conclusion

In summary, the contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions that Dana, Mumin, and Prashant presented in their narrative identity constructions reveal the significance of my own presence as their teacher-researcher, which motivated them to portray their writer identities in particular ways. Based on Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, the participants included narrative contradictions that presented their 'ought-to' selves as successful students. When describing their 'ideal' selves as academic writers, the participants presented omissions when attempting to describe their academic writing in relation to how they embraced, resisted, or felt excluded from the discourse community of their writing classrooms. Moreover, based on Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible-selves theory, all three participants used positivity bias when imagining their possible 'future' selves, which entailed purposeful narrative inclusions that resulted in a redemption resolution commonly found in success master narratives. The success master narrative that each participant followed, as based on McAdams' life story model (1985, 1993, 1996), also revealed their own unique writer identities in 'little narrative form' as revealed in the story arcs of their narrative identity constructions: Dana as Hero; Mumin as Rebel; and Prashant as Victim.

## CHAPTER 9

### THEMES, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a thematic discussion of the findings that is divided into three main sections. The first section summarizes the findings into six general themes that reflect the research questions and frameworks that guided this study. The second section provides a thematic discussion of the themes that also engages with specific literature on writer identity and narrative identity construction that is relevant to the findings. The third section discusses the implications of the study by suggesting how the findings can contribute to further understandings of writer identity and narrative identity construction in multilingual students using academic English in the UAE.

#### 9.2 Section I: Six Themes on Writer Identity

Several themes emerged from the research questions, which I will discuss in more detail below:

- 1) *How do first-year writing students at an American-style university in the UAE construct their narrative identities as writers?*
- 2) *How do motivational strategies in the classroom impact the participants' writer identities?*
- 3) *How do ideological beliefs about academic discourse in English impact the participants' attitudes toward writing?*
- 4) *How do sociocultural influences position the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms?*
- 5) *How do narrative motives influence the participants to construct their writer identities based on specific narrative forms?*

### **9.2.1 Theme 1: Impact of ‘Success’ Narratives on Writer Identity**

Three common narrative features based on ‘success’ impacted how the participants constructed their writer identities within the three major stages of their story arcs as related to Research Question 1. These are the ‘success’ master narrative; the redemption theme; and the ‘little’ narrative form.

#### **9.2.1.1 Success ‘Master’ Narrative**

All three participants followed a success ‘master’ narrative based on a generalized framework for the three major stages of their story arcs when depicting their writer identities. This resulted in their past negative writing experiences in secondary school each leading to a description of their present development as writers that ultimately ended with their imagined improvement as writers in the future. However, I believe their use of a conventional narrative construct was greatly influenced by my own role as their teacher-researcher, as further discussed in Theme 5, as well as the journal prompts that formed the basis of my research. While I aimed to create prompts that were broad enough to allow the participants to reach their own conclusions about their past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences, the sequential relationship between the questions appeared to elicit an expectation that the result of their experiences should conform to an institutional value upheld in school: academic success. Moreover, their desire to be seen as ‘successful,’ especially by their teacher-researcher, reflects how predisposed the participants are to conventional ‘master’ narratives that instruct students how they should perform in the classroom (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Alexander, 2011). The findings therefore suggest that implicit expectations about success led the participants to believe that a success ‘master’ narrative was the only acceptable form to construct for their teacher-researcher.

#### **9.2.1.2 Redemption Theme**

In order to ensure that they presented themselves as successful students, as based on the success ‘master’ narrative, the participants constructed their writer identities according to a ‘redemption’ theme in which a negative experience in their past was transformed into a positive one (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). This type



of theme is enmeshed in institutional contexts because it promotes the belief that any student, no matter their abilities, can achieve success if they just work hard enough (Alexander, 2011). It also enabled the participants to maintain a progressive image of success to their teacher-researcher even when they struggled, resisted, or could not achieve the academic outcomes expected of them. This was evident based on how the participants described their difficulties in secondary school yet found a way to overcome them and achieve success at university: With Dana, the 'A' she could not achieve in secondary school was finally obtained with her argument essay; with Mumin, his resistance toward academic discourse in English eventually shifted to engagement once he could choose his own essay topic; and with Prashant, the shame he felt over his writing mistakes transformed into a sense of assurance that he could indeed rectify those mistakes and eventually improve. The findings suggest that the participants' understanding of their purpose as students, as based on their ability to achieve, was defined by a thematic construct in which their academic struggles were deemed acceptable if they eventually led to success.

### **9.2.1.3 'Little' Narrative Form**

A further exploration of the participants' writer identity constructions revealed how they sought a more nuanced representation of themselves by embedding 'little' narrative forms within the success 'master' narrative of their story arcs (Alexander, 2011). This allowed the participants to create individualized depictions of their writing journeys based on their own notions of success. With Dana, she established herself as a 'hero' by overcoming the academic obstacles that prevented her from achieving 'A's. In Mumin's case, he established himself as a 'rebel' by seeking engagement as a blogger far removed from the academic requirements of his classroom. With Prashant, he established himself as a 'victim' by blaming himself for past and present mistakes yet still imagining his improvement in the future. However, even though the participants displayed aspects of their identities that were unique to their 'little' narratives, in each case, they still positioned themselves as writers based upon the conventional construct of a success 'master' narrative. The findings suggest that the participants were still

influenced by master narratives, even as they sought to individualize them in little-narrative form, based on the implicit assumption that they must ultimately succeed in school.

### **9.2.2 Theme 2: Impact of Motivational Strategies on Writer Identity**

Three major motivational strategies, based on internal and external expectations, impacted how the participants constructed their writer identities and approached their achievement outcomes as related to Research Question 2. These are fear of failure; pressure to achieve; and avoidance/ approach goals.

#### **9.2.2.1 Fear of Failure**

Each participant was driven by a 'fear of failure,' which impacted how they constructed and maintained their writer identities from secondary school up until university (Covington, 1984, 1997; De Castella, et al., 2013). However, this sense of fear impacted the participants in different ways depending on their particular learning behavior and approach toward academic outcomes. As an over-striving learner, Dana measured her worth solely by her grades, which motivated her to relentlessly pursue the highest grade possible as a writer. Mumin's self-protective behavior provided him an excuse for not performing well by blaming external reasons for when he did not succeed as a writer. With Prashant, his failure-accepting behavior was based on a form of 'learned helplessness' in which he felt there was little hope to alter his writing abilities when faced with impending failure (De Castella, et al., 2013). As a result, Dana avoided her fear of failure by succeeding; Mumin blamed his secondary Discourse in English for fear of blaming his lack of ability; and Prashant accepted defeat for fear of feeling hopeful in the face of never-ending failure. The findings suggest that fear was a motivating factor for how the participants approached academic writing, but their management of this fear had either positive outcomes in the classroom, as was the case with Dana, or negative outcomes, as was the case with Mumin and Prashant.

### **9.2.2.2 Pressure to Achieve**

All three participants faced external pressure by their family or teachers to achieve success, which impacted their internalized motivations as writers and achievement outcomes in the classroom (Covington, 1984, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). With Dana, the expectations imposed on her by a high-achieving family motivated her as an over-striving learner by inducing high levels of stress and anxiety if she did not succeed. With Mumin, the expectations of his family and teachers to write in his secondary Discourse of English motivated him as a self-protective learner to resist their efforts instead of attempting to engage with a potentially difficult discourse. With Prashant, the public shaming by his secondary school teachers motivated him as a failure-accepting student to internalize and accept their criticism. As a result, Dana coped with her anxiety by pursuing 'A's; Mumin coped with his resistance by avoiding further responsibility for his poor performance; and Prashant coped with his criticism by believing he could not achieve his teachers' writing standards. The findings suggest that external pressure to succeed motivated the participants to create coping mechanisms based on their individual learning behaviors, which resulted in high-achievement outcomes, as was the case with Dana, or low-achievement outcomes, as was the case with Mumin and Prashant.

### **9.2.2.3 Avoidance/Approach Goals**

The participants' motivations as academic writers depended on how they avoided negative outcomes in the classroom, based on external expectations, or approached positive outcomes in the classroom, based on their own internal desires (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). With Dana, she tried to prevent negative outcomes by avoiding low grades, as based on external expectations to achieve high grades. However, she was able to achieve a positive academic outcome, in the form of an 'A,' by simultaneously approaching her internal goal as a successful writer and debater. With Mumin, he disengaged from academic writing in order to avoid responsibility for any negative outcomes, as based on external expectations to write in his secondary Discourse of English. However, he was able to achieve a positive outcome when he simultaneously approached his internal goal as a blogger outside of the classroom, which motivated him to engage with academic

writing inside of the classroom. With Prashant, he tried to prevent negative outcomes by avoiding the mistakes for which he was criticized, as based on external expectations to write correctly in Standard English. However, he maintained these negative outcomes by fearing that he would continue to make mistakes, even when he imagined rectifying them, rather than achieving positive outcomes by developing his own internal desires and motivations as a writer. Therefore, the findings suggest that motivations based on a combination of internal and external expectations helped the participants achieve positive outcomes in the classroom, as was the case with Dana and Mumin; whereas Prashant, who did not achieve positive outcomes in the classroom, was only motivated by external expectations.

### **9.2.3 Theme 3: Impact of Ideological Beliefs on Writer Identity**

Three major ideological beliefs about the status of English impacted the participants' writer identities and negotiations with their secondary Discourse as related to Research Question 3. These are English as a form of prestige; English as a dominant discourse; and English as a symbol of correctness.

#### **9.2.3.1 English as a Form of Prestige**

The importance Dana placed on her secondary Discourse reflects the common-held belief that English is a prestigious language in the UAE and necessary for academic achievement and social standing (Vora, 2013). This was reinforced by Dana's parents who enrolled her in English-medium schools to better prepare her for acceptance by an American-style university, which is a widespread practice among families in the UAE (Seymour, 2016; Al-Issa, 2017). As a result, Dana considered English her most fluent written language and linked her 'successful' identity as a student with her many academic achievements in her secondary Discourse. She therefore assumed her abilities in English would assist her in achieving 'A's on her writing assignments since she was familiar with the standard written norms required for academic discourse. However, her understanding of what it means to be a successful, academic writer was based solely on Dana's desire for achievement as signified by obtaining 'A's and receiving her parents'

praise. The findings therefore suggest that Dana's construction of her 'successful' writer identity was based on the prestige she experienced with her secondary Discourse and the belief that investing in academic discourse in her writing classrooms would provide her an additional level of prestige associated with English (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

### **9.2.3.2 English as a Dominant Discourse**

The importance Mumin placed on his primary Discourse of Arabic resulted in a conflict with his secondary Discourse of English after his father obliged him to transfer to a private English-instruction secondary school in Sudan. Mumin's resistance toward academic discourse in English subsequently continued after his entire family moved to the UAE so he could attend GAU. While Mumin studied in English for most of his schooling, he never considered himself a fluent writer in English. Instead, he constructed an 'enforced' writer identity based on his experiences with English as a dominant discourse. The clash between Mumin's primary and secondary Discourses was also intensified by the formulaic rules and essay assignments he had to follow in secondary school, which differed greatly from how he wrote in Arabic. As a result, Mumin resented the significance attributed to English over his home language of Arabic, which hindered his desire to invest in such a dominant discourse at his secondary school (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). The findings suggest that Mumin's construction of an 'enforced' writer identity was in reaction to his family and teachers' beliefs that academic English was the only legitimate form of discourse, thus, implying that Mumin's primary Discourse was not.

### **9.2.3.3 English as a Symbol of Correctness**

While Prashant placed importance on his secondary Discourse, he did not consider himself a fluent writer in English, and instead, struggled with continuous surface-level mistakes on his essay assignments throughout school. However, the difficulty he experienced with his secondary Discourse reflects a standard-language ideology commonly practiced in the Gulf by teachers who value Standard English

as the only 'correct' form of written accuracy (Goodwin, 2016; Solloway, 2016). This enforced correctness was further intensified by Prashant's secondary school teachers who used deliberate shaming practices to improve his writing, and as a result, he constructed a 'weak' writer identity based on their constant criticism. While Prashant justified his teachers' intentions to help him obtain a level of standardized correctness in English, their assessments and judgements made him believe that he would always be a 'weak' writer, even when he tried to improve and rectify his mistakes. The findings suggest that highlighting Prashant's mistakes, and consistently judging his abilities as 'weak,' negatively impacted his investment in academic discourse because he internalized his secondary school teachers' assessments and eventually performed according to their expectations (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

#### **9.2.4 Theme 4: Impact of Attitudinal Beliefs on Writer Identity**

Three major attitudinal beliefs about academic discourse in English impacted the participants' agency and engagement with the discourse community of their writing classrooms as related to Research Question 3. These are academic discourse as a generalized genre; academic discourse as a surface/deep writing approach; and academic discourse as a multi-interpreted concept of legitimacy.

##### **9.2.4.1 Academic Discourse as a Generalized Genre**

All three participants indicated that they were unaware of the varied genre structures that comprise academic discourse in English, which reflects a common-held belief by students that academic writing is a single set of formulaic skills (Hyland, 2013). In Dana's case, she believed her writing should follow a formulaic structure based on a reproduction of the rules and conventions that she had construed since secondary school were what she needed to succeed as an academic writer in English. As a result, Dana's search for a 'one-size-fits-all' formula (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Hyland, 2013) made her believe that she could only attain an 'A' once she discovered the correct format for writing her argument essay. In contrast, Mumin felt forced by his teachers and the overall educational system to write formulaic essays in English, which made him view academic

writing, no matter the genre, as a symbol of ideological conflict (Fairclough, 2014). Even when Mumin began to engage with a genre-specific characteristic of his argument essay, such as researching, his tendency to view academic discourse in English as a form of institutionalized control only seemed to abate when he was allowed the freedom to choose a meaningful topic of his own. Prashant's focus on the surface-level mechanics of English reflected his belief that academic discourse was similar to the rules of Standard Written English (Hyland, 2013). As a result, when Prashant was expected to practice genre-specific skills for his argument essay, he continued to solely focus on improving his surface-level mistakes in English rather than engage with the specific requirements of the assignment itself. The findings suggest that Dana and Prashant accepted, and even welcomed, their understanding of academic discourse in English as a set of formulaic skills or surface-level rules, respectively, because it provided them a sense of guidance; whereas Mumin, who resisted the practice of academic English as a set of formulaic skills, felt his agency as a writer was severely diminished (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

#### **9.2.4.2 Academic Discourse as a Surface/Deep Writing Approach**

The participants' writing approaches were shaped by their experiences in secondary school and their desire to invest, or not invest, in academic discourse in English (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Specifically, the 'deep' and 'surface' paradigm that Lavelle (1993) used in her study on writing approaches applies to the participants' attitudes about their own legitimacy and agency as academic writers in English. With Dana, a 'surface' approach to writing, based on following and reproducing a formulaic structure to writing essays, was appealing because she preferred to write the way her teachers required if it guaranteed the potential of a better grade. This was influenced by her experiences in secondary school when she felt her teachers were at fault for not providing the appropriate guidelines to earn a higher grade. When Dana discovered that this writing approach provided her the agency to receive an 'A' on her argument essay, she felt more confident about her legitimacy as a writer at university. Mumin on the other hand, who felt forced by his secondary school teachers to use a 'surface' approach, resented

writing in academic English according to an institutionalized formula. He preferred a 'deep' approach, based on writing for personal meaning and investment, but felt he could only achieve this with Arabic. For him, 'deep' writing could not exist within the constraints of an institution that demanded 'surface' writing, and he only began to consider his legitimacy as an academic writer when he felt a sense of agency by choosing his own essay topics at university. Prashant believed that using a 'surface' approach, in which he relied on his teacher's corrections to improve his essay assignments, was an effective strategy to develop his abilities as a writer. However, his over-reliance on his teachers' feedback, as established in secondary school, prevented him from developing a sense of agency at university. As a result, he never moved beyond the stages of making surface-level corrections at university, which negatively impacted his legitimacy as a writer. The findings suggest that feelings of legitimacy as an academic writer in English were not dependent on 'surface' versus 'deep' writing approaches, but rather, how these approaches helped the participants achieve a sense of agency in the classroom (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

#### **9.2.4.3 Academic Discourse as a Multi-Interpreted Concept of Legitimacy**

While all three participants recognized that academic discourse in English was the only acceptable and legitimate form of writing in the academy, their various interpretations of its legitimacy as a dominant discourse impacted how they negotiated their own peripheral participation as members within the academic discourse community of their writing classrooms (Davies & Harré, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). With Dana, her understanding of legitimate academic discourse was based on the prestige of English and earning the highest grade possible; as a result, Dana devalued her peripheral membership in secondary school when she received 'B's on her essays but eventually embraced her membership once she obtained an 'A' at university. With Mumin, his understanding of legitimate academic discourse was based on replicating its normative standards in English; as a result, Mumin resisted any form of peripheral membership until he discovered at university that he could, indeed, find engagement beyond trying to imitate its formulaic



requirements. With Prashant, his understanding of legitimate academic discourse was based on surface-level correctness in English; as a result, he excluded himself from any peripheral membership because he wanted to rectify his 'micro-issues,' such as grammar mistakes, before tackling the 'macro-issues' deemed necessary for academic essays at university. The findings suggest that the participants' peripheral levels of participation as members of an academic discourse community were based on how they interpreted the legitimacy of academic discourse in English; as such, Dana embraced its prestige, Mumin resisted its normative standards, and Prashant excluded himself for not mastering surface-level correctness.

### **9.2.5 Theme 5: Impact of Sociocultural Beliefs on Writer Identity**

Three major sociocultural beliefs about academic discourse in English positioned the participants' writer identities and negotiations within the academic discourse community of their writing classrooms as related to Research Question 4. These are teachers as gatekeepers; parental expectations for an English-based education; and Perceived Academic Control (PAC) in the classroom.

#### **9.2.5.1 Teachers as Gatekeepers of Academic Discourse**

Each participant was impacted in varying degrees by the role of their secondary school teachers as gatekeepers of academic discourse in English. For Dana, this involved her teachers' assumptions that she already possessed the English-language skills and discursal competencies to write academically, and as a result, she felt her writing lessons were implicit and opaque rather than clear and informative. This common practice of teaching academic discourse as a 'hidden curriculum' (Hyland, 2013; White & Lowenthal, 2011) positioned Dana, who embraced the prestige of academic writing in English, by preventing her from acquiring the skills she needed to negotiate effectively within the discourse community of her writing classroom (Davies & Harré, 1990). While Mumin's secondary school teachers seemed more transparent about the standard requirements needed to write academic essays in English, he struggled with their implicit assumption that using a dominant discourse such as English is necessary

for practicing the writing norms upheld in schools (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). As a result, Mumin viewed English as a discourse of power, and he positioned himself against his teachers' attempts to prepare him for the discourse community in his upcoming writing courses (Davies & Harré, 1990). In Prashant's case, his teachers enforced an institutionalized assumption that 'correct' English was the only legitimate form of academic writing (Goodwin, 2016; Solloway, 2016), which they instilled with public-shaming techniques. However, since he experienced repeated difficulties acquiring the mechanical features of English, his teachers' rigid expectations positioned him and made him feel excluded from ever joining the academic discourse community of his writing classrooms. These findings suggest how different types of gatekeeping impacted the participants' negotiations within the discourse community of their writing classrooms, including their own sense of legitimacy as academic writers in English (Davies & Harré, 1990).

#### **9.2.5.2 Parental Expectations for an English-based Education**

The significance of an English-based education to parents in the AUE and greater MENA region was evident by the participants' shared linguistic experiences: All three studied in English-medium schools at various stages in their lives, which enabled them to attend GAU. However, the participants' motivations to write in their secondary Discourse of English, as exemplified by Dana and Mumin, differed depending on the level of importance their families placed on the language. In Dana's case, her engagement with English was influenced by the expectations of her high-achieving family who valued English as a symbol of prestige in the UAE (Dahan, 2015). For Mumin, he resisted English because he felt forced by his father to switch from an Arabic school to that of an English-medium secondary school in Sudan. While Prashant struggled with writing in English, he did not describe the parental expectations experienced by the previous participants. Instead, he attended English-instruction 'national' schools in the UAE (Vora, 2013), which incorporated Hindi classes into the Indian-based curriculum, suggesting that his home language was considered just as significant as English. In contrast, Dana's parents enrolled her in American-style schools from the age of four, and Mumin's parents moved from Sudan to the UAE so he could attend GAU, indicating an

elevated importance placed upon English that was missing from Prashant's experience. As a result, the findings suggest that varying levels of parental expectations to learn English, in relation to Dana and Mumin, affected the participants' engagement or resistance with English as their secondary Discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990).

### **9.2.5.3 Perceived Academic Control in the Classroom**

The impact of Perceived Academic Control (PAC) in the classroom, based on how the participants felt responsible for their achievement outcomes, was greatly impacted by how they experienced their identities as writers (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015). Dana's 'successful' writer identity motivated her to seek outside help when she felt unsupported by her secondary school teachers rather than accept their assessments that she was a 'B' writer. As a result, her belief that she was capable of success motivated her to continue to seek help and use the available resources at university to achieve an 'A' on her argument essay. Mumin's 'enforced' writer identity motivated him to resist the expectations of his secondary school teachers who required a strict adherence to formulaic essays. However, once he was able to choose his own essay topic at university, his motivation to resist academic discourse turned into engagement and he became more accountable for his achievement outcomes. Prashant's 'weak' writer identity motivated him to internalize the critical views of his secondary school teachers who made him feel incapable of ever improving as a writer. Once he was free from their criticism at university, he continued to believe he was weak and avoided responsibility for his writing outcomes by finding reasons that hindered his improvement. Thus, Dana and Prashant maintained their successful and weak writer identities, respectively, whereas Mumin shifted his identity when he did not feel enforced in his new classroom environment. The findings therefore suggest, in relation to Dana and Prashant, that PAC was a maintained internalization that did not shift even when the participants' classroom environments changed between secondary school and university (Perry, 1991; Pekrun, 2006; Collie, et al., 2015).

### **9.2.6 Theme 6: Impact of Narrative Motives on Writer Identity**

An exploration of the participants' narrative motives revealed how the presence of myself as their teacher-researcher impacted the construction of their writer identities as related to Research Question Five. These are audience-pleasing motives; self-construction motives; and possible-future motives.

#### **9.2.6.1 Audience-Pleasing Motives**

All three participants displayed 'audience-pleasing' motives in which they constructed self-presentations of their writer identities based on the assumption that their teacher-researcher, as sole audience to their narratives, 'expected' them to be successful (Goffman, 1959; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Such motives to appear successful are common when students construct narratives about their writing experiences, as previously discussed in Theme 1 (Alexander, 2011). However, in order for the participants to maintain an 'expected' image of themselves as successful students, even when they faced difficulties in the past, they highlighted external circumstances that prevented their success. With Dana, she blamed her secondary school teachers and their lack of guidance for receiving 'B's'; with Mumin, he blamed his secondary Discourse of English for making him lose his love of writing; and with Prashant, he blamed his secondary school teachers' weakness in English for his inability to improve. The findings therefore suggest that the participants' narrative constructions focused on external circumstances that prevented their past successes in order to explain inconsistent behavior that conflicted with their current presentations of success as based on audience-pleasing motives (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996).

#### **9.2.6.2 Self-Construction Motives**

All three participants exhibited 'self-construction' motives in which they presented an 'ideal' image of themselves as successful writers based on their own internal motivations and values about academic discourse in English (Goffman, 1959; Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, this 'ideal' image was compromised by their audience-pleasing need to conform to institutionalized expectations regarding success and how students should perform in the classroom, as previously

discussed in Theme 1 (Alexander, 2011). This was evident when the participants described their preferred image of success but did not explain 'how' they practiced the skills to achieve this success. With Dana, she constructed her 'ideal' image based on achieving the highest grade possible; however, once she obtained an 'A' her success was established by proof of her grade, not on the acquired skills that led to her 'A.' With Mumin, he constructed his 'ideal' image of success based on meaningful writing in Arabic rather than formulaic standards in English. However, once he chose his own topic for his argument essay, his success was established by his newfound engagement with academic discourse, not on his abilities when writing the assignment. With Prashant, he constructed his 'ideal' image of success based on rectifying his mistakes in English; however, his success was established by his imagined improvement, not on the skills acquired after his asserted process of rectification. The findings suggest that the participants' understanding of academic success was shaped by institutionalized expectations; thus, while each participant aimed to construct their own notion of success, it was based on a standard marker of achievement upheld in schools: high grades, active engagement, and evidence of improvement.

### **9.2.6.3 Possible-Future Motives**

All three participants utilized possible-future motives when envisioning themselves in WRI 102 the following semester by depicting successful imaginings about the future, as previously discussed in Theme 1. Specifically, this 'positivity bias' for the future was characterized by positive illusions about their writing that had the potential to occur (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986), which was also influenced by the role of their teacher-researcher, whom the participants most likely assumed wanted to hear about their future improvement and success. As a result, the participants fashioned their imagined futures of success based on their past failings in order to fulfill the success 'master' narrative that was the driving force behind the construction of their narrative identities as writers (McAdams, 1985, 1993, 1996). With Dana, she imagined herself as a 'prepared' writer, capable of success as an academic writer in English, as based on her past difficulties in secondary school in which she felt she was not provided the guidance

to achieve an 'A.' With Mumin, he imagined himself as a 'passionate' writer, capable of engaging with his secondary Discourse in English, as based on the linguistic conflict he once felt between Arabic and English. With Prashant, he imagined himself as an 'improved' writer, able to learn from his mistakes, as based on his past difficulties producing surface-level correctness in English. The findings suggest that the use of positivity bias allowed the participants to construct their future selves unrestrained by the reality of what had actually occurred in the past; as a result, each participant chose to overcome the negative outcomes of their past writing experiences by altering their future possibilities.

### **9.3 Section II: Thematic Discussion About Findings**

#### **9.3.1 Role of 'Success' in Narrative Identity Construction**

While Alexander (2011) argues that little narratives provide students alternative ways to challenge the 'success' master narrative, the findings reveal that the participants' little narratives only presented variations of a successful academic writer, not different representations of an academic writer altogether. This contradicts Alexander's (2011) overall stance that little narratives offer students distinctly different writer identities than what is available from the success master narrative. In fact, while Alexander (2011) asserts that "students do not view their literacy paths only in terms of success" (p. 627), all three of the participants clearly chose to construct their writer identities based on a chronological path of success as evident by their past, present, and imagined-future journal responses. Even when Mumin appeared to rebel against academic English or Prashant focused on his victimization in the writing classroom, the importance of success was ever-present in their journal responses. This highlights another point, which seems specific to the UAE, in which the participants may have felt there was no other narrative identity for them to construct save a successful one since the prestige of an English-medium education is equated with future success in the region (Seymour, 2017; Al-Issa, 2017).

Moreover, I was surprised to discover my own role in perpetuating the success master narrative with the participants. Originally, I had anticipated that the

participants would construct alternative writer identities, as based on Alexander's (2011) argument, but it appears that I too was guided by a master narrative of 'success' when designing the writing prompts that formed the basis of my study. As previously stated in Section 9.2.1.1, this was evident when my writing prompts encouraged the participants to frame their experiences according to institutionalized expectations of academic success. This reflects how susceptible we all are, instructors and students alike, to the academic values embedded within the academy, which confirms the poststructural view (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1977, 1980; Weedon, 1997) that institutionalized discourse upholds fundamental standards of what it means to be a successful student. Such findings indicate the need for modifications to my own pedagogies when using narratives with writing students in the future. Specifically, classroom conversations about 'success' could help students become more aware of their own understandings of what it means to be a successful writer. Additionally, teaching students to explicitly examine literacy narratives before they compose their own narratives may help them gain awareness of how they perceive 'success' and what they want to present about themselves as academic writers. Finally, reflecting on my own notions of 'success' in the writing classroom and how this may impact my students could benefit other narrative assignments or research on writer identity that I conduct in the future.

### **9.3.2 Role of 'Fear' in the Writing Classroom**

I was quite surprised that 'fear of failure' was such a motivating factor for all three participants (Covington, 1992; De Castella, et al., 2013), which reveals how external expectations to succeed, based on standardized writing norms, do not automatically encourage success in the classroom. In fact, as evident by Mumin and Prashant, pressure to succeed by their secondary school teachers produced low-achievement outcomes in which Mumin resisted academic English and Prashant lacked confidence in his abilities as a writer in English. Based on these findings, I believe there is an implicit assumption in the region that students should—and therefore want—to be successful in English, as previously discussed in Section 9.3.1, which may backfire with certain students, as was the case with Mumin and Prashant.

While pressure to succeed as a writer in academic English is certainly not contained to this region, as evident by previously cited literature based in the United Kingdom and United States (Williams, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Fernsten, 2008; Burges & Ivanič, 2010; Alexander, 2011; Park, 2013; Rahimivanda & Kuhib, 2014), the added significance here is that ‘fear of failure’ was such an underlying theme throughout all three participants’ journal responses. It was therefore informative to me, as a writing instructor, to understand *how* the participants’ fears stemmed from different notions of success, not just a generalized view upheld in the academy, such as achieving high grades. Although this was the case for Dana and her pursuit of A’s, it did not necessarily reflect Mumin and Prashant’s perceptions of success. Instead, it appears that the participants’ fears as academic writers were related to their investments in English as an academic discourse in which they either embraced, resisted, or felt excluded from using the language correctly. Thus, I believe these findings highlight the need for more awareness of writing students’ motivations, as based on Covington’s (1992) self-worth theory of achievement motivation, but with particular focus on how the linguistic context of the UAE, shaped by English as the medium of instruction, can potentially increase ‘fear of failure’ in multicultural students writing in academic English.

### **9.3.3 Role of ‘Academic English’ in the UAE**

Several studies conducted in the UAE, as discussed in Chapter 3, touch upon issues revealed in the findings regarding the role of academic English for multilingual writers in the Gulf region. Specifically, Dana’s experiences in secondary school echo Shine’s (2008) longitudinal study on feedback practices at an American-style university in the UAE in which teachers did not provide explicit directions because they assumed students were already familiar with the discursive conventions of their essay assignments. A point to consider, however, is that Shine’s (2008) study does not acknowledge students like Dana who consider English their most fluent written language, even though Shine conducted her study in a similar setting as my own (an American-style university in the UAE) and with a



similar student population (multilingual writers in a first-year academic writing course). Instead, Shine (2008) refers to all of her participants as “L2 students” (p. 42) practicing “L2 writing conventions” (p. 61), a category in which Dana clearly would not consider herself a member. Further studies (Dahl, 2010; Hall, 2011; Solloway, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017) carried out in the region also highlight their participants’ L2 status and conflicting relationship with English, which suggests that multilingual students such as Dana, who embrace the prestige of English and consider themselves fluent writers in the language, are not adequately represented in current literature on writer identity in the UAE.

Mumin’s experiences with formulaic writing in academic English reflects Picard’s (2007) study on university writing students in the UAE. According to Picard (2007), practicing formulaic methods in secondary school does not prepare students for the content-driven, genre-specific assignments required in their English writing courses at university. However, his participants’ writing difficulties were attributed to formulaic writing practices without acknowledging the overall difficulty that students, multilingual or not, encounter when writing academically in English (Flores, et al., 2015). This issue was brought to light in my own findings when Mumin repeatedly blamed his secondary school teachers, as well as their formulaic writing assignments, for his difficulties writing in English as his secondary Discourse. However, based on Mumin’s journal responses, it appears that his struggles were indeed related to writing academically rather than solely writing in English.

This point reaffirms my previous concerns, established as the rationale for my study, in which I have observed that multilingual students in the UAE are expected to acquire written fluency in English as an academic discourse without consideration for their investments in the English language. Unfortunately, as in the case of Mumin, when mastering academic writing was difficult to achieve, he blamed his difficulties on the English language rather than the standards and norms of academic discourse upheld in his English-medium schools. This was particularly evident when Mumin stated that he did not want to write in English

anymore after receiving a disappointing grade on his first WRI 101 assignment without acknowledging that his grade reflected his abilities as an academic writer, not just his English-language abilities.

Prashant's writing difficulties in secondary school and university concur with Solloway's (2016) study on 'orthographic correctness' in English, a common practice in the UAE, in which writing teachers enforce accuracy and standard language norms over writing content. According to my own findings, when Prashant could not achieve the surface-level correctness demanded of him, his secondary school teachers blamed him for his poor English skills. I find this result significant because it further supports the rationale of my study in which I state that multilingual students in the UAE are expected to write with academic fluency in English without consideration for the challenges that writing in an additional language entails (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017).

However, another point highlighted in my findings is the issue of 'blame' when students cannot achieve the level of academic writing required by their teachers. With Prashant, this resulted in two different forms of blame attributed to his English-language skills: external blame by his secondary school teachers and internal blame by Prashant himself. Thus, I believe it is essential to acknowledge the difference between 'orthographic correctness' in English and 'correct' academic writing in English. As previously noted in Mumin's findings, blaming the English language did not improve his academic writing; moreover, with Prashant, blaming his English-language skills did not improve his confidence nor his abilities as an academic writer.

#### **9.3.4 Role of 'Genre Structures' in Academic Discourse**

I was concerned, yet not surprised, that all three of the participants had vague, if not generalized, notions of academic discourse, with very little awareness about the genre-specific assignments they were expected to write in secondary school. While their awareness of genre structures ostensibly increased after completing their argument essay in WRI 101, this may have occurred only because they were

asked to reflect on their essay assignment for one of their journal responses. Overall, however, the findings show that the participants mainly regarded academic writing as a 'formula,' which was an especially strong theme throughout Mumin's three journal responses. My concern regarding the findings stems from *why* the participants perceived their genre-specific assignments as formulaic, which highlights an ongoing debate in the field of academic writing, as discussed in Chapter 3. Specifically, some educators believe that academic genres should not be reduced to a set of normative skills (Russell, 1995; Benay, 2008; Lynch-Binie, 2009) whereas others advocate the benefits of teaching normative, genre-specific writing conventions (Swales, 1990; Birkenstein & Graff, 2008; Wilder & Wolfe, 2009; Thonney, 2011).

However, it appears that no matter one's stance as a writing instructor in the UAE, the tendency to teach academic discourse according to a set of formulaic norms is the standard in the region. This is evident based on the participants' descriptions of their writing assignments in secondary school, as well as the program requirements of the Writing Studies department at GAU, where this study took place. Out of the three participants, it is important to note that Dana was the only one who appreciated the guidance of following a formulaic structure when writing her essays. In contrast, Prashant often ignored the structured guidance of his formulaic essay assignments, and Mumin resented feeling forced to follow formulaic writing standards in English. However, when Mumin wrote about an essay topic that was meaningful to his own life, he became more engaged with his essay assignment, albeit however formulaic the structure. This suggests that providing multilingual students opportunities to use surface-level writing, based on following a standard essay structure, along with deep-level writing, in which they explore and develop their own personal interests, may encourage them to invest more in English as an academic discourse.

### **9.3.5 Role of 'English as a Dominant Discourse' in the UAE**

When I initially conceived this study, I had assumed that all three of my participants would confirm a prevalent belief in the UAE that multilingual students encounter

difficulties in the classroom because they do not culturally identify with English as the dominant discourse (Ahmed, 2011; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Al-Issa, 2017). Surprisingly, Mumin was the only participant who expressed a cultural conflict over his primary Discourse in Arabic and his secondary Discourse in English, yet he received most of his schooling in Sudan, not the UAE. While Prashant was evidently concerned about his 'weak' English skills, he never described them as a hindrance to his primary Discourse in Hindi, and instead, felt that his Indian teachers should have been better skilled at helping him improve his English grammar. Dana, on the other hand, not only embraced English as her secondary Discourse, but welcomed the prestige it afforded her at private English-medium schools in Dubai, as well as GAU, the American-style university she was expected to attend by her parents. As a result, she strongly identified with English as her most fluent written language over her primary Discourse in Arabic.

The findings further surprised me because they suggest that English, as the primary language of instruction in the UAE, did not conflict with Dana and Prashant's cultural identities as an Arab or Indian, respectively. Rather, it seems that Dana and Prashant experienced difficulties with the instructional methods used by their secondary school teachers: i.e., gatekeeping practices and 'orthographic correctness.' As previously stated in Section 9.3.3, these are issues common to academic writers in general, including those considered native-English speakers (Flores, et al., 2015). Thus, I found that issues surrounding teaching practices, based on English as an academic discourse, were more prevalent throughout the participants' journal responses than issues surrounding cultural conflict, based on English as a dominant discourse.

### **9.3.6 Role of 'Fluidity Vs. Continuity' in Narrative Identity Construction**

An issue I found perplexing throughout my research was how to resolve the distinction between the poststructural view of a 'fluid' identity (Norton, 1995; Ivanič, 1998; Norton Pierce, 2000) and McAdams' (1985, 1993, 19960) life story model of an identity shaped by 'continuity.' This issue was especially apparent in my mind when designing the journal response questions since they reflected three separate

time periods in the participants' lives that had the potential to appear as "discrete, isolatable 'moments'" (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, p. 234), a concern brought to light in Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) study on the impact of 'timescales' on writer identity. This concept of a timescale helped me understand that writer identity can be both multiple and coherent over time, whereas initially, I questioned my intent to present the participants' writer identities as a 'singular' self (Ivanič, 1998) by describing them in the following ways: Dana, the Successful Writer; Mumin, the Enforced Writer; and Prashant, the Weak Writer. While these descriptions may appear one-dimensional at first glance, I feel assured that the multiplicity of the participants' identities are evident upon further examination of their writing experiences in chapters 5-7.

Furthermore, by including Chapter 8—one that I had not anticipated writing at the beginning stages of my research—I was able to show how the participants' contradictions, omissions, and purposeful inclusions evident in their journal responses revealed a narrative thread of continuity that reflected multiple representations of the self as based on Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory. Therefore, I wonder: Could Ivanič's (1998) notion of 'fluidity' be construed as McAdams (1985, 1993, 1996) and Goffman's (1959) depiction of 'continuity' since both understandings of identity reflect multiple meanings of the self? While I did not feel it necessary to make this distinction in my study, I do think it is an interesting question to consider for others conducting identity research in the future.

## **9.4 Section III: Implications of the Study**

### **9.4.1 Implications of 'Success Narratives' on Writer Identity**

The findings are in keeping with McAdams' (1985, 1993, 1996) life story model in which he argues that master narratives provide frameworks for a person's life story, and thus, are central to narrative identity construction. This suggests that master narratives were a useful source of data collection for my study on writer identity, as they not only revealed established beliefs about successful academic writing, but they also allowed the participants to reflect on what it means to be an academic writer based upon institutional expectations upheld in English-medium

schools throughout the UAE. Furthermore, while Bamberg (1997, 2004, 2006, 2010) and other identity theorists (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Moissinac & Bamberg, 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) consider master narratives restrictive because they reflect archetypical representations of the self, I found that working within the archetypical standards of a 'success' narrative allowed the participants to conceptualize their notions of academic success in different ways. For example, with Dana, she viewed English as a form of prestige, whereas Mumin and Prashant viewed it as a conflicting dominant discourse based on Standard English norms.

As a writing instructor myself, this helped me better understand the impact of success, and how it influenced the participants in both positive and negative ways, depending on their perceived understandings of English within an academic writing environment. Therefore, I believe there is a need for more studies similar to mine where researchers examine the complexity of 'success' on writer identity in the UAE. I think studies conducted in other English-medium schools could provide additional insight into how English, as the primary language of instruction in the UAE, is shaping future writers in the region. As previously discussed in Section 9.3.1, if teachers and students reflect on their own notions of 'success' in the writing classroom, this could potentially benefit future research on writer identity in academic English throughout the UAE and greater MENA region.

#### **9.4.2 Implications of 'Fear' on Writing Motivations in English**

While Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System helped me address the participants' external and internal expectations, by differentiating between an ought-to self (based on the external expectations of their family and teachers) and an ideal self (based on their individual interests), I believe his theory essentially perpetuates the assumption that students ultimately desire a form of success that mirrors the external expectations of the academy: succeeding in English, whether as an 'L2 learner' of English, or in the case of the participants, as multilingual writers in English. This is especially evident when Dörnyei (2005, 2009) claims that envisioning a positive future self will eventually balance out, and thus resolve, a

student's feared self. To further explicate, I believe his L2 Motivational Self theory (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) assumes that pursuing one's ideal self will somehow override the setbacks of one's feared self without pausing to understand the cause of those fears in the first place. Since these are often based on the external expectations of others, according to Markus and Nurius' (1986) definition of a feared self, I believe further acknowledgment of these fears in the writing classroom would benefit a student such as Prashant who did not instinctively envision an ideal self like Dana and Mumin.

Furthermore, my decision to expand Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System by coupling it with other frameworks in my study, such as Davies and Harré's (1999) positioning theory, helped me better understand all three of the participants' underlying reasons for their 'fear of failure,' as evident by their sociocultural positionings as academic writers. This also helped me discover that the participants were motivated as academic writers in English based on external factors specific to the UAE, such as the prestige of English and parental pressure to succeed in English, which contributed to their 'fear of failure' as academic writers in English. Thus, I believe my study can contribute to ongoing discussions in the UAE about how to re-conceptualize multilingual students' motivations as academic writers in English by examining other factors beyond what motivates their ideal selves. Rather, as reflected in the findings, using multiple frameworks to examine the participants' writing experiences, positionings, and perceptions of the self, enriched my study on writer identity by seeking to understand the cause of their fears, not just their reasons for succeeding as academic writers.

#### **9.4.3 Implications of 'Blame' on English-Language Abilities**

This study is significant because it highlights educational practices in the UAE that demand mastery of academic writing conventions in English without considering the potential impact on students' perceptions of their English-language abilities. The findings concur with current literature in the region (Picard, 2007; Shine, 2008; Dahl, 2010; Hall, 2011; Solloway, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2017) that attributes multilingual students' English-language abilities as reason for their writing

difficulties without considering the overall challenges of mastering academic discourse. However, my own findings further reveal that when the participants encountered difficulties common to academic writers, even those considered native-English speakers, including gatekeeping practices, formulaic teaching methods, and standard-language correctness (Flores, et al., 2015), the participants were specifically made to feel that their English-language abilities were to blame. It is important to note that this did not occur with Dana, who considered English her most fluent written language, even when she struggled with genre-specific issues regarding her academic writing. While she was frustrated by her inability to receive A's on her essay assignments, she never once blamed her abilities in English. In contrast, Mumin and Prashant, who also encountered writing difficulties, both assumed it was their English-language abilities that caused them to struggle with academic writing.

Thus, it appears the participants felt they had to write with native-like mastery yet their English-language skills were blamed, either by their teachers or themselves, if they encountered writing difficulties common to all students. Based on these findings, my study has the potential to contribute to discussions about language practices in the UAE that increasingly require multilingual students to gain written mastery of academic English. The findings could possibly provide a counterpoint to understandings about the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of adopting writing programs based on monolingual English standards for multilingual students living in the UAE.

#### **9.4.4 Implications of 'Formulaic Writing Conventions' on Academic English**

This study can contribute to ongoing debates (Swales, 1990; Russell, 1995; Benay, 2008; Birkenstein & Graff, 2008; Lynch-Binieck, 2009; Wilder & Wolfe, 2009; Thonney, 2011), as previously mentioned in Section 9.3.4, in which educators argue for the advantages or disadvantages of teaching genre-specific conventions that reflect a common core of generalized writing skills. However, I believe it is essential to broaden these conversations to the UAE in order to push writing instructors in the region to examine the impact of using a set of conventional norms



when teaching academic writing in English to multilingual students. This is especially important to consider for multilingual students who are still developing their English-language abilities while they are concurrently expected to acquire the 'necessary skills' of academic writing conventions. While this was not an issue for Dana, who began learning academic English at the age of four, this was indeed an issue for Mumin and Prashant who began to learn academic English at later stages in their lives.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the complications of teaching formulaic writing conventions to students who are still struggling with their English-language acquisition. Instead of feeling motivated to improve their academic writing in English, for example, Mumin and Prashant demonstrated that standardized writing norms hindered their investments in English as an academic discourse (Norton, 1995; Norton Pierce, 2000). With Mumin, this resulted in his overall resistance toward academic writing in English whereas Prashant only desired to improve his surface-level mistakes in English, and thus, ignored opportunities to develop his academic writing. While I am not arguing against the use of formulaic teaching methods with multilingual students, as I have found them beneficial in my own classroom when teaching genre-specific writing assignments, I do believe writing instructors have a responsibility to acknowledge their students' individual preferences and approaches when writing according to a set of conventional norms in academic English. Thus, I believe this study can contribute to discussions about the challenges that may arise from writing programs in the UAE that follow a genre-approach to teaching academic English with multilingual students who are at differing levels of their English-language acquisition.

#### **9.4.5 Implications of an 'English-Medium Education' on Multicultural Students**

While the participants represent a specific group of 'privileged' students in the UAE whose parents can afford the high cost of private English-medium schools and tuition at an American-style university, they are also reflective of the varied, multicultural mix of people who embody the country. As previously discussed, the

UAE consists of over 200 nationalities and roughly 100 different spoken languages (Dahan, 2015), yet, to the best of my knowledge, most studies on language and identity in the region focus on Arab student populations. When researching the literature, I found very few studies on Sudanese and Indian students, yet Indians, specifically, comprise one of the largest communities in the UAE studying in English (Vora, 2015). Furthermore, while Dana is indeed reflective of the UAE's vast Arab population, her self-identification as a fluent writer in English sets her apart from other Arab students commonly depicted as struggling with English-language issues within educational research throughout the region (Ahmed, 2011; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Seymour, 2016; Al-Issa, 2017; Miller & Pessoa, 2017).

Thus, it is important to note, I believe Dana signifies an underrepresented group of Arab students in current literature who strongly identify with English as an academic discourse yet do not consider the language a detriment to their Arabic language. To date, only Dahan's (2015) longitudinal study on the relationship between global English and Arab identity in the UAE indicates that the majority of her Arab participants embraced English as their most fluent language while specifying that their English-medium educations were a contributing factor. In contrast, Mumin felt conflicted by his English-medium education while living in Sudan, even claiming that it prevented him from writing about his interests in Arabic. This suggests that more studies specific to the UAE could contribute to an understanding of how English-medium educations are shaping students' opinions about their English-language abilities, in both positive and negative ways, while also examining if English proficiency is a determining factor in their self-perceptions.

#### **9.4.6 Implications of 'Narrative Identity Construction' on Writer Identity**

This study reveals the significance of examining writer identity by having students construct their identities as writers in narrative form. Since this method of data collection influenced my own participants to present themselves as 'successful' writers, it showed me that Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation could

provide a useful framework for future identity work in the UAE. Specifically, if multilingual students feel compelled to present themselves as successful to their teachers, even when they have conflicting experiences with academic discourse in English, their narrative constructions could potentially provide a neutral space for students and teachers alike to engage about writing expectations devoid of the common challenges apparent in writing classrooms, as mentioned by the participants, such as gatekeeping practices, formulaic writing standards, or 'orthographic' correctness.

Furthermore, having the participants construct their writer identities in narrative form allowed me to shed light on a concern of mine, based on ten years' teaching academic writing in the UAE, in which I have observed that multilingual students are expected to master academic discourse in English with little consideration for their investments in the English language. While this was not a concern for Dana, this was especially evident for Prashant, whose inability to perfect his surface-level mistakes in English led to his difficulties with academic writing. Even though Mumin did not attend English-medium schools in the UAE prior to his admittance into GAU, his experiences in secondary school also reflect how enforcing formulaic writing standards discouraged him from engaging with academic English long after he entered university.

These findings are particularly significant because they show how multilingual students perceive their own abilities, as academic writers and English-language users, based on teaching practices in English-medium schools throughout the UAE and greater MENA region. While other studies in the region (Ahmed, 2011; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; Solloway, 2016; Al-Issa, 2017; Miller & Pessoa, 2017) do, indeed, discuss writing difficulties related to multilingual students' English-language abilities, the studies reflect the perceptions and concerns of teachers and educators, not the students themselves. However, by having my participants construct their writer identities in narrative form, I was able to provide their own unique perspectives on their investments in English and their motivations as academic writers, which I believe can only occur when students

'write about writing.' Thus, the findings not only back up the rationale of my study, but they further highlight the need for future studies in the UAE to examine writer identity in narrative form. Overall, I believe this study can offer important alternative perspectives on the ways in which English impacts writer identity in multilingual students in the UAE.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

In summary, I provided six themes based on the findings of the study that reflect the research questions and frameworks that guided this study. Then, I discussed the themes in relation to specific literature on writer identity and narrative identity construction that is relevant to my own findings. I also discussed the implications of the study by suggesting how the findings can contribute to further understandings of writer identity and narrative identity construction in multilingual students using academic English in the UAE. Finally, I showed how the findings back up the rationale of my study in which I argue that multilingual students in the UAE are expected to master academic discourse in English with little concern for their diverse linguistic backgrounds. Last, I highlighted the need for further studies in the region to examine writer identity in narrative form as narrative constructions can provide unique perspectives on multilingual students' investments in English and motivations as academic writers.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes my study by considering the contribution it has made to understanding writer identity by examining the narrative identity construction of three multilingual students at an American-style university in the UAE. Last, I discuss the limitations of my study and provide recommendations for future research.

#### **10.2 Contributions to Knowledge**

This study reveals that the participants' motivations as academic writers were impacted by their investments in English rather than their sole abilities as academic writers. Thus, the participants' motivational strategies, linguistic ideologies, sociocultural influences, and attitudinal beliefs surrounding English as the primary language of instruction in the UAE play a significant role when understanding writer identity in the region. Furthermore, the study also reveals the challenges that can arise when educational practices in the UAE demand mastery of academic discourse in English without considering the potential impact on multilingual students' perceptions of their English-language abilities. This was highlighted when the participants encountered difficulties common to all academic writers, such as gatekeeping practices, formulaic teaching methods, and standard-language correctness, yet their English-language abilities were perceived to be the cause, by either themselves or their teachers, rather than the overall challenges of mastering academic discourse.

This study provides a useful contribution to knowledge because it shows how multilingual students perceive their own abilities, as academic writers and English-language users, based on teaching practices in English-medium schools throughout the UAE and greater MENA region. By having the participants construct their writer identities in narrative form, I was able to provide their own unique insights on their investments in English and their motivations as academic writers,

which I believe can offer important perspectives on the ways in which English impacts writer identity in multilingual students in the UAE.

### **10.3 Limitations of the Study**

Although the journal responses were an indispensable component of the research design, it is important to remember that the participants' responses do not provide a full picture of their writing experiences. They are merely subjective constructions, not reflections of reality (Bruner, 1987), which highlight just a sliver of their experiences based on how they responded to the three journal prompts. While the participants were shown examples of how to write a journal response during a classroom activity in my fall 2015 WRI 101 course, some aspects of their journal responses appeared superficial and provided minimal information. This was especially apparent when the participants were asked to imagine themselves as future writers in WRI 102.

Another downside of using journal responses is that they are based on what the participants view as worthy of being reported. Certainly, this is a basic aspect of any journal response; however, it created the potential for a very limited outlook of the participants' experiences while my overall intent was to aim for a more holistic perspective of their writing experiences. This suggests the necessity for using interviews in conjunction with journal responses so as to elicit information that might have been overlooked by the participants. At the same time, this can encourage overly guided questions during the interview process, which is another potential limitation of an interpretive study such as mine. I aimed to avoid this by using semi-structured questions, as opposed to structured questions, during the interview process so that the participants were allowed to respond as freely as possible.

While the participants shared similarities in that they were WRI 101 students in an American-style university at the time of the study, their individual backgrounds before arriving to GAU may have impacted audience understandings of the data. First, Dana and Prashant were raised in the UAE, and their schooling reflected

prior information about the educational system in the region that I had provided in the background section of Chapter 2. Mumin, however, was raised in Sudan, and I provided very little background information about the educational system in his home country before arriving to GAU. Furthermore, Mumin attended the Bridge Program at GAU and had to repeat his WRI 101 course for a second time; Dana and Prashant, however, were fully matriculated students who were taking WRI 101 for the very first time. This may have also impacted differences highlighted in their perceptions of themselves as academic writers in my course. Additionally, the participants represent a particular group of 'privileged' students whose parents can afford private English schools and tuition at an American-style university, and therefore, are not illustrative of all students in the region. Although these points should not be of concern to an interpretivist study, especially one that does not seek to generalize to a larger population, I believe such differences between the participants should be highlighted in case an audience wants to compare and contrast my own interpretations of the three case studies with their own.

While issues of credibility and trustworthiness were discussed in Chapter 4, I cannot deny that my analysis is still 'biased,' based on my own interpretations of the data, despite all intentions to preserve an impartial perspective. I aimed to address this by presenting my interpretations as separate findings from those of the participants in chapters 5-7. In Chapter 8, I also aimed to address any narrative motives on the participants' part when presenting themselves in their journal responses based on my own presence as their teacher-researcher. It is also necessary to note that my interpretations of the data were not only influenced by my own background, but also by the different understandings of writer identity and narrative identity construction available in the literature discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, the findings of the study were specific to how I viewed identity construction, which was also impacted by the multiple frameworks I used to examine writer identity and narrative identity construction. Since the very concept of identity is multiple and shifting according to poststructural theory, as the foundation of my study, it is understandable that my own views about identity may differ and vary from others. This is beneficial, I believe, since diverse

interpretations can expand and contribute to ongoing discussions about writer identity within the field of educational research.

#### **10.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

The aim of this study was to understand how multilingual students at an American-style university in the UAE feel about academic writing in English and choose to construct their writer identities in narrative form. While this study can contribute to current research on writing practices and pedagogy in the Gulf region, I believe additional research needs to be conducted so that students can gain awareness of their own motivations as writers by teaching them how to reflect on their subjective writing experiences in analytical and evaluative ways after they compose their narratives. Therefore, I would like to conduct another study based on students' personal evaluations and examinations of their narratives rather than solely focusing on a teacher-researcher's interpretations, as I did in my current study.

I also believe that researching students who are not my own would help gain insight into the effects of narratives beyond a classroom environment, such as mine, which already encourages discussions about academic discourse in English and its impact on multilingual students' writing experiences. Ultimately, implementing narrative writing as an essential component of the core academic writing courses required by the Writing Studies department at GAU could provide invaluable insight for future studies on the long-term effects of narratives on writer identity and narrative identity construction in this region.



## APPENDIX I

### Three Journal Responses of Participant 1 (Dana)

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #1 (PAST)

In one of my English classes, we were asked to write about a situation we've faced that changed us and helped shape the people we've become today. I decided to talk about my parents' divorce, because it was what taught me how to be independent and strong. Although writing about the many ways their divorce helped me mature perfectly suited the topic, I still wasn't sure if it was a good decision. I was a bit scared of what my teacher might think. I had always been known to be confident and assertive individual. I didn't want anything to change the way she perceived me. I didn't want to appear vulnerable and weak and I didn't want to be known as the girl from a broken home. After a whole day of debating with myself, I finally decided not to be afraid of sharing my story. As soon as I started writing, I found it difficult to stop. Words and memories flowed out of me uncontrollably. Before I knew it, I had come up with a piece I was proud to call my own. This essay wasn't like any other. It had a part of me that I don't usually like to share with others. I eagerly waited for her to correct my paper and I was excited to know how she felt about it. When I finally received my essay, all what was written was "Your writing is underdeveloped. Thoughts incoherent. Needs revision". Although my approach and style in writing improved throughout the year, my grades never got better.

My initial reaction to my teacher's comments consisted of a mixture of disbelief and disappointment. I wasn't sure how she managed to tear down the first piece that I truly composed with honesty. I poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great. This was my first time taking such a school assignment with a lot of heart. I didn't understand why she didn't like it. I felt hurt. Her comments made me feel that none of my writings would ever be good enough. When I asked her why she didn't like my essay, she told me that I shouldn't take her comments to heart, and that I should just do better next time. After that my writings in school would always get a score of either B- or B. To some people those grades might be considered really good, but I was personally never proud of what I got. I felt like since the moment I got my first "B" my teacher just had this idea that a "B" is always going to be my level in writing, and I felt that she didn't think I'd ever improve. I learned that pouring my heart out on the pages of a notebook without any consideration for the details does not make it a solid piece of writing.

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #2 (PRESENT)

When I first started university, I wasn't a confident writer. I never thought that I had what it takes to compose a proper, well written piece of writing. I have always worked really hard in school and I have always strived to achieve high scores in my classes. Sadly, I was able to do that in all my

subjects, except for writing. However, I love debating. I was the head of the debate club in my school and I also participated in the Model United Nations (MUN) conferences we had in AUS and AUD. I've always been known for knowing how to stand up for what I believe is right. I love having arguments with people; but not the regular pointless arguments people usually have. I love having a proper debate about a serious topic that includes references, proof, statistics and facts. Although I was never into writing, I realized that it is essential for something I love. In order for me to excel at debating, I need to have proper writing and researching skills. Therefore, I realized that my writing 101 class is what will help me improve.

When I entered University and realized that I have to take 3 courses in English, I was honestly afraid. I didn't want what happened in school to happen all over again. I didn't want my grades to drop again just because of writing. Despite my fear of failure, I decided to enter my class with an open mind and I was determined to improve. When we had our first writing assignment, I made sure to write down all the notes, bullet points and tips the professor mentioned in class. I worked as hard as I could on my essay. I devoted my entire week to writing it and I was actually really proud of what I wrote. I gladly and thankfully got an "A". When I saw my grade I started jumping and running around the house because of how happy and proud I felt. Getting that score boosted my self-esteem and made me believe more in my abilities and in my writing skills.

My writing class taught me how to research properly. The first academic writing I had to submit taught me how to properly find suitable sources, references and proof. I learned how to cite and how to efficiently find the needed information for my topic. This course helped me improve my writing skills, and now I'm capable of writing proper essays that include accurate proof. Although writing might not be my favorite thing in the world, I have to admit that it's really helpful. It's a skill required for many different fields. Once you know how to search and format your ideas correctly, everything later on would be considered easy. I'm actually really proud of the improvements I made in this course.

### JOURNAL RESPONSE #3 (FUTURE)

I finally realized that the problem wasn't me, it was my teachers. They didn't support or push their students to do better. After looking back at my high school years I realized that my teachers were never passionate about teaching. It felt like they dealt with teaching as a task they just had to get over with. They would never sit down and ask their students if they had questions about their essays. They would just come in, lecture for 50 minutes then leave. The reason to me not liking English class wasn't my fault. All what was lacking was some motivation and support. Thanks to my writing 101 class I finally have the proper background in writing and I'm gladly going to admit, that for the first time in four years I actually think that I got what it takes to compose good essays. Writing 101 class taught me different techniques and different research approaches that I'm sure

will help me later on. I am finally proud and confident in myself and in my abilities to write. I'm ready to enter my writing 102 class, knowing that I had the proper background and practice.

## APPENDIX II

### Three Journal Responses of Participant 2 (Mumin)

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #1 (PAST)

Ever since I can remember, writing, mainly in Arabic, was something that I enjoyed doing. Writing was not just a collection of words but it was a way to describe my thoughts. It was an opportunity to explain more to others about myself. In school, we were taught that writing is expressing one's thoughts between ourselves and a piece of paper. Writing cards to my parents on their birthdays, trying to write bed time stories with my mother and my brothers, and enrolling in an elementary short story contest were little things that gave me a lot of joy and gave me memorable quality time with my beloved ones. Later, as I grew up writing became more and more integral to who I am, as I started writing in a dairy [sic]. The diary was my way of dealing with emotions mainly, and a hobby that I have developed a sincere affection for.

This idea of writing, which I hold dear to my heart, has been severely mutated due to contradictions I sensed in the way I was made to understand writing, and the way teachers responded to my writing. A mutation that has troubled my conception of writing even more. In my first encounter with proper academic writing, the truth struck me real hard. In 8th grade, my English teacher opened his power point slides and started telling us about how we should write proper secondary schools level essays. The teacher went on explaining how to write an introduction, what to include in the introduction, what sort of things fit in the body, how to write a conclusion, how long should our essays be...etc. To most of my classmates, this was an ordinary class that they forgot about as soon as the teacher went out of the class; but not to me.

Nevertheless, and since 8th grade, I have gradually lost interest in writing because of the systematic and formulaic approach that schools and teachers followed which, to a great extent, made me write forcefully to "get good grades" and satisfy my teachers' goals of writing properly. This was a big game changer as the sanctions forced on me by the new education system made me feel like less of a writer. I stopped writing in my diary and turned my interest into other things, such as music and basketball which made me less connected to my spiritual and emotional side and left me feeling a bit shallow and less connected to writing.

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #2 (PRESENT)

On the first day in our writing 101 classes I was scared not because of the tasks or of the assignments I was scared because I had a lot of negative experiences with writing, I was scared that I may not pass this course again. Our first task for the course was a summary assignment; I tried to focus more on this assignment because it was really important for me to get a good grade. I

tried to prepare before because I was afraid I wouldn't get a good grade. I was scared that I would fail and lose a 5% of my final grade from the beginning of the semester. When we were done with the summary I was so happy that I made it and I finished it. But again when I got notification on my phone saying "Quiz 1 grades are on ilearn" I felt that I failed and I don't have to open it. But at the end I checked the grade and it's True that I got a C+ but I expected more. To be honest this grade disappointed me more, and I said to myself "Summary is easiest part of the course, if I didn't get a good grade on it how am I going to do well on the other assignments and essays."

On the other day of the class we started to talk more about our first essay assignment, and on the following week our professor told us that we have to choose a topic for our essays. I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in the past, especially in English and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed they didn't care about what their students might be interested in writing about. However, since that day came I started thinking about a topic for my essay and spent hours reading articles to come up with a topic. After suffering in finding a topic I was like why don't I write about "child abuse" in Sudan because it was from my country and important to me. I started doing a lot of research about it and I also asked some of my friends back home to send me some books that contain ideas about this topic. And each day I started writing part of the essay till I completed it to the conclusion. But I got disappointed of myself again when I checked my essay grade and I thought that I wouldn't make it out of Probation this semester. But I said to myself whatever the results at the end I am not going to give up, I have to continue till the end.

However, I started sharing some tweets in Twitter about my writing and I created a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, like when I was younger. I was thinking if I can write more why don't I make a blog for writing small daily paragraphs in English as well, and it became one of new goals, and hopefully after finishing writing 102 I will start working on it. No matter what people think of someone's writing, they must realize that their main focus is enjoying what they do. Once you do that, you make peace with yourself.

### JOURNAL RESPONSE #3 (FUTURE)

Now I have a lot of feelings about writing and I started to be passionate about it again. Because at the beginning of the semester I was sure that I am not going to do well in the course because of the struggles I have gone through with writing, but now everything has changed and to be honest since the school days till now, this is the only English course I have benefited from so far. No matter what teachers think of someone's writing, they must realize a student's main focus should be enjoying themselves. Once you do that, you make peace with yourself.

"Writing 102! Writing 102!" This is the voice I have been hearing in my head for the last month that scares me a lot about writing, not because I can't do it but because I know there's another challenge I have to go through next semester. And this challenge is much harder than the

confrontation I had this semester with my grade. Although, I know it will be hard, but to be honest I am also excited about it, because I know that I have another chance to improve my writing skills and disclose the thoughts I have in my mind about writing. And I know that I will spend a lot of time doing the assignments, but I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person's beliefs and feelings. However, if someone asked me at the beginning of this semester "What am I going to do in writing 102" I would have told them I will fail. But now I am more confident about it and about writing in general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it. I know a lot of new things about writing and whatever the tasks of writing I am going to get in the future I know that I am going to do well on it.

## APPENDIX III

### Three Journal Responses of Participant 3 (Prashant)

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #1 (Past)

It was in 9th grade when I encountered the most embarrassing moment in my life. Our English teacher had given us an essay assignment. We had to read the few chapters in our novel and based on those chapters, write an essay on what we learnt from the chapter and what is the message the writer is trying to convey. Well, the assignment was really easy for others but for me it just turned out to be a blunder. I became a laughing stock in the class. She called me dumb. My essay was completely out of topic. It was related to the chapter but not at all related to the question. My teacher told me to read my essay loud out in the class. At first I thought that my teacher liked my essay very much but when I read it in the class, I was ashamed of myself. I had wished that why did the teacher even give me the assignment and even if she did why did she tell me to read it out loud. Was her intention to embarrass me? It took me a very long time to figure that out. This really affected my overall grade. Everything I did was a mistake. I felt I was the weakest in English in my class.

After that incident, I became super careful on my essay and article assignments. I started reading each and every question more than a thousand times. I kept reading a question until it got stuck in my head. But I still made lots of errors due to which many teachers made fun of me. This helped me think more about my writing due to repeated readings of the questions. That was when I figured out the question which was disturbing me. My teacher wanted me to understand my mistake in the best possible way and never wanted me to forget about it. Every teacher has its own way of teaching their students and that was her way. I became super careful on my every essay or article writing etc. This helped me think more about my answer due to repeated readings of the question. I still make lots of grammatical errors due to which many people make fun of me.

I have studied in schools where teachers would like to embarrass the students to teach them a lesson so that they don't repeat it and remember it forever. My way of writing was to some extent criticized by my teachers. My essays were sometimes written more than the limit or sometimes less. Most of my high school writing experiences contain embarrassing moments but there have been moments where it was appreciated. In all of the embarrassing moments I have come across, I have always learned something very important from my mistakes. I have always tried to improve my writing skills as it is very important to get good grades. But my weakness in writing skills has been following me from Elementary level to high school and even in the university level.

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #2 (Present)

I'm not saying I haven't learnt English in high school. I have, but writing 101 is something beyond the basic principles of writing and it is quite interesting yet quite difficult as it is something really new for me and I am still getting used to it. Writing in school was completely different as we could write whatever we wanted to, but the university level course changes that.

My first Essay experience didn't go as good as I dreamt of it to be. Well, how could it go well as I was completely new to this course? When I was assigned the first essay I thought it would be fun as I had decided to write something which interested me a lot. I read each and every direction more than a thousand times to avoid making mistakes. But here comes the main drawback of this course. While writing in an academic course you simply cannot write something on your own. You need the support of good academic courses. If one lacks good academic sources, you are put into a dilemma. That is what exactly happened with me. I had chosen a difficult topic, but I thought if I spend time on my research, I might get good sources. Unfortunately it did not happen as my way. Midway, I even thought of changing the topic but I had come way too far and I saw no way of rectifying my mistake. Important parts of my essay like the 'Thesis Statement' and the 'Introduction' were really weak. My essay should have mainly focused on the audience, according to my professor, but it didn't. Even I sometimes now think that I should have directed my essay's focus towards the audience. Sometimes I think I will always be weak in English.

#### JOURNAL RESPONSE #3 (Future)

Writing 102 in next semester will be something really advanced, well at least for me as my background in writing is quite weak. But I have to admit, I have learnt that my mistakes are rectifiable. I can always improve myself, if not on my first essay, then definitely on my second essay, and I can improve in the exact same way for my third essay as well. In the future, I will be able to handle writing 102 course in a much better way than I did on my first semester for writing 101 because I am very new to this course and I am still learning. My mistakes have helped me realize what I have been missing all this time and next semester I will definitely try to overcome the mistakes I have been making this semester and in high school as well. At the beginning of the semester I was doing quite badly at this course because I hadn't done all this before. I found it difficult in understanding the objective of this course. My future self for writing 102 next semester will be way better than the one in the current semester because he has learned a lot from his mistakes and will rectify all of them in the next semester for a much more advanced academic writing course.



## APPENDIX IV

### Open-Ended Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Fall 2015

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. All the information you provide will be held in confidentiality, and the information gathered will only be used for research purposes. Since this is anonymous and voluntary, your course grade will not be affected at all by your decision to answer the 15 questions below. It should take you a total of 10-15 minutes to respond thoroughly to each question.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your nationality?
4. How many years have you lived in the UAE?
5. What is your native language?
6. What language(s) do you speak at home the most?
7. What age did you start learning English?
8. What was your primary language of study in elementary school?
9. Describe your school: private, national, etc.
10. In elementary school, were your teachers mostly native-English speakers (from the US, UK, Australia, or other English-speaking countries)?
11. Please provide any additional information about your elementary school or teachers (i.e., feelings or observations about their teaching practices).
12. What was your primary language of study in middle school?
13. Describe your school: private, national, etc.
14. In middle school, were your teachers mostly native-English speakers (from the US, UK, Australia, or other English-speaking countries)?
15. Please provide any additional information about your middle school or teachers (i.e., feelings or observations about their teaching practices).

16. What was your primary language of study in secondary school?
17. Describe your school: private, national, etc.
18. In secondary school, were your teachers mostly native-English speakers (from the US, UK, Australia, or other English-speaking countries)?
19. Please provide any additional information about your secondary school or teachers (i.e., feelings or observations about their teaching practices).
20. Describe your school: private, national, etc.
21. Which language do you speak most fluently?
22. Which language do you write in most fluently?
23. Do you consider yourself a fluent writer in English? Why or why not?
24. Overall, how would you describe yourself as an academic writer in English?

## APPENDIX V

### Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

#### Interview Questions:

1. Can you describe in more detail how you felt after your writing experience in secondary school?
2. Do you think you learned something about yourself as an academic writer after this experience?
3. How did you feel about yourself as a writer when you first started WRI 101?
4. Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer changed after writing your first academic essay in WRI 101?
5. How do you see yourself as a writer now before entering WRI 102?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add? Or, was there anything confusing about the questions?

## APPENDIX VI

### Interview Transcript of Participant 1 (Dana)

LS = Interviewer

P1 = Participant 1

LS—The purpose of the interview is to gather data for my dissertation, which explores students' writer identities. Before we start I'd like to say the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the university where you attend, so you'll be completely anonymous ... I'll use pseudonyms for all respondents so I won't use your name.

So, I have six prepared questions based on your three journal entries. Please feel free to include anything else not covered by my questions. I may also ask additional questions based on our conversation.

LS—Can you describe in more detail how you felt after writing your narrative in secondary school?

P1—Like I said, I felt hurt. I couldn't believe my teacher gave me that grade. ... *[laughs]* I still feel like sort of angry!

LS—Why do you still feel angry?

P1—Not really angry, I guess, but like feeling unfairly treated. I don't think I deserved her grade.

LS—What do you think you deserved?

P1—I should have gotten an A. If she had told me what she wanted, I would have done it to get the A.

LS—What else did you learn from that experience?

P1—Not to care. I mean, not to care about what I write so much. Just do what I have to do and make sure it's what the teacher wants.

LS—Do you think you knew what your teacher wanted?

P1—No! Otherwise I would've gotten an A. *[laughs]*

LS—Do you think you learned something about yourself as a writer after this experience?

P1—I don't think I was writing academically. I don't—didn't know how ... to write that way. I think it's better for me to write academically.

LS—Why is that?

P1—It's better to write research essays than share personal information in narratives like before.

LS—How did you feel about yourself as a writer when you first began WRI 101?

P1—Honestly, when I first started I didn't feel like I was capable of being in 101. OK, I was in an American school and all that because my parents wanted me to go to uni here, and I did what the teacher required and all that, but the grading and all that for my writing, it didn't improve. At first I started with everything ... as I said, I like don't find myself in writing so I was afraid of trying to maintain the standards that they want of 101 students. At first I saw like I have a couple of friends that I already knew before university and I know that their writing level is extremely beautiful. So, I'm like, OK, I'm on the same level as them? *[laughs]* How is that going to happen?

LS—Uh huh.

P1—Like, I don't know. I was afraid, like I thought I wouldn't do well. I never, never had to do something like that before. I honestly believe that writing was what's going to lower my entire average. I do well in math and sciences and all that cuz I love them.

LS—Uh huh. What was the standard that you're talking about that you felt was difficult?

P1—WRI 101, like how we started it, it had citations and references and all that. Um, like, I never, like I never had to do something like that before, so it was my first time in WRI 101. So, it was a bit challenging. And for my first essay I was panicking. I was running around the house like, "I have an essay to write!" *[laughs]*

I found the difference was in just the writing because I was used to narratives and um, persuasive, and all that. But we never required specific sources.

LS—Uh huh. OK.

Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer have changed after writing this first academic essay in WRI 101?

P1—Honestly, yeah, they did, especially like after like realizing you actually like it and I got a good grade. Like, oh! I can actually write a proper essay! *[laughs]* I was actually really excited because I never thought I could do well in writing. People tell me, OK, you have good writings, they like them, but you know when you see them, your own points of view, you always compare yourself and think that you could always do better, but I never felt I'd managed.

LS—Who were you comparing yourself to?

P1—OK, honestly, I'm not going to say my friends, because it's my sister.

LS—Uh huh.

P1—My sister is a beautiful writer. I'd see what she writes and it's beautiful. Everyone in my family loves what she writes, you know? And, with my mom's job, my father's job, whatever, they have emails, they have anything, and it passes through her. And, she writes—she was at [name of university], actually. And, the fact that I'm the youngest, of two older siblings ... the oldest one was brilliant in the sciences. The second one was brilliant the sciences and *writing*.

LS—Uh huh.

P1—But her writing, I found it amazing. So the fact that, I was afraid that I'd be compared to her? It's what, it started like to have a downfall and a good side. It's what actually made my self-esteem a bit lower, but actually it made me strive to do better. If she did it, I could do it. You know what I mean?

LS—Yes.

P1—So, her writings are what made me feel like my writings would never be good enough. But then I always had them as an example. If you want good writings, then make them be as good as hers. I would always say, "Will you read this for me? The due date is tomorrow! Can you read it?" She would sometimes help me with simple corrections, nothing major.

LS—Do you show her your writing now or do you ask her questions for help?

P1—I do, but like, she's not the type of person to like ... I tell her, "[Name of sister], how do you do this? Like, "Google it!" Like, she's too lazy—not lazy! But, like, she—she finishes TV, she wants to

work. She's not even bothered, like I'm a freshman, I mean, why would she help me? You know what I mean?

LS—Yes, I know what you mean.

P1—Now, she's always too busy or something. I go, like, "[Name of sister], will you read this for me?" She'll go like, "OK, later." I say, "The due date is tomorrow," and she's like, "OK, I promise I'll read it before I sleep and I'll send you my feedback." Like, I'll wake up the next day and I'm like, "[Name of sister], did you read it?" "Oh! I forgot!" So, actually she doesn't read them up until the day I get my grade and I go like, "In your face!" *[laughs]* I actually did well! She's really proud.

LS—Does she read it afterwards?

P1—Yeah, and she's like, and honestly, cuz like, she's my older sister, and when I was in school, she would read my writings—she would read them and ask if like, I had ideas. She would give me simple ideas. It was simple writing. She was honestly like, "Now you have really improved." Like, my terminologies and everything and all that, and my research, and I have to read a lot about the topic.

LS—Uh huh.

P1—Like, they have lifted up my essay.

LS—Good! That's nice to hear. Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer changed after writing your first academic essay in WRI 101?

P1—There was something that made me change. It was one time during writing class where we shared our thesis statements. The whole class was welcome to give back feedback. One of my classmate's thesis statements wasn't very good, in my own point of view. I really profited from it as I dissected it and figured out why it was very good.

LS—How do you think this helped your own writing?

P1—I didn't feel bad for sharing my thesis with the class after that, even though it wasn't the best I could have written. I began asking the same questions they asked when I was writing my thesis statement.

LS—How do you see yourself as a writer now before entering WRI 102?

P1—Like, um, when I was in English class with my teacher in secondary school I tried to focus on which vocabulary to use, which skills to use. I used to go up to other students and ask them what they thought about an essay. Just to see, to understand what skills the teacher wanted. I won't need to do that in WRI 102.

LS—Well, that's all I wanted to ask you for now. Thank you for participating. Is there anything else you would like to add?

P1—No. Don't worry!

LS—OK. And, was there anything confusing about the questions?

P1—No, they were quite clear.

LS—Thank you so much. I appreciate it.



## APPENDIX VII

### Interview Transcript of Participant 2 (Mumin)

LS = Interviewer

P2 = Participant 2

LS—The purpose of the interview is to gather data for my dissertation, which explores students' writer identities. Before we start I'd like to say the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the university where you attend, so you'll be completely anonymous ... I have six prepared questions based on your three journal entries. Please feel free to include anything else not covered by my questions. I may also ask additional questions based on our conversation.

LS—Can you describe in more detail how you felt after your writing experience in secondary school?

P2—There was one teacher, he gave us an assignment ... to do. Most of my friends, my colleagues, in the class, we tried to tell him that we would like to choose our topics. But he gave us a specific topic. It was really hard for all of us to write about that topic at that time.

LS—How did that make you feel?

P2—To be honest, it was one of the moments I started to hate writing.

LS—Did you have any issues with having to write academically or in a certain way?

P2—It was difficult. Our teachers gave us a specific formula. We had to write the same way ... every time they gave us a new assignment.

LS—Do you think you learned something about yourself as an academic writer after this experience?

P2—No.

LS— ... Nothing at all?

P2—No.

LS—I have a quick question about something you wrote in your questionnaire. You moved here a year before starting university? You finished high school here?

P2—No, I finished high school in my country. I went to one of the top schools in my country so they would pick the good teachers to teach us English, but my family came here so that my brother could start school from a younger age. It is a very important school in English so we all moved here.

LS—So, your teachers were Sudanese?

P2—Yes, most of them studied outside and then they came back to teach.

LS—Oh, OK. I get the sense that they were—they were fluent in English but not native?

P2—Yes, fluent. My father wanted it. I had to go there for English.

LS—Because it was a top school?

P2—Yeah, and for English. My father wanted me to go to [GAU].

LS—What did you do during the year before attending GAU?

P2—Actually, I was taking English courses at the British Council in Dubai. Then last year I was in the Bridge Program.

LS—What was the Bridge Program like for you?

P2—Yeah, OK.

LS—Do you feel that it helped you for WRI 101?

P2—We just wrote sentences and paragraphs. Practiced talking, reading, pronouncing. 101 is different.

LS—How?

P2—We have to write specific essays, like with a formula, like in high school.

LS—Mmm hmm. How did you feel about yourself as a writer when you first started WRI 101?

P2—Actually, when I started WRI 101 I was, like, scared. And, I ... I had a lot of, like, thought that, like, I am not going to pass this course and I am going to fail because, like, because of my past experiences with writing because it was only in Arabic and now I'm with you. And then I got a bad grade on the summary.

LS—Mmm hmm. How did that make you feel?

P2—I never wanted to write in English again and only write in Arabic. Except when I had to.

LS—Because ...

P2—I didn't like the article. It was boring. That's why I got the grade even when I studied a lot the night before.

LS—The one about cultural appropriation? What didn't you like about it?

P2—It was hard to understand. I didn't like the topic.

LS—What would you have preferred?

P2— ... I ... something else that I like. Maybe I could have prepared earlier. Not just the night before. I don't know. But now I became to feel more confident about writing because I didn't write in English in the past but now I feel like I can write more English ...

LS—Mmm hmm.

P2—... I can be more confident in the course.

LS—What exactly made you feel more confident in the course?

P2—Uh, actually, maybe because we experienced, experienced a lot of like English like in the class. And uh, we did a lot of research and assignments and that really helped me, helped me a lot.

LS—Mmm hmm. OK. Thank you. So, let's go back. Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer changed after writing your first academic essay in WRI 101? Or, in your case, when you first wrote your summary assignment?

P2—Actually, I think yes. I think that I needed to write like more about myself in that journal. And it really helped me to like share, to share what I am going through with someone else so it really helped me ... This gave me a sense that I should work hard for me—not to please someone else, like a professor or a parent, but to achieve to please myself.

LS—And, going back to that experience that you had, when you wrote your summary assignment. Did you question your ability to write after that experience? You weren't happy with your grade, I believe.

P2—Actually, like ... actually, after that first negative writing experience I was like, I was like, I like was not going to write anymore in English unless I had to and only focus on Arabic. And now I think I can write whatever the assignment is. I can do well but also I know that it needs a lot of work, a lot of research to do about the assignment.

LS—OK, so now let's focus on the argument essay. Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer have changed *after* writing your argument essay? You answered this a little bit before, but I just want you to think back to when you wrote the argument essay. How did your feelings change about your abilities as a writer?

P2—Actually, it helped, the first essay, because it was specifically my first major writing assignment in WRI 101 and like, I worked hard on it and I did a lot of research but at the end it was, I didn't get a good grade but I like felt I was more confident about my writing and I am ready to take the other side ... and, just really it helped me.

LS—Can you explain what you mean by the other side?

P2—I could write about how other people feel, the children. I wanted to write about this before. I prefer to write about things in my country.

LS—OK. Thank you. ... And, how do you see yourself as a writer now before you're going to enter WRI 102?

P2—Now, I see myself like, uh, a good writer—actually, I can realize now that I can do—because I like started sharing some tweets in Twitter ...

LS—Mmmm. Mmm hmm!

P2—... and I started to talk more about like writing and the experiences I've had.

LS—Really? In your tweets?

P2—Yeah.

LS—What kind of things do you tweet about?

P2—And also like, I, I'm thinking about ... because I have a, I have a, like small profile in Arabic ... and I started like, thinking about, after WRI 102, after I get a lot more experience with writing in WRI 102, I should start writing small paragraphs in English ...

LS—... That's fantastic! What about?

P2—Like the journals we did. Actually, I think like yeah, they were, uh, helpful because like, I mentioned before like, I wanted, I wanted to talk to someone about like my experience and this year like helped me a lot to talk about it. And also, like in the journals I can see the change of when I like started the semester. The first journal was only with negative experiences; the second journal I am going more on to be like positive, on the positive side; and then in my last journal it was like really good also.

LS—That's really nice to hear. ... And, my last question is: How do you see yourself as a writer now before entering WRI 102?

P2—I think I understand myself more in English ... I am excited about next semester. I don't think I will fail even though it will be hard.

LS—Mmm hmm? ... that's really wonderful to hear. ... Uh, thank you so much for participating. Is there anything else you would like to add or do you have any questions for me?

P2—No, thank you very much.

LS—OK, thanks.

## APPENDIX XIII

### Interview Transcript of Participant 3 (Prashant)

LS = Interviewer

P3 = Participant 3

LS—The purpose of the interview is to gather data for my dissertation, which explores students' writer identities. Before we start I'd like to say the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be used, nor will the name of the university where you attend, so you'll be completely anonymous ... I'll use pseudonyms for all respondents so I won't use your name. I have six prepared questions based on your three journal entries. Please feel free to include anything else not covered by my questions. I may also ask additional questions based on our conversation.

LS—Can you describe in more detail how you felt after your writing experience in secondary school?

P3—Yeah, I questioned, like you know, if I, if I am really good at English or if I am not. The teachers would tend to be hard teachers, which were really, uh, [inaudible] in English. But I was also weak in English and the teachers themselves were not strong in English. It took me a while to like, figure out was she just trying to embarrass me or like, was she—was her intention to make me better?

LS—Mmm hmmm. And what do you think her intention was?

P3—Oh. I'm still trying to figure it out. I don't know! Maybe she was trying to embarrass me or maybe she was, like, you know ... let's embarrass him so he can improve himself.

LS—Do you think your negative writing experience occurred because of this?

P3— Can be. Because it is possible. Sometimes I think if my teachers are much better in English I might have improved.

LS—OK. Do you think that the teachers considered themselves weak or strong in English? Did you ever get this sense?

P3— No. I don't think that they know that they make the mistakes.

LS—Hmm. How could you tell that they were making mistakes? When did you realize that they were not strong in English?

P3—Mostly common grammar mistakes.

LS—I see. Can you give me an example?

P3— Like um, saying “threwed” instead of “threw.” But I’m not fluent in English myself.

LS— Oh?

P3— Honestly. Not that fluent. It was a bit of an effort for me to grow up in an environment where teachers taught me to be fluent in English. I’m from a family where we don’t speak English at all. Like, not at all, but very less. We don’t speak much, so only Hindi and not in [inaudible], and I’m never writing in Hindi these days. And I come from a school where even the teachers have weak English.

LS—Do you think you learned something about yourself as an academic writer after this experience?

P3— I was weak in English.

LS – Do you feel that now?

P3—Weakness? I think I am still weak in some places but a little less.

LS – OK, and why do you feel it a bit less?

P3—Because I have improved.

LS—OK. How do you think you’ve improved?

P3—I learned to fix my mistakes.

LS—Can you give me an example?

P3—Like with tenses. I can fix my tenses better.

LS—Anything else? Is there something else you would like to add?

P3—Sometimes when I'm reading it out loud, and it's a common mistake, I feel like I can fix it.

LS—How did you feel about yourself as a writer when you first started WRI 101?

P3—Everything was new. I didn't know what to expect. I was afraid I was still weak.

LS—Do you think your feelings about yourself as a writer changed after writing your first academic essay in WRI 101?

P3—Um, yeah, I have, uh, changed the feelings, like, uh, I feel more confident and, uh, I have learned a lot from this. After my first, my first essay was quite bad but I did do good later on so yeah, that says that I have improved a lot.

LS—Mmm hmmm. And what specifically do you feel improved?

P3—In writing, getting used to the academ—the searching of academic sources ...

LS—Mmm hmmm.

P3—... because I've never done that before ...

LS—Mmm hmmm.

P3—... so that's a new thing. So, that is what I really learned, like how to research effectively.

LS—OK, thank you. How do you see yourself as a writer now before entering WRI 102?

P3—And, um, like, I've learned a lot ... uh, I've learned many new things and with me I'm going to put all those experiences in [WRI] 102 and improve even more in that, in [WRI] 102, I think ... You know, I've written a lot, the past experiences which have happened to me at the university, so these, these instances have helped me a lot in other courses, you know? The journal responses helped me in understanding. My research essay, too.

LS—Hmm! With other courses, as well?

P3—Yeah, I think so.

LS—Can you explain a little bit about that?

P3—Like, um, other courses also involve writing. Like in environmental, you also have writing articles over there, environmental articles, and so, the research essay also helped me in writing these articles because they work in a much similar way.

LS—OK, Is there anything else you'd like to add? Or, was there anything confusing about the questions?

P3—No.

LS—OK, thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

P3—That's it?

LS—Yep!



## APPENDIX IX

### Excerpts from Research Diary (Part I)

**In the following excerpt I discuss my decision to use a research diary:**

I talk about how reflexivity will help me address issues of power but I don't see how this will actually happen. Theoretically, yes, but I am still telling the participants what to do. They have to write about specific situations. They have to answer my research questions. These concerns made me want a solution that would ensure my own bias and familiarity with the participants would not influence the results of my study. After reviewing literature, I eventually discovered that there was no foolproof method to prevent researcher bias. However, I did come across common suggestions by qualitative researchers to use a research diary, which influenced my decision to use one for my thesis. I haven't done this before. I certainly never thought of it as a data-collection method.

**In the following excerpt I express concern about my role as teacher-researcher and its influence on what the participants chose to write about:**

While it's good to write about my concerns, I still don't see how this will eliminate my position, my power. I suppose no researcher can truly eliminate this, but I find it hypocritical to claim that I want to present the participants' subjective views while I'm being subjective by the way I look at their views. One participant told me 'off the record' that she didn't really feel bad about her writing experience in high school. She just needed something to write about—of course she told me this after she was chosen to be a participant! Then I thought, even if she was elaborating on a particular experience, it still was valid since she chose it over other experiences. But, the way she described her choice seemed very random, which makes me think how I am spending all this time examining an experience that was randomly selected to fulfill a writing assignment.

**In the following excerpt I express concern about my choice of journal response questions:**

I regret the third journal response question in which the participants had to write about an imagined-future experience. What could they say but that they feel prepared and capable for WRI 102? How did I not foresee such generic responses based on a very leading question? I never thought about how students feel compelled to narrate their literacy experiences based on success—glad I found those studies when researching McAdam's life story model. I find it surprising that I never considered how much I do this in my own classroom when using narratives. I also never thought about how I did this myself when asked to write a literacy narrative for my HOD. I definitely did the redemption theme/success narrative.

## APPENDIX X

### Excerpts from Research Diary (Part II)

**In the following excerpt I discuss my preconceived notions about the role of English in the UAE:**

I was struck by how differently the participants viewed English as a powerful discourse. Even though I aimed to look at the data with an open mind, I had conducted previous qualitative studies in this region in which English was portrayed as a negative, disempowering discourse. Here, even when the participants depict writing struggles, they each discuss some aspect of empowerment when writing in their secondary Discourse. I need to explore this theme further. With Participant 2, I noticed that he seemed to confuse the English language with writing academically in English, such as writing formulaic essays. I wonder if he would have felt this way writing in academic Arabic? This made me realize that when I was conducting previous research, I wasn't looking at 'English' and 'academic writing in English' as two separate issues. If my students had been native-English speakers, I don't think I would have done this. I think this issue relates to how some writing teachers think students in this region are 'bad' in English when essentially they are just struggling with academic writing. I've become more aware of this as a doctoral student learning to write a dissertation. I have definitely been struggling with this format even though I know how to write in English. I wasn't planning on addressing issues such as essay formats or genres, but of course I have to do this.

**In the following excerpt I discuss additional themes that emerged from the data:**

I need to talk about more than positioning by teachers or good/bad English-language skills. Really, issues about academic writing—genres, writing approaches, what it means to be an academic writer—are emerging themes. Also, learner identity is a big issue. It's impacting other themes about writing beliefs or writing abilities. With Participant 3, PAC is a big concern. Not sure if I want to make this a major theme, though. I feel like it underlies bigger issues, like why students position themselves as writers. Big find: importance of success and fear of failure. These seem obvious now, as students want to succeed—especially here in the Gulf—but I wasn't anticipating these for some reason. I wasn't anticipating a lot. My supervisors told me I should look into contradictions and omissions (??) in the narratives. How do I do this? Not sure how to explain why. I don't want to assume. Also, I need to talk about my role as teacher-researcher. If I ignore this, then I'm not reflecting the data clearly. Or, it looks like I am ignoring inconsistencies. I guess this is how I can be more reflexive. Do I do this within my analysis? As a separate chapter? Really not sure how to talk about omissions. How can I prove they have omitted something? I have to take their experiences at face-value.

**In the following excerpt I discuss my decision (and confusion) to use several frameworks based on the data:**

I am so confused. Frustrated. I feel like this data is taking on a life of its own. I don't think I can use just one framework. There needs to be more for all these different aspects emerging. It's not just positioning. Originally, I thought I was just going to use Bamberg. Every time I see a theme I feel like it needs its own framework. Is it OK to do this? D said it was perfectly fine but I haven't seen any dissertations with so many frameworks. I think it shows that I'm flailing. I seriously don't feel in control of this data. I can't seem to figure out where it is going. It's like it's growing and I don't know how to capture it. I'm worried that using so many frameworks is going to dilute the data somehow because I'll only be applying a framework to one theme as opposed to several themes, which means it will be a very brief analysis of the theme—especially if I have three participants. I really need a theory when addressing my role as teacher-researcher. Yes, it's positioning, but presence—as opposed to face-to-face interactions in the classroom—reflects something else beyond classroom interactions. Research that.

## APPENDIX XII

### Background Information from Questionnaires

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Years in UAE	Home Lang	Age Learned English	Primary Lang in Elementary School	Type of School
Dana	17	F	Jordanian	15	Arabic	4 yrs	English	Private American
Mumin	18	M	Sudanese	2	Arabic	7 yrs	Arabic	Private Arabic
Prashant	18	M	Indian	17	Hindi	7 yrs	English	Private Indian

Name	Primary Lang in Middle School	Type of School	Primary Lang in Secondary School	Type of School	Fluent Spoken Language	Fluent Written Language	Perceived Written Fluency in English	Additional Info
Dana	English	Private American	English	Private American	English	English	Fluent	Former teachers were native-English
Mumin	Arabic	Private Arabic	English	Private Arabic	Arabic	Arabic	Not Fluent	Former teachers learned English outside of Sudan
Prashant	English	Private Indian	English	Private Indian	Hindi	Hindi	Not Fluent	Former teachers were not native-English

## APPENDIX XII

### Coded Journal Responses Related to Research Questions 1-4

In one of my English classes, we were asked to write about a situation we've faced that changed us and helped shape the people we've become today. I decided to talk about my parents' divorce, because it was what taught me how to be independent and strong. Although writing about the many ways their divorce helped me mature perfectly suited the topic, I still wasn't sure if it was a good decision. I was a bit scared of what my teacher might think. **[Wanting Teacher's Approval]** I had always been known to be confident and assertive individual. I didn't want anything to change the way she perceived me. I didn't want her to pity me. I didn't want to appear vulnerable and weak and I didn't want to be known as the girl with a broken home. After a whole day of debating with myself, I finally decided not to be afraid of sharing my story. As soon as I started writing, I found it difficult to stop. Words and memories flowed out of me uncontrollably. Before I knew it, I had come up with a piece I was proud to call my own. This essay wasn't like any other. It had a part of me that I don't usually like to share with others. I eagerly waited for her to correct my paper and I was excited to know how she felt about it. When I finally received my essay, all that was written was "Your writing is underdeveloped. Thoughts incoherent. Needs revision". Although my approach and style in writing improved throughout the year, my grades never got better.

My initial reaction to my teacher's comments consisted of a mixture of disbelief and disappointment. **[Disappointed by Low Grades]** I wasn't sure how she managed to tear down the first piece that I truly composed with honesty. I poured my heart out into that paper, thinking it was going to be great. This was my first time taking such a school assignment with a lot of heart. I didn't understand why she didn't like it. I felt hurt. Her comments made me feel that none of my writings would ever be good enough. When I asked her why she didn't like my essay, she told me that I shouldn't take her comments to heart, and that I should just do better next time. After that my writings in school would always get a score of either B- or B. To some people those grades might be considered really good, but I was personally never proud of what I got. I felt like since the moment I got my first "B" my teacher just had this idea that a "B" is always going to be my level in writing, and I felt that she didn't think I'd ever improve. **[Wanting Teacher's Approval]** I learned that pouring my heart out on the pages of a notebook without any consideration for the details does not make it a solid piece of writing.

## APPENDIX XIII

### Coded Interview Responses Related to Research Questions 1-4

LS = Interviewer

P1 = Participant 1

LS—Can you describe in more detail how you felt after writing your narrative in secondary school?

P1—Like I said, I felt hurt. I couldn't believe my teacher gave me that grade. ... *[laughs]* I still feel like sort of angry!

LS—Why do you still feel angry?

P1—Not really angry, I guess, but like feeling unfairly treated. I don't think I deserved her grade.

LS—What do you think you deserved?

P1—I should have gotten an A. **[Only an 'A' is Acceptable]** If she had told me what she wanted, I would have done it to get the A. **[Writing the Way Teachers Want]**

LS—What else did you learn from that experience?

P1—Not to care. I mean, not to care about what I write so much. Just do what I have to do and make sure it's what the teacher wants. **[Writing the Way Teachers Want]**

LS—Do you think you knew what your teacher wanted?

P1—No! Otherwise I would've gotten an A. *[laughs]*

LS—Do you think you learned something about yourself as a writer after this experience?

P1—I don't think I was writing academically. I don't—didn't know how ... to write that way. I think it's better for me to write academically.

LS—Why is that?

P1—It's better to write research essays than share personal information in narratives like before.  
**[Believing 'Research Essay' Is More Legitimate Genre than Narratives]**

## APPENDIX XIV

### List of Themes Based on Research Questions 1-4

**NOTE: SST = secondary school teachers**

#### **MS = Motivational Strategies**

##### Dana:

MS: Writing Like an Over-Striver

MS: 'Avoiding' Grades of 'B' (or Lower)

MS: 'Approaching' Writing to Improve Debating

MS: Envisioning Future Self as a Successful Debater

MS: Gaining Confidence with 'A'

##### Mumin:

MS: Writing Like a Self-Protector

MS: 'Avoiding' School System

MS: 'Approaching' Writing as a Choice

MS: Envisioning Future Self as a Blogger

MS: Engaging with Essays by Choosing Own Topic

##### Prashant:

MS: Writing Like a Failure-Acceptor

MS: 'Avoiding' Mistakes

MS: Further 'Avoiding' by Blaming SST

MS: Envisioning Future Self as a Rectifier (of Writing Mistakes)

MS: Hoping for Future Improvement ('positivity bias')

#### **IB = Ideological Beliefs**

##### Dana:

IB: Academic English Is Symbol of Prestige

IB: Only an 'A' is Acceptable

IB: Feeling Knowledgeable Because of 'A'

IB: Disappointed by Low Grades

IB: Feeling At Fault for Lack of Knowledge

##### Mumin:

IB: Academic English Is Symbol of Conflict

IB: Writing in English Linked to School

IB: Resisting Systematic Approach to Writing

IB: Clashing of Primary & Secondary Discourses (secondary school)

IB: Merging of Primary & Secondary Discourses (university)

##### Prashant:



IB: Academic English is Symbol of Correctness  
IB: Writing as an Act of Correctness  
IB: Writing to Rectify Grammar Mistakes  
IB: Believing He Will Always be a 'Weak' Writer

### **AB = Attitudinal Beliefs**

#### Dana:

AB: Writing the Way Teachers Want  
AB: Writing as a Rules-Based Process  
AB: Writing as a 'Surface' Approach  
AB: Writing Academically Is a 'Single Set of Skills'  
AB: Believing 'Research Essay' Is More Legitimate Genre than Narratives

#### Mumin:

AB: Writing in Arabic as a Joyful Act  
AB: Writing in English as an Oppressive Act  
AB: Preferring to Write as a 'Deep' Approach  
AB: Feeling Forced to Write as a 'Surface' Approach in School  
AB: Writing Academically Is a 'Single Set of Skills'  
AB: Viewing 'Academic Essays' as a Formulaic Genre

#### Prashant:

AB: Writing as a Corrective Process  
AB: Depending on Teachers for Corrections  
AB: Believing 'Correctness' Equals 'Good' Writing  
AB: Writing as a 'Surface' Approach  
AB: Writing Academically Is a 'Single Set of Skills'  
AB: Preferring Not to Learn New Academic Genres  
AB: Correcting Mistakes Is More Important Than Genre-Specific Skills

### **SI = Sociocultural Influences**

#### Dana:

SI: SST as Gatekeepers of Knowledge  
SI: Fearing SST (Negative) Opinion  
SI: Wanting Teachers' Approval  
SI: Blaming SST for Not Providing Knowledge  
SI: Upholding Parents' Standards of Perfection  
SI: Wanting Parents' Approval  
SI: Embracing Discourse Community of Writing Classes

#### Mumin:

SI: SST as Gatekeepers of Power

SI: Resenting Dominant Role of SST  
SI: Blaming SST for His Lack of Engagement  
SI: Feeling Forced by Family to Write in English  
SI: Resisting Discourse Community of Writing Classes  
SI: Eventually Engaging with Discourse Community

Prashant:

SI: SST as Gatekeepers of Standard English Norms  
SI: Fearing SST Criticism  
SI: Accepting SST Criticism  
SI: Blaming Self for Mistakes  
SI: Blaming SST for Their Poor English Skills  
SI: Blaming SST for His Mistakes at University  
SI: Lacking Perceived Academic Control  
SI: Excluded from Discourse Community of Writing Classes

## APPENDIX XV

### Coded Journal Responses Related to Research Question 5

“Writing 102! Writing 102!” This is the voice I have been hearing in my head for the last month that’s scares me a lot about writing, not because I can’t do it but because I know there’s another challenge I have to go through next semester. And this challenge is much harder than the confrontation I had this semester. Although, I know it will be hard, but to be honest I am also excited about it, because I know that I have another chance to improve my writing skills and disclosed the thoughts I have in my mind about writing. And I know that I will spend a lot of time doing the assignments, but I am not worried because now I know that writing is one of the best ways to express the person’s beliefs and feelings. **[Using ‘Positivity Bias’]** However, if someone asked me at the beginning of this semester “What am I going to do in writing 102” I would have told them I will fail. But now I am more confident about it and about writing in general, and I see myself as a good writer and I know I can handle it. **[Using ‘Positivity Bias’/ Desiring to Appear ‘Successful’]**

However, this semester I realized that negative experiences are not always a bad thing. I had a lot of negative experiences with writing in the past, especially in English and this is all because of the way my teachers in school forced us to write about what they want, and because of the systematic approach they followed they didn’t care about what their students might be interested in writing about. **[Blaming Past Teachers for Writing Difficulties]** But now as I mentioned before I am more confident about writing and I have a small blog that I write my thoughts in Arabic in it, and I was thinking if I can write more why don’t I make a blog for writing a small daily paragraphs in English as well. And it became one of new goals, and hopefully after finishing writing 102 I will start working on it. **[Desiring to Appear ‘Successful’]**

Moreover, now I have a lot of feelings about writing and I started to be passionate about it again. Because at the beginning of the semester I was sure that I am not going to do well in the course because of the struggles I have gone through with writing, but now everything has changed and to be honest since the school days till now, this is the only course English course I have benefited from so far. Past in the school days we used to listen to our teachers for hours without even know what they are talking about, but in Writing 101 I learned a lot of things. **[Blaming Past Teachers for Writing Difficulties]** I know a lot of new things about writing and whatever the tasks of writing I am going to get in the future I know that I am going to do well on it. **[Using ‘Positivity Bias’]**

## APPENDIX XVI

### List of Themes Based on Research Question 5

#### Narrative Motives (for all three participants)

##### **NMC: Narrative Motives as Contradictions**

- NMC: Desiring to appear 'successful'
- NMC: Blaming past teachers for writing difficulties
- NMC: Not blaming present teacher for writing difficulties

##### **NMO: Narrative Motives as Omissions**

- NMO: Lacking detail about self as academic writer
- NMO: Lacking detail about motives to write academically
- NMO: Lacking detail about negotiations in discourse communities

##### **NMPI: Narrative Motives as Purposeful Inclusions**

- NMPI: Following 'master' narratives of success
- NMPI: Following 'little' narratives of success
- NMPI: Using 'positivity bias'
- NMPI: Following 'redemption' resolution

#### Narrative Forms

##### **NFIC: Narrative Forms as Identity Constructions**

###### Dana:

- NFIC: Struggling Writer in Past
- NFIC: Searching Writer in Present
- NFIC: Successful Writer for Future
- NFIC: Resulting in Hero-Narrative Form

###### Mumin:

- NFIC: Resistant Writer in Past
- NFIC: Discovering Writer in Present
- NFIC: Resolved Writer for Future
- NFIC: Resulting in Rebel-Narrative Form

###### Prashant:

- NFIC: Self-Blaming Writer in Past
- NFIC: Avoidant Writer in Present

NFIC: Rectifying Writer for Future

NFIC: Resulting in Victim-Narrative Form

## APPENDIX XVII

### University of Exeter's Consent Form

When completing this form please remember that the purpose of the document is to clearly explain the ethical considerations of the research being undertaken. As a generic form it has been constructed to cover a wide-range of different projects so some sections may not seem relevant to you. Please include the information which addresses any ethical considerations for your particular project which will be needed by the SSIS Ethics Committee to approve your proposal.

Guidance on all aspects of the SSIS Ethics application process can be found on the SSIS intranet:

<https://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/research/researchenvironmentandpolicies/ethics/>

All staff and postdoctoral students within SSIS should use this form to apply for ethical approval and then send it to one of the following email addresses:

[ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

[ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in the Graduate School of Education.

Applicant details	
Name	Lelania Sperrazza
Department	Education
UoE email address	las220@exeter.edu

**Duration for which permission is required**

You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. The start date should be at least one month from the date that you submit this form. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that retrospective ethical approval will never be given.

<b>Start date:20/09/2015</b>	<b>End date:20/01/2016</b>	<b>Date submitted:20/07/2015</b>
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### Students only

All students must discuss their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. The discussion may be face to face or via email.

Prior to submitting your application in its final form to the SSIS Ethics Committee it should be approved by your first and second supervisor / dissertation supervisor/tutor. You should submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of their email approval.

Student number	620035119
Programme of study	<b>PhD</b>
Name of Supervisor(s)/tutors or Dissertation Tutor	<b>Dr. Durrant</b>
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	No

### Certification for all submissions

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically I will complete a further ethics proposal form.

**Lelania Sperrazza**

Double click this box to confirm certification X

*Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.*

#### **TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT**

**The Narrative Identity Construction of Three Multilingual Students at an American-Style University in the UAE: An Examination of Motivational, Ideological, Attitudinal, and Sociocultural Factors that Impact Writer Identity in Academic English**

#### **ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE**

N/A

#### **MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005**

N/A

#### **SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

*As a guide - 750 words.*

This interpretivist study aims to understand the various ways writer identities are positioned by analyzing global English students' autobiographical narratives and in-depth interviews in an academic writing course at GAU. First, I will investigate how academic writing positions my participants as "non-native" writers and impacts their identities through classroom practices and beliefs about the correctness of writing. Second, I will examine how my participants "reflexively" self-position themselves or are "interactively" positioned by their teachers during academic writing practices. Finally, I will investigate how my participants can re-position their identities by writing autobiographical narratives as a way to gain awareness of their learning experiences, sense of agency, and acceptance of themselves as legitimate English language writers. Ultimately, I hope my study will spark interest in autobiographical narratives for classroom



research in the Gulf region, and also, will address a major gap in literature on positioning and writer identity for university students in the Gulf.

I chose this topic based on my own observations teaching composition to global English students at GAU for five years. During this time, I have worked with students whose backgrounds span a multitude of countries, cultures, and languages that have converged throughout their childhoods into one academic space: the English classroom. However, while most of my students have been educated in English since elementary or secondary school, I believe many arrive to university with “negative” writer identities that affect their ability to write competently. A common assumption among my colleagues is that students resist writing because English is not their native language. However, in order to be placed into my intermediate course, students are administered an English Placement Exam (EPT) designed by the Writing Studies department, which ranks their proficiency in academic writing on par with entry-level composition courses found in most American universities. And, if they do not immediately place into my course as incoming freshmen, students must first successfully complete a beginning-level writing course. Therefore, while my students have the *ability* to write in academic English, I feel that their past experiences, prior to their arrival at university, have led to their resistance to writing.

The results presented in the study will be based on three different autobiographical narratives administered throughout the semester that focus on participants’ understanding of themselves as academic writers. Since I am interested in narratives that represent significant writing moments in my participants’ lives, I will examine their narratives for holistic, storied evidence that can provide a sequential understanding to their development as writers as well as the construction of their writer identities (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). As such, Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) past-present-future chronological approach to narrative research will allow me to capture these significant moments by providing my participants the flexibility to explore their writer identities from different stages and perspectives in their lives. Additionally, this will highlight the development of my participants’ autobiographical, discursal, and authorial selves based on Clark & Ivanic’s (1997) three elements of identity construction. Then, to further understand my participants’ understanding of their writer selves, I will conduct in-depth interviews that explore how their autobiographical narratives helped them to rethink and potentially re-position their writer identities.

## INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Since my research will take place internationally, I am currently seeking IRB approval from the university in which I will conduct my research. The IRB application was submitted concurrently along with Exeter's SSIS Ethics Application on July 20, 2015.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The first method I will use to gather data are autobiographical narratives, which will allow me to conduct Critical Discourse Analysis, a common methodology in qualitative research (Cohen, et al., 2011). Each autobiographical narrative will be approximately 500 words in length and participants will have two weeks to submit the assignments to their individual, online journals available on Blackboard, a virtual course-management system provided by GAU. After I analyze the narratives based on chronological themes, I will have the participants review my interpretations of their experiences so that I can encourage a collaborative relationship during the research process. Any modifications or revisions of my narrative analysis will be noted in my research diary.

*Question 1.* The first phase will highlight my participants' past academic writing experiences, including their feelings and assumptions about writing in an academic English context. The below writing prompt, offered at the beginning of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on your past experiences writing in academic English. Describe a specific writing moment in either your elementary- or secondary-school classroom that impacted you. Write about your feelings, beliefs, and understandings of yourself as a writer based on this particular moment.

I feel it is necessary to begin the narrative-writing phase before my participants were required to write their first academic essay of the semester. I want to understand their academic writing experiences before they had ever entered my classroom, and as such, before they could be influenced by the rhetorical strategies required by my own particular writing course. Here, I am interested in how their writer identities were shaped and positioned by past experiences, which would potentially influence their current writing abilities in my own classroom (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Davies & Harré, 1999).

Question 2. The second phase will highlight my participants' current academic writing experiences, including their feelings and assumptions about the rhetorical strategies required of them to write an academic essay. The below writing prompt, offered during the middle of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on your current experiences writing in academic English. Describe a specific moment from your university-level Writing 101 course that impacted you. Write about your feelings, beliefs, and understandings of yourself as an academic writer based on the rhetorical strategies required of you to write an academic essay in this course.

For this phase, I am interested in how my participants' social, cultural, and historical backgrounds have impacted their current decisions when using the rhetorical strategies required by one of my own academic essay assignments. According to Clark and Ivanič (1997), the fluidity of students' writer selves is influenced by how they are positioned by their past writing experiences. I am also concerned about how my participants are reflexively or interactively positioned (Davies & Harré's, 1999) by their desire to invest, or not to invest, in the academic discourse community that had formed in my own writing classroom (Norton, 2000). I specifically want to know if there are common themes, or patterns, made evident by their narratives, which would help me become more aware if I have interactively positioned my participants based on their abilities to write academically in English.

Question 3. The third phase highlights my participants' potential transformation and self-worth as academic writers. Specifically, I will ask them to envision their future writer identities after reflecting upon their autobiographical and discursal selves. The below writing prompt, offered at the end of the semester, guided their responses:

- Reflect on how you see yourself as a writer when you begin Writing 102 next semester. Write about your future self as an academic writer and how this was impacted by understanding your past and present writing experiences. Discuss how your feelings and knowledge about academic writing may have changed since the beginning of this semester.

I feel it will be necessary to end the narrative-writing stage with the potential understanding of my participants' transformation as writers. According to Hussein (2008), narratives can encourage students to value their own knowledge and experiences, which in turn, can empower those in future situations—especially students who have felt marginalized in an educational context. They can also help writing students “consider how they can resolve their linguistic and identity tensions” (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 775) by providing awareness about past positionings (Norton, 2000; Fernsten, 2008; Hirano, 2009; Park, 2013).

The second method I will use to gather data are in-depth interviews. All three interviews will be conducted in a neutral space (location to be determined based on each participant's choice) on the university campus at the convenience of each participant. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. All interview transcripts will be shared with the participants. Although I will have some structured questions related to my participants' background information (nationality, languages spoken, demographics, and previous schooling), the majority of my open-ended questions will emerge from the participants' semester-long, three phases of narrative writing. While some questions will be determined in advance based on my narrative writing prompts and the participants' ensuing written responses, I anticipate that each interview session will have its own unique characteristics in that my open-ended questions and participant responses will just naturally emerged during the flow of our conversation. However, I will try, as much as possible, to ensure that my questions are not leading but rather focused on helping the interviewees describe their experiences as fully as possible. For each interview I will have a prepared form with my structured questions and open-ended questions; an introductory statement explaining the purpose of the interview; and another statement guaranteeing the anonymity of all my participants.

The third method I will use to gather data is the research diary, which will allow me to acquire thick description, another common methodology for qualitative research (Cohen, et al., 2011). As such, I will use my research diary throughout the research design stage, the data collection, the analysis, and the final writing-up stage. I will also use it to note down emerging themes during the data collection; note down observations and reflections when conducting CDA on my participants' autobiographical narratives; comment on my interview process; and plan, write, and revise during the research and writing process. It is important to note that the research diary will be particularly useful when conducting the in-depth interviews. I plan to make entries to the diary based on the hand-written notes I take during the interviews; and, I will adopt the habit of spending several minutes at the end of each interview to quickly note down my reactions to what had happened during the interview, including any interesting conversations that had occurred after the recorder was turned off.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

I will use a convenience sampling of three intermediate-level writing students from one of my fall 2015 academic writing courses. The participants will be selected for close analysis after they write their first autobiographical narrative at the beginning of the fall semester. I will specifically

choose their narratives for my study, and their overall participation in my research, based upon written reflections that describe the understanding of their writer identities in a “negative” fashion.

### THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

I will obtain consent from my three participants to use certain data for publication regarding their autobiographical narratives and in-depth interviews, and pseudonyms will be used to protect their identities. **(See attached SSIS Ethics Consent Form.)** They will be reassured that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will in no way affect how they will be graded in the course. The participants are also not required to do any additional assignments beyond the class requirements save for the in-depth interviews conducted at the end of the semester. Since all my students will have access to the syllabus and grading distribution for the semester, I feel it will be clear that the autobiographical narratives are part of an online journal grade in which all students, not just my participants, will write reflectively about their writing experiences throughout the semester. It is important to note that the online journal will count toward 10% of the overall semester grade, but the autobiographical narratives and any other reflective writing, will be considered informal writing tasks that encourage reflection over academic writing standards. As such, the online journal will be graded holistically based on its completion, not for following traditional formal discourse norms required in my intermediate-level composition course.

### SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

N/A

### THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Please see the attached **SSIS Ethics Consent Form** for a detailed description of how my participants will be informed of their participation in the study.

### ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

I will apply several strategies, as previously discussed, which interpretivist researchers use to ensure trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell, 2000). First, I will use a multi-methodological approach by conducting CDA on my participants’ autobiographical narratives and

in-depth interviews while also keeping a research diary with detailed, rich descriptions of the setting, the participants, and my reflections throughout the study. I will provide participants my analysis of their autobiographical narratives so that they can suggest any modifications or revisions of their thematized writing experiences. I will also conducted in-depth, follow-up interviews with my participants after they write their three autobiographical narratives; afterwards, I will provide them transcripts so they can re-check their interview responses and ensure that the discussions of their subjective writing experiences were as authentic as possible. I will obtain permission from all participants to use their narratives and interview responses with the assurance of anonymity, and I will guarantee that my participants' participation, or lack of participation, will not affect their grade in my course. I intend to practice reflexivity throughout every stage of the writing process, data collection, and analysis of the results; I will also anticipate researcher bias while formulating my research paradigm and thinking through the process of epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Finally, I will discuss my role as teacher-researcher and the pre-established familiarity I will have with my participants by being honest about our relationship in the classroom.

Nevertheless, ethical concerns may still arise about my relationship with the participants and my assumptions about their writer identities. Since I will select my participants based on how they describe their academic writing experiences to be "negative," I am concerned about creating a research environment in which I will encourage them to feel positioned as global English writers. Additionally, I am concerned that my role as teacher-researcher will contribute to social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013) in which my participants will feel they have to respond a certain way in order to support my views, rather than theirs, about positioning in academic writing classrooms.

Based on these ethical concerns, I believe a research diary will provide me the reflexive space to explore issues of power while researching "vulnerable groups" such as my own writing students (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 175). As Munroe, Holly, Rainbird, and Leisten (2004) highlight, powerless groups are easy to stereotype because they are unable to protect their own interests. Since the aim of my study is to explore the construction of writer identity in students who have been positioned by their writing instructors, then I was very concerned about my role as teacher-researcher. If I wanted to encourage the contributions of my participants, then I will have to value their experiences from a place of equitability and inclusion, not authority and exclusion (Munroe, et al., 2004; Cohen, et al, 2011). Therefore, I aim to constantly reflect on our social interactions and question my own motivations regarding three major areas: Will I positioning my participants as struggling writers for the sake of my data results? Will I force them into the role of compliant interviewee so that I can guide their responses? And finally, Will I engage in "ventriloquy" (Sandelowski, 2006, p. 10) by controlling the voices of my participants when analyzing their experiences? While a simple research diary will not eradicate these ethical concerns, it will

certainly contribute to a more impartial, authentic, and honest account of my participants' writing experiences, as well as my own analysis of the data.

## **DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE**

All data will be stored securely for a retention period of five years on my personal desktop computer located in my office in the Writing Studies department of GAU. The data will be saved on password protected files stored on the university's U-drive. After five years, the data will be destroyed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of participants or I will only refer to them as Participant 1, 2, or 3 while collecting and analysing the data.

In addition, all participants will be given in writing a privacy notice located on their **SSIS Ethics Consent Form** that states the following:

“Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.”

## **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

N/A

## **USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK**

I will provide participants my analysis of their autobiographical narratives so that they can suggest any modifications or revisions of their thematized writing experiences. I will also conduct in-depth, follow-up interviews with my participants after they write their three autobiographical narratives; afterwards, I will provide them transcripts so they can re-check their interview

responses and ensure that the discussions of their subjective writing experiences are as authentic as possible.

## **INFORMATION**

Please see the attached **SSIS Information Sheet Form**.

## **CONSENT FORM**

Please see the attached **SSIS Ethics Consent Form**.

## **SUBMISSION PROCEDURE**

Staff and students should follow the procedure below.

In particular, students should discuss their application with their supervisor(s) / dissertation tutor / tutor and gain their approval prior to submission. Students should submit evidence of approval with their application, e.g. a copy of the supervisors email approval.

This application form and examples of your consent form, information sheet and translations of any documents which are not written in English should be submitted by email to the SSIS Ethics Secretary via one of the following email addresses:

[ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

[ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in the Graduate School of Education.



**APPENDIX XVIII**  
**Participant Consent Form to Sign**

Title of Research Project:

**The Narrative Identity Construction of Three Multilingual Students  
at an American-Style University in the UAE: An Examination of Motivational, Ideological,  
Attitudinal, and Sociocultural Factors that Impact Writer Identity in Academic English**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....

(Signature of participant )

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....

OR

.....

\* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

## **APPENDIX XIX**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **PROJECT TITLE**

**The Narrative Identity Construction of Three Multilingual Students at an American-Style University in the UAE: An Examination of Motivational, Ideological, Attitudinal, and Sociocultural Factors that Impact Writer Identity in Academic English**

#### **INVITATION**

You are being asked to take part in a research study on the various ways writer identities are created by multilingual students in academic English. The aim of the study is two-fold: (1) to understand how motivational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociocultural factors related to academic discourse in English impact how participants view themselves as writers; and (2) to investigate how participants construct their narrative identities as academic writers based on based on their past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences in the classroom.

The study will be conducted by Lelania Sperrazza, doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at University of Exeter and senior writing instructor at GAU.

The project supervisor is Dr. Philip Durrant, senior lecturer in Language Education at the University of Exeter.

The project is approved by the Social Sciences and International Studies Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter, UK.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN**

In this study, you will be asked to (1) write three 500-word online journal responses; (2) fill out a questionnaire about your background information; and (3) participate in one 30-minute interview during the fall 2015 semester.

The journal responses are part of an online journal grade that will count toward 10% of the overall semester grade. Each journal response will take two weeks to complete and will be administered at

the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. All students in the course, not just the participants, will write reflectively about their past, present, and imagined-future writing experiences. (The journal responses are considered informal writing tasks that encourage reflection over academic writing standards and they will be graded based on their completion, not for what participants choose to contribute.)

The questionnaire will be administered after your first journal response is completed. The questions will be based on the participants' background information, such as: gender, age, home language, and years studying in English.

The interview will take place on campus at the end of the semester at a location of the participants' choosing. The interview questions will be based on what each participant wrote in their three journal responses. (All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. All interview transcripts will be shared with the participants.)

### **TIME COMMITMENT**

The study will take place during the fall 2015 semester. Each journal response will take two weeks to write, for a total of six weeks. The interview will take up to 30 minutes.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

You may decide to stop being part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied up to that point be withdrawn and/or destroyed. You have the right to omit, refuse to answer, or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered at anytime. Your course grade will not be affected at all by your decisions and responses during the study. In addition, your course grade will not be affected if you decide to stop participating in the study for any reason.

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, please ask or email the researcher before the study begins: Lelania Sperrazza / [lsperazza@aus.edu](mailto:lsperazza@aus.edu)

## **BENEFITS AND RISKS**

There are no known benefits or risks for you in this study.

## **COST, REIMBURSEMENT AND COMPENSATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY**

The data the researcher collects (journal responses, questionnaires, and interview transcripts) will be stored securely for a retention period of five years on her personal desktop computer located in her office in the Writing Studies department of GAU. After five years, the data will be destroyed.

The researcher's intentions regarding the data is to use it for presentations at conferences; publication in scholarly journals or books; and ultimately, for a completed and possibly published PhD dissertation.

No one will be able to link the data you provide to the identifying information you supplied because (1) pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of participants and (2) the researcher will only refer to participants during the data-collection and analysis stage of the study by the participants' pseudonyms.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Supervisor Dr. Philip Durrant will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact him at [P.L.Durrant@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:P.L.Durrant@exeter.ac.uk).

If you want to find out about the final results of this study, you should contact the researcher, Lelania Sperrazza, at [Lsperrazza@aus.edu](mailto:Lsperrazza@aus.edu).

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