INNER SPEECH AS AGENCY: A SELF-DIRECTED DIALOGUE AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN L2 WRITING AT FUUAST

Nimrah Anis

PhD Scholar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology
Email: n.waseem@fuuast.edu.pk

Dr. Saira Niaz
Corresponding Author

(Co-Supervisor), Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh,
Email: saira.altaf@usindh.edu.pk

Prof. Dr. Abdul Fattah Soomro

(Supervisor), Professor & Director, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh
Email: soomrofatah@usindh.edu.pk

Abstract
Inner speech, often understood as internalized self-talk, performs a mediational function in regulating affective states such as writing anxiety yet it remains underexplored in non-native context (Khatib et al., 2025). Grounded in Sociocultural Theory, this qualitative study aims to explore the manifestation of self-directed speech, its dialogical structure and how it is employed by L2 learners at FUUAST during writing process to manage writing anxiety and regulate emotions. Students of BS first semester from all faculties were sampled through purposive sampling to conduct focus group interviews in order to capture rich, contextualized experiences of inner speech during writing tasks. Data was analyzed using Saldana's (2021) coding cycles to identify agency and patterns of dialogism and regulation. Trustworthiness was established through Guba and Lincoln's model (1985). Findings indicate that learners' inner speech is dialogically constituted by internalized past experiences, exam discourse, teachers' feedback and family expectations. Self-directed speech functions in unpredictable way; it regulates anxiety through self-repositioning, cognitive reframing and breaking down tasks into meaningful segments yet it may intensify anxiety if internalized critical authoritative voice is dominant. Examining inner speech, mediation and agency through the lens of sociocultural theory, this study focuses on the understanding of L2 writing anxiety from an intrapersonal emotion to the socially and historically embedded dynamics of self-regulation. Implications for teaching underscore the value creating supportive learning environment while promoting self-regulatory skills in L2 writing classrooms at FUUAST.
Keywords: Self-Talk, Agency, Writing anxiety, Sociocultural theory, emotional regulation.

Introduction

Writing is a cognitively demanding skill which also keeps the writer affectively charged during the process. Non-native learners face increased pressure during writing tasks as English language is not their primary language of socialization (Wang et al., 2025). Non-native writers frequently struggle not only with idea generation but also with vocabulary, grammar and organization of the text. In addition, during the process they face a pressure to perform and fear of negative evaluation which causes frustration and anxiety at times (Ruslan et al., 2025). Writing anxiety is a significant phenomenon among L2 learners specially in a context where learners are not much exposed to authentic English language (Erdel, 2024). Among non-native learners, the complexity of academic

writing along with other restricting elements cause high level of writing anxiety which manifest in the forms of cognitive anguish, physical symptoms and avoidance behaviour (Zhao, 2025). Studies show that L2 writing anxiety not only affects writing performance but undermines students' ability to engage and plan (Zhao, 2025; Fan & Wang, 2024).

In non-native contexts such as Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, Students of tertiary level have reported of having moderate to high level of writing anxiety in several studies and they have been guided to employ various self-regulation strategies like self-talk to manage their emotional states (Talasee & Poopatwiboon, 2024; Waked et al., 2024).

Though various studies have highlighted the role of self-regulation strategies to mediate the relationship between writing anxiety and performance, most of the research conducted in non-native context are predominantly focused on development of cognitive strategies rather than exploring strategies learners employ during writing tasks such as intrapersonal dialogues (Fan & Wang, 2024). Likewise, series of quantitative researches accentuate that students having more emotional control can receive feedback more constructively but oversee the internal dynamics of learners' psychological regulation processes (Zhang & Li, 2025). On the other hand, the studies focused on self-regulated learning interventions indicate that explicit strategy instruction can reduce anxiety and bring stability in the affective state of the learners, only to improve writing performance (Teng, 2025).

Sociocultural theory considers language learning as a socially constructed phenomenon. It provides a foundation to explore the mediational role of language in cognitive functions and affective regulation. Sociocultural theory asserts self-talk and inner speech serves as a cultural tool for self-regulation (Allami et al., 2025). According to sociocultural theory, higher mental functions such as problem solving and affective self-regulation emerge through social interactions and become internalized (Wu & Kanji, 2025). Central to SCT is the notion that language itself acts as both a cultural tool and a mediational means that organizes thought, emotion, and action (Palm, 2023).

Research in the education suggests that sociocultural theory has been vastly used in the field of language teaching and learning, the role of inner speech as a mediational mechanism in regulating writing anxiety remains under-researched (Khatib et al., 2025). Studies conducted in non-native context has not sufficiently explored the multi-voiced, dialogic nature of inner speech and its relation to agency and emotional regulation during writing (Allami et al., 2025).

The studies in second language acquisition, conducted within the purview of sociocultural theory concludes that private and inner speech are internalized forms of interaction that learners employ to solve problems, regulate focus and resolve complex tasks such as writing independently (Jiang et al., 2025).

In Pakistan, like other postcolonial countries, writing task is not merely a linguistic activity but a site where identity, agency, and institutional expectations intersect. Language learners at Pakistani universities often draw on socio- culturally shaped concept of skills, notion of correctness and performance. These beliefs construct their responses to difficulty (Ahmed et al., 2025; Siddique et

al., 2025). As a result, writing is not a regular academic activity at undergraduate level, for Pakistani learners but a challenge which involves metacognitive and emotional regulation and negotiation with inner speech (Razzaq & Hamza, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2024). The complexity of the issue demands investigation of self-regulatory processes like self-talk, inner speech and other mediational strategies. In this regard, various aspects such as the sociolinguistic context, classroom environment and educational histories of learners are needed to be taken in account.

Learner's capacity to regulate his own learning and intentionally act within and across diverse social contexts is referred as Agency in Sociocultural theory (Block, 2007; Jun & Mu, 2024). Agency is not a static feature but it is co-constructed through sociocultural interaction and mediated by tools such as language and inner speech. Educational histories and socio-cultural practices regarding language use and prior institutional experiences shape not only their language proficiency but also their emotional orientations toward writing activities (Alyasin & Shah, 2026; Truong, 2024). For instance, in non-native context like Pakistan, where error avoidance is reinforced, most of the learners tend to develop negative inner dialogues that perpetuate anxiety, while the learners exposed to dialogic learning settings may utilize their inner speech more constructively.

Rationale for the Study

Despite Sociocultural theory suggests that inner speech functions as a key mediational tool in affective regulation and cognition, most of the studies in SLA have primarily focused on the role of inner speech in oral tasks (Kreiner & Eviatar,2024). Thus, it leaves a gap in Pakistani context in understanding the role of private speech in writing anxiety and self-regulation. empirical research in SLA has predominantly focused on private speech in oral tasks or collaborative dialogues, leaving a gap in understanding its role in **writing anxiety and self-regulation**. Addressing these gaps, this study explores how undergraduate learners at FUUAST, a non-native English higher education context, employ inner speech, enact inner speech functions as a mediational tool for regulating anxiety, how learners construct agency through self-talk in moments of cognitive demanding or emotionally challenging moments.

Problem Statement

Writing anxiety is widely regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing various components such as fear of negative evaluation, increased heart rate and avoidance behaviour. Research has shown that high level of writing anxiety negatively affects all stages of writing from planning to actual writing. In Pakistani context, writing anxiety remains a persistent challenge for undergraduate learners working within high-stakes, exam-oriented education system (Kurd et al., 2023). Likewise in FUUAST, writing instruction traditionally focus on grammatical accuracy and error correction, often establishing a judgmental classroom environment. Such environments contribute to acute sensitivity to language error and internalized critical self-perceptions. Therefore, learners experience high levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety during writing tasks. Evidence from research in local context on writing anxiety suggest that some learners successfully deploy self-talk and self-regulation strategies but not much is documented that whether the learners successfully overcome anxiety and sustain engagement or fail to deal with writing anxiety due to past experiences and self-doubt. Hence, the role of self-directed speech as a mediational and

agentive mechanism in regulating L2 writing anxiety remains underexplored within the undergraduate learners of FUUAST. The study aims to find answers to the following questions;

Research Questions

1. In what ways does inner speech operate as a mediational tool for regulating anxiety and affect during L2 writing among undergraduate learners at FUUAST?
2. How do undergraduate learners at FUUAST construct and negotiate agency through self-talk in moments of cognitive and emotional challenge during L2 writing?

Literature Review

Writing Anxiety is a sub type of situational anxiety and generally considered as a multi-dimensional affective construct which primarily hinders student's writing process. According to Cheng (2004) and Zhao (2025), writing anxiety is a feeling of apprehension that is directly linked with L2 writing tasks. It is typically divided into three components: Somatic anxiety, involving physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, and tension. It is the physical stress when writing. Cognitive anxiety, encompassing worry, negative self-talk, and fear of negative evaluation. It is the mind that creates undesired alarm. Avoidance behaviour, reflected in reluctance to initiate or complete writing tasks (Cheng, 2004; Zhao, 2025; Nor & Senom, 2024).

Learners respond in different ways to these three types of anxiety. Somatic anxiety is evinced in physiological reaction such as heart pounding and hand shaking which interrupts focus and fluency in writing. Cognitive anxiety brings worry as it drags learners in a position where they engage in an excessive self- monitoring and reduced functional memory (Wang et al., 2024).

Similarly, Avoidance behaviour is a result of accumulated negative experiences and fear of evaluation, leading learners to either procrastinate or entirely avoid writing tasks. These elements of anxiety often coexist and interact dynamically to undermine writing performance.

Empirical evidence confirms that text quality and language performance is negatively affected by writing anxiety. Cognitive anxiety interferes the processes involved in writing, such as planning and pre-writing skills which results in lower syntactic complexity and poorer organization (Wang et al., 2024). Moreover, systematic reviews show that high level of anxiety is linked to decreased willingness to write, increased avoidance behaviour, and overall lower achievement in writing tasks (Guo et al., 2025). The effects of self-regulated strategies have also been identified; learners with high self-eficacy and strongly active metacognitive strategies, report lower anxiety level which indicates that these learners were able to alleviate anxiety (Khosravi & Han, 2026).

Well-developed metacognitive strategies have not been only associated with higher writing performance but reduced writing anxiety as well. Empirical studies reveal that use of planning and self-monitoring strategies are positively correlated with self-eficacy and negatively correlated with anxiety (Cheng, Chen, & Wei, 2026). Self-regulation is one of the chief metacognitive skills. Self-regulation refers to learners' ability to plan, monitor, evaluate, and adapt their learning behaviours and emotional responses during complex tasks like writing. Metacognition is a central component of self-regulation and includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's cognitive processes (Futurity Social, 2025).

From a sociocultural perspective, self-regulation is mediated through language. Different linguistic tools such as private speech (overt self-talk) and inner speech (covert self-talk) are used by learners to manage emotional challenges and cognitive load (Jiang et al., 2025).

Inner speech originates from overt external communication: as children engage in dialogues with others, they gradually internalize these interactions, transforming them into self-directed speech that supports cognitive and affective functions (Colelli et al., 2025; Fernyhough & Borghi, 2023). Private speech is more used by children while adults often indulge into inner speech for problem solving and emotional management. Recent studied in psychology suggest that inner speech is related to mindfulness, cognitive, affective and behavioural control which establishes its functional importance (Racy, 2024).The capacity to engage in effective inner speech is use of agency which successfully direct the congnition and regulates the emotions during anxiogenic tasks such as writing in a second language (Fernyhough & Borghi, 2023; Verhaeghen & Mirabito, 2021).

Inner speech, which emerges from the internalization of private speech used by learners to regulate cognition, emotion and behaviour. As inner speech develops, learners use it to plan, monitor, evaluate, and regulate both cognitive and affective processes (Fernyhough & Borghi, 2023). Research conducted in second language acquisition on inner speech argue that self-talk is not merely a cognitive process but a tool of mediation based on past social and linguistic experiences.Recent studies have extend its implications in writing processes (Jiang et al., 2025).

In the context of L2 writing, learners use both external and internal dialogues as mediational tools to generate ideas, plan writing, manage performance and regulate anxiety.

When socially shared discourse is transformed into internal cognitive processes, it is known as internalization. Thus the inner speech of learners basically reflects variety of internalized voices such as past experiences of evaluation, teachers' feedback, peer opinions and supportive comments by parents. The inner speech becomes a medium which is not merely private cognition but a socially formed tool that reflects past experiences of the learners' overall social interaction (Colelli et al., 2025).

Writing anxiety is directly related with writing performance (Jasman & Aziz, 2025). Learners experiencing L2 writing anxiety often use inner-speech in two ways. The ones who actively employ strategy to calm themselves are able to reduce anxiety and improve performance. On the other hand, there are learners with higher anxiety who are less engaged and less likely to employ self-regulatory strategies often underperform (Wang et al., 2024). While studies on self-regulated writing strategies have demonstrated the value of planning, monitoring, and evaluation for mitigating writing challenges (Teng & Zhang, 2024). Recent empirical work demonstrates that learners' use of self-regulated writing strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social behavior, and motivational strategies) is significantly associated with reduced writing anxiety and improved writing performance (Fan & Wang, 2024). Writing anxiety has been shown to negatively correlate with writing attainment and self-efficacy, with students who experience higher anxiety displaying less strategic engagement and poorer performance outcomes (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Fan & Wang, 2024).

Nevertheless, there remains a notable gap in applied linguistics research examining how inner speech specifically mediates anxiety and self-regulatory processes in L2 writing, particularly in

sociocultural non-native contexts where learners' educational histories and cultural norms shape how they talk to themselves internally.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, positions human cognitive development as fundamentally mediated by social interaction and cultural tools such as language (Vygotsky, 1934/87). According to SCT, mental functions are co-constructed socially and then internalized through a process of mediation and internalization (Wu et al., 2025)

Leve Vygotsky proposed through Sociocultural Theory that higher cognitive functions in human beings are inherently social in origin and that cognitive development occurs through mediated action and internalization of socially derived linguistic tools (Vygotsky, 1978). In sociocultural theory, Language is both a cultural artifact and a mediational tools that modifies social interaction into internal cognitive processes (He & Lv, 2025; Vygotsky, 1978). As per sociocultural theory, learners acquire language structures as a tool to socially engage which enable them to regulate themselves. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) demonstrates the process of learning from scaffolded and socially mediated stage to independently functioning individuals (Panhwar et al., 2025).
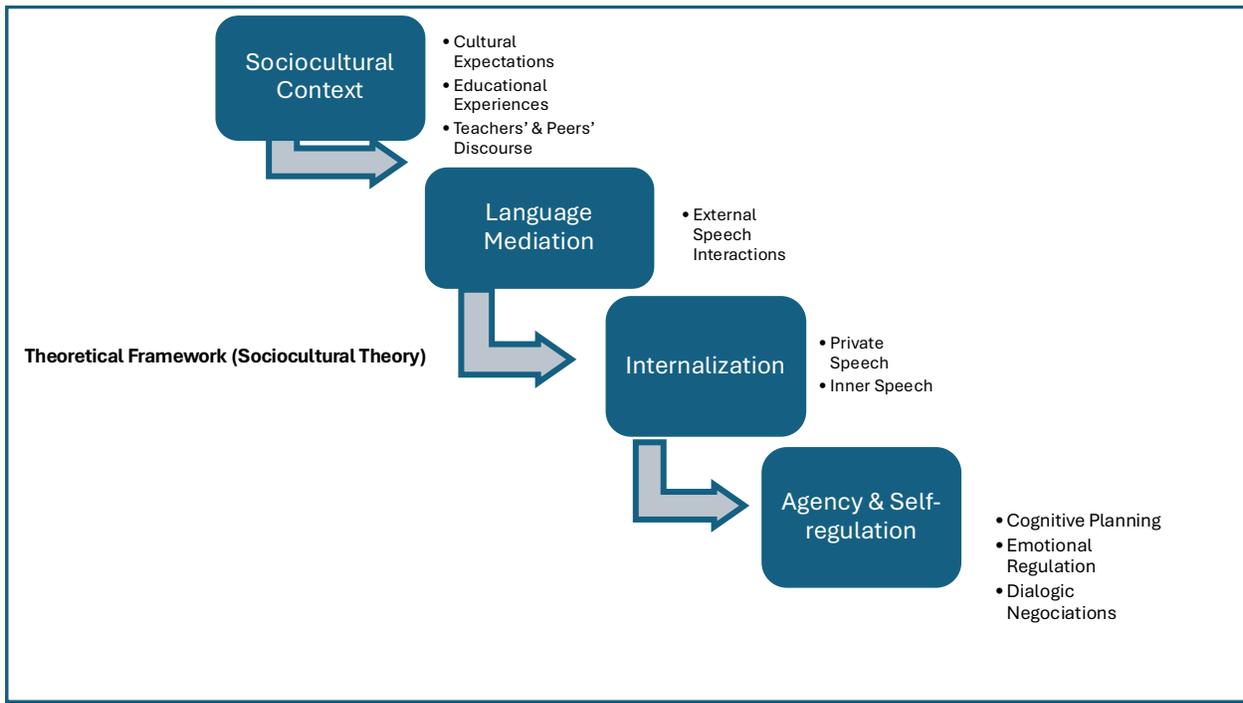
Sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of Agency. Agency is the ability of an individual to control and direct his own thoughts, emotions, and actions (Truong, 2024). It is the power a learner has to direct his emotions and thus controlling the reaction towards a problem.

Learners negotiate meanings through agency and position themselves in their own development. Dialogism supports this view by proposing that mind does not has singular monologue but it is a site of multiple interacting voices. The trio of internalization, mediation and agency offer a sturdy theoretical framework to understand the functions of inner speech as self-regulatory and affect-regulatory tool in L2 writing context (Björk, 2025).

According to sociocultural theory agency is the capacity of a learner to act intentionally regulate their own learning in response to the contextual demands of a task ((Rivera-Gómez-Barris, 2025).Research conducted in psychology and education suggests that private speech assists learners regulate emotions and problem- solving, and is implicated neurologically as a transitional form leading to inner speech (Jiang et al., 2025). Though Sociocultural offers an explanatory framework to explore inner speech as mediational agentive tool but use of inner speech as an agency mediation tool for self-regulated L2 writing behavior and writing anxiety reduction remain underexplored in non-native contexts (de Oliveira & Santos, 2026; Twardowski, 2025).

This gap warrants qualitative inquiry, particularly focused on learners' perspectives and lived experiences of self-directed speech during writing.

Below is the theoretical framework figure1:

Sociocultural Context
- Cultural Expectations
- Educational Experiences
- Teachers' & Peers' Discourse

Language Mediation
- External Speech Interactions

Internalization
- Private Speech
- Inner Speech

Agency & Self-regulation
- Cognitive Planning
- Emotional Regulation
- Dialogic Negociations

Theoretical Framework (Sociocultural Theory)

Methodology

Design

The study is a qualitative Phenomenology. It is a type of study that explore a phenomenon through in-depth analysis of lived experiences of the participants. The goal is not to measure variables but to gain deep insight into subjective meanings and perceptions of reality (Kazeroony, 2026; Daruhadi, 2024; Badil et al., 2023). Phenomenological studies therefore emphasize participants' perspectives and the interpretation of human experience within its context, enabling researchers to reveal the essential structure of a phenomenon as it is consciously lived and understood by individuals (Fernandez, 2024; Badil et al., 2023).

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is focus group interviews. A set of interview questions and prompts were designed to collect data from the participant during Focus group interviews. This method allows researchers to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes through interactive discussion, where group dynamics can stimulate deeper insights and diverse viewpoints. Because of this interactive nature, focus groups are particularly useful for exploring complex issues, generating ideas, and understanding collective perspectives in social and behavioral research (Savin-Baden et al., 2023; Cyr et al., 2024; Quarta et al., 2026). Expert opinion was taken for Interview questions and one question was removed and two were rephrased after pilot study.

Sampling Technique & Sample Size

Purposive sampling techniques was employed to select participants of the study. It is a non-probabilistic sampling technique in which a researcher intentionally choose individuals or cases that are considered information-rich and capable of providing detailed insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024; Creswell et al., 2023; Savin-Baden et al., 2023;

Tracy et al., 2024). Three groups of undergraduate learners having 7-9 students in each group were selected through purposive sampling technique for focus group interviews.

Thematic analysis

Interviews were transcribed. Data was coded through Saldana's (2021) In Vivo Coding model in which direct quotes of participants are used for further process. Coding is central to this process as it helps in organizing the data and enables the identification of categories that finally lead to the development of themes. The codes were moved through the model of thematic analysis by Saldana (2009). The five-step model of thematic analysis described by Johnny Saldaña (2009) focuses on systematically coding qualitative data to identify meaningful patterns and themes. At first stage familiarization was done. Second stage was coding. Third stage was categorization of codes. At fourth stage themes were developed leading to the interpretation and reporting the themes in the fifth and final stage.

Trustworthiness

The Lincoln and Guba (1985) model of trustworthiness is widely used to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research. The model consists of four key criteria. The first criterion is Credibility which refers to the confidence in the accuracy of the results, ensuring that the findings actually reflect participants' opinions. Credibility of the data analysis was achieved through prolonged engagement and member checking. Second criterion is Transferability which concerns with the generalizability of the findings. Purposive sampling is one of the ways to secure transferability. Moreover, thick description ensured transferability in the study. Third criterion is Dependability which relates to the consistency and stability of the research process over time, ensuring that the study could yield similar results if repeated in similar conditions and it was ensured through audit trail. Finally, Confirmability means the research is free from researcher's bias and it was ensured through member validation. This framework is a fundamental standard practiced in qualitative research to evaluate the validity and reliability of the whole process (Creswell et al., 2023; Savin-Baden et al., 2023; Tracy et al., 2024).

Discussion

Six themes emerged during data analysis which provide a rich ground for discussion and reflect on the cognitive and affective state of the undergraduate learners at FUUAST.

Anxiety-Driven Inner Speech

This turned out to be the most reported issue by the participants. Writing anxiety is a major hurdle in learning and improving writing skills especially students fall victim of anxiety during writing tasks. One of the reasons is having negative inner speech. A participant shared that he knows his grammar is pathetic, whenever he starts writing, a voice emerges in his mind," I will make mistakes in grammar". Apart from fear of making errors, many participants shared the fear of negative evaluation. A participant shared that during writing tasks she tries hard to write correct structure but as her foundations in English writing are weak, she often makes mistakes. She shared that while writing she tells herself, "Teacher will find mistakes". A great number of participants reported of having peer pressure. One of the participants shared that he feels embarrassed if teacher provides him corrected feedback in the class. The participant added that this is quite a tension for him and he neither wants the teacher to share his work in the class nor to return his assignments in the class. He reported of having an inner speech, "my class fellows will laugh at

me". Another participant shared, "others write better than me". This shows that students compare among each other and this induces anxiety in them.

Negative Self-Talk as a Barrier

The second most reported theme was practice of negative self-talk which works as a barrier in the anxiety-free writing activity. Most of the student did not even know the role of negative inner speech in creating writing anxiety. A participant shared that he always doubts his abilities. He shared that whenever he starts writing, he tells himself, "My English is poor", "I won't be able to complete the task". Another participant reported, "now it begins again". A participant shared, "I will fail, why do they have English as a subject?". Apart from self-doubt another issue faced by the participants is self-perception of being incompetent. Many participants shared a negative self-perception. When they compare themselves with others, they usually consider themselves as below average or literally poor performers. A participant reported that during writing activity he often tells himself, "I am not good at English writing". A participant shared that she is good at other subjects but English writing tasks makes her anxious and if the task is unseen, she often start blaming herself as, "I will fail this task, I am not good for anything". This shows that due to their past experiences, participants tend to send negative messages to their brains. This could be the result of poor parenting or inappropriate style of feedback by the teachers of initial classes.

Emotional Regulation through Self-Talk

Many participants reported of having emotional regulation through self-talk. A participant from faculty of Arts shared, "whenever I feel distressed, I read verses of Iqbal". Another participant shared that when he realizes that he is about to lose control on herself, she applies self-calming strategy and tells herself, "its going to be alright, just move ahead". Another participant shared that he tells himself, "this shall pass too, just stay here". Another participant shared that at times the writing tasks is challenging and if he is not prepared for it, it triggers anxiety. In this situation she starts repeatedly assuring herself that if she starts right now, she will be able to finish it on time. She shared that at that time the inner speech turns into private talk and she starts chanting, "just start writing first paragraph, just start writing first paragraph….". Another participant from computer science department shared that in their field hierarchy is very important and a teacher has trained them to always divide the task in small portions. Therefore, if he feels stuck in English writing task, his brain tells him, "lets begin step by step".

Inner Speech as Cognitive Mediation

Among the participants, there were many who reported of being able to handle the anxiety successfully through inner speech and self-talk. One of the participant shared that he is well aware of his proficiency level in English writing skills but her English school teacher trained her to cope up with a situation through cognitive management. She shared that she tells herself, "ok, lets do the brain storming first". This cognitive mediation helps her control her anxiety. Another participant from department of business administration shared that its part of their training to begin with a small step and even if one fails, it easy to redo. He reported that when he is caught up in a demanding task, an inner voice guides him, "first write the introduction". A participant from English department shared his experiences that though the students of English department do not face problems in grammar and syntax but vocabulary is an important issue for them. He shared that being students of English major they are expected to write formal literary language. In this

situation, writing with appropriate vocabulary is challenging and can trigger anxiety. He told that in this situation he keeps on monitoring his writeup and constantly an inner voice guides him, "Is this the right word for it? Am I able to bring the right evidence for the text?". Many participants shared the experience of monitoring and planning through inner speech during writing task.

Motivational Inner Speech

One third of the participants reported of using inner speech for getting motivated. The group of participants who have positive school experience, they strive to learn the technical aspect of English writing. One of the participants share that he intends to move ahead with post-graduation so he is more focused on improving academic writing skills. He shared that whenever there is a new task, he tells himself, "I enjoy writing". A female participant share that she used to suffer from severe writing anxiety in her school days. Then the counsellor in school helped her and through practice of motivational inner speech for years, she can now handle difficulties unseen tasks too. In such situations, she tells herself, "this is an opportunity to learn a new skill" or "this is new, I will improve my writing skills through it." Another participant shared that he often try to himself buck up during task if he feels stuck at any point by saying, "come on soldier, this is merely a game"

Negotiating Agency through Self-Directed Dialogue

This turned out to be very important finding of the study. Most of the participants whether the ones who have a positive orientation or the ones who suffer from low self-esteem, both of the group asserted of having negotiating agency through self-directed dialogues. Firstly, the participants who admitted that they suffer through severe writing anxiety and send negative messages to brain through inner speech, shared that after certain time they also try to uphold themselves through negotiating agency. One of the participants shared that initially he gets anxious but after few minutes he realizes that nobody else can help him so he has to be strong, so he tells himself, "I can do it". Another participant shared that she gets too anxious that she at times unable to hold her tears but as the time passes, she hears an inner voice, "hold on, it will be done".

On the other hand, the participants who have medium to low level of writing anxiety, opt for strategic problem-solving approach. A participant shared that his vocabulary is limited but he does not get too worried, he tells himself, "find another way to say it". Another participant shared that if she does not have much content to write, she tells herself, "ok write the answer in a form of list, teacher will take notice". Another participant shared, "write a focused conclusion". A participant shared that writing response of reading comprehension are equally tricky so he often tells himself, "write all the important points and read again".

The data analysis demonstrates that the undergraduate learners at FUUAST frequently get indulged into both positive and negative self-talk. As soon as the writing task is assigned, these learners behave in different ways. Learners with troubled past often face anxiety and as a reflex action they practice negative inner speech. On the other hand, some of them handle this anxiety with strategic positive self-talk. There is a group of motivated students who take challenges as learning opportunity and buck themselves up through motivational inner speech. As the initial time passes, most of the students from all the three group try to strategically use the inner speech as Agency to manage cognitive and emotional anxiety. Following is the conceptual framework of the study;

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework
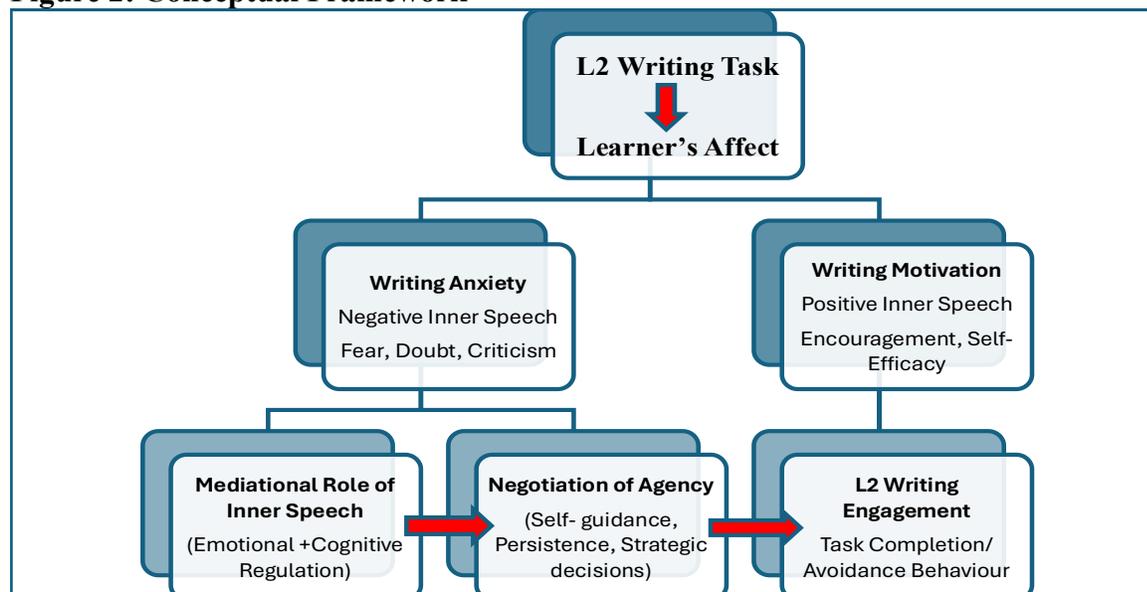
Nimrah Anis- figure 2, 2026

It is investigated that inner speech is used by undergraduate learners of FUUAST to regulate anxiety through several distinct mechanism. First and foremost aspect is the choice of language in mediation. Majority of the participants reported that they regulate emotions more effectively in their L1, where emotional expression feels more natural. Others remain bilingual which is their natural way of social interaction which maintains the mediational effect.

Firstly the most reported issue is the role of negative self-talk in amplifying the writing anxiety. For some learners with negative educational histories, internal dialogue may mirror past criticism, ("You always make mistakes in tenses"). In such cases, inner speech becomes a vehicle for self-surveillance and perfectionism rather than regulation. Secondly, inner speech functions as emotional reassurance. Learners consciously calm themselves ("Ok calm down, keep writing, you can edit it later") This type of self-talk directly addresses somatic symptoms such as tension or panic. It may reduce avoidance behavior by lowering emotional intensity.

Thirdly, inner speech may mediate anxiety cognitively by task segmentation. learners tell themselves, "Write one paragraph first." This reframing reduces cognitive overload and restores perceived control. Moreover, mediation may occur through repositioning the self. A student might shift from "I am bad at writing" to "I am still learning." This narrative reframing transforms identity-based anxiety into developmental perspective.

Agency emerges when learners get over the emotional reflex action and shift to intentional strategy to solve the problem faced by them in that moment. For instance, a student experiencing avoidance may use a directive inner speech ("lets start with introductory paragraph"). This is known as agentive repositioning.

Majority of participants reported of constructing agency through self-command mode. They use imperative language, ("Stop overthinking", "Focus", "don't panic"). Others may construct agency through self-encouragement, ("you can do this").

At times student suffers through severe writing anxiety, in that situation agency may appear as persistence. A student may continue writing despite negative self-talk. Agency, in this view, is not the absence of anxiety but the decision to act despite it.

On the other hand, agency construction may fail when the negative inner speech becomes dominant. Learners with educational disadvantage learned helplessness. Their self-talk may reinforce incapacity ("No matter what I do, I fail"). Here, agency collapses under accumulated negative past experiences. Moreover, in the particular context of FUUAST, as per reported by some participants, agency might not be expressed as individual autonomy but as responsibility to family or social expectations ("I don't have a choice, I must clear", "I must succeed for my parents"). In this case, agency is socially anchored rather than individually asserted.

Conclusion

It is concluded that undergraduate learners of FUUAST actively use inner speech to regulate emotions and cognitive anxiety. Some of the learners fall victim to negative inner speech but most of them push themselves through inner speech of encouragement and successfully complete their task by overcoming writing anxiety. The mediational role of inner speech within the local students has also been proved through the data analysis. Leaners directive inner speech as the agency to reach their target.

Suggestions

The university should establish department of guidance and counselling, where counselors may train learners to deal with writing anxiety through creating agency and exercising self-talk. This would help the learners to overcome negative self-talk, control writing anxiety and improve their writing performance through exercising agency to self-regulate, make strategic decisions, set goals, and actively engage with writing tasks.

References

Ahmad, A., Sanober, R. S., & Cheema, M. I. (2024). ESL learners' attitude towards metacognition approach for learning creative writing at university level. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences, 5*(1), 01–14. https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024(5-I)01

Ahmad, M., & Wilkins, S. (2024). Purposive sampling in qualitative research: A framework for the entire journey. *Quality & Quantity.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-024-02022-5

Ahmed, K., Ali, S., Abbas, I., Ahmed Khan, A., Khaleel, B., Muhamad Rusly, N. H., & Ilyas, M. S. (2025). English language and cultural identity in Pakistan: An exploratory study of language attitudes and usage among Pakistani university students. *Forum for Linguistic Studies, 7(11)*, 172–191. https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.10672

Allami, H., Najari, B., & Tajeddin, Z. (2025). The impact of sociocultural theory-informed instruction on learners' IELTS writing: task response, grammar, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 10*, Article 7. https://sfleducation.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40862-024-00310-z

Alyasin, A., & Shah, M. A. (2026). Human-AI collaboration in academic writing: Exploring university students' agency through a sociocultural lens. *Ampersand, 16*, 100256. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2026.100256

Badil, B., Muhammad, D. D., Aslam, Z., Khan, K., Ashiq, A., & Bibi, U. (2023). The phenomenology qualitative research inquiry: A review paper. *Pakistan Journal of Health Sciences, 4*(3), 9–13. https://doi.org/10.54393/pjhs.v4i03.626

Björk, O. (2025). Towards a multimodal dialogic understanding of early writing development in school. *Language and Education, 40*, 40–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2025.2471506

Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal, 91(5)*, 863–876. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00674.x

Cheng, S., Chen, L., & Wei, D. (2026). A longitudinal psychological model of writing development: Interactions among self-efficacy, regulation, and anxiety. *Frontiers in Psychology, 17*, 1757045. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1757045

Cheng, Y.-S. (2004). A measure of second language writing anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*(4), 313–335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.07.001

Colelli, J., Di Bernardo, M., & Verde, F. (2025). Toward a patterned theory of inner speech: rethinking Vygotsky through 4E cognition and phenomenology. *Mind & Society, 24*, 91–107. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11299-025-00319-y

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.)*. SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book270550

Cyr, J., & Goodman, S. W. (Eds.). (2024). *Doing good qualitative research.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197633137.001.0001

Dallasheh Khatib, R., Eviatar, Z., & Kreiner, H. (2025). Spontaneous inner speech in multilinguals: Short-term and long-term effects on code-switching. *Journal of Cultural Cognitive Science*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41809-025-00191-9

de Oliveira, R., & Santos, L. (2026). Private and inner speech and the regulation of self-directed thought: A developmental perspective. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence, 9*, 1691074. https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2026.1691074

Daruhadi, G. (2024). Phenomenological method as a theoretical basis of qualitative methods. *International Journal of Social Health, 3*(9), 599–613. https://doi.org/10.58860/ijsh.v3i9.238

Erdel, D. (2024). A thorough investigation into foreign language writing anxiety in a Turkish EFL context. *Erzincan University Journal of Education Faculty, 26(1),* 25–37. https://doi.org/10.17556/erziefd.1373734

Fan, C., & Wang, J. (2024). Configurational impact of self-regulated writing strategy, writing anxiety, and perceived writing difficulty on EFL writing performance: An fsQCA approach. *Scientific Reports, 14*, 11125. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-61537-x

Fernandez, A. (2024). *Existential phenomenology and qualitative research. In K. Aho, M. Altman, & H. Pedersen (Eds.)*, Routledge handbook of contemporary existentialism (pp. 24–35). Routledge.

Fernyhough, C., & Borghi, A. M. (2023). Inner speech as language process and cognitive tool. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 27(12)*, 1180-1193. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2023.08.014

Futurity Social. (2025). Self-regulated learning and metacognition: Processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. *Futurity Social, 3*(20), 79–90. https://futurity-social.com/index.php/journal/article/download/113/63/634?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Guo, T., Hamat, A., & Jaafar, N. M. (2025). Writing anxiety and L2 writing performance: A systematic literature review. *Arab World English Journal, 16*(1), 103–124. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol16no1.7

Güvendir, E., & Uzun, K. (2023). L2 writing anxiety, working memory, and task complexity in L2 written performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 60*, 101016. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2023.101016

He, J., & Lv, H. (2025). Analysis of factors influencing the use of new forms of foreign language textbooks from the perspective of sociocultural theory. *Frontiers in Education, 10*, Article 1670872. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1670872

Jasman, N. H., & Aziz, A. A. A. (2025). Writing under pressure: The correlation between anxiety and performance. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 9*(10), 7531–7535. https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0557

Jiang, R., Xiao, Z., Jiang, Y., & Jiang, X. (2025). The neural mechanisms of private speech in second language learners' oral production: An fNIRS study. *Brain Sciences, 15(5)*, 451. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci15050451

Jun, H. R., & Mu, B. (2024). An ecological perspective on agency: L2 learners' sociopragmatic interpretations and strategies in a study abroad context. *Languages, 9(5)*, 174. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9050174

Kazeroony, H. H. (2026). *Writing phenomenological research: A step-by-step approach*. Routledge.

Khosravi, S., & Han, X. (2026). Self-regulated writing strategies, self-efficacy, and writing anxiety in EFL learners: A longitudinal SEM study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 17,* Article 1757045. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1757045

Kurd, S. A., Hassan, S., & Iqbal, A. (2023). Investigating factors causing English writing anxiety among undergraduate students of Balochistan, Pakistan. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review, 7*(2), 78–85. https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-II)08

Md Nor, N. H., & Senom, F. (2024). Second language writing anxiety: A comprehensive structured review. *International Journal of Modern Education, 6*(22), 700–720. https://doi.org/10.35631/ijmoe.622047

Panhwar, I. A., Usman, M., Panhwar, F., & Surahio, T. A. (2025). Exploring the impact of zone of proximal development and scaffolding in second language acquisition: A comparative study of Vygotskian and Freirean approaches. *Social Science Review Archives, 3*(1), 1166–1176. https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.416

Racy, F., & Morin, A. (2024). Relationships between self-talk, inner speech, mind wandering, mindfulness, self-concept clarity, and self-regulation in university students. *Behavioral Sciences, 14*(1), 55. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14010055 PMCID PMC10813701

Razzaq, S., & Hamzah, M. H. (2024). The integration between metacognitive writing strategies and willingness to write: A way to expedite writing performance of Pakistani ESL learners: A mixed-methods approach. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 10,* 101010. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101010

Rivera-Gómez-Barris, B. (2025). Agency from a sociocultural perspective. *Frontiers in Education*. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1660370/full

Ruslan, Z. M., Tahir, M., & Patak, A. A. (2025). An analysis of writing anxiety among EFL graduate program students. *International Journal of Language, Education, and Literature, 2*(2), 305–311. https://journal.unm.ac.id/index.php/IJLEL/article/view/7451

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* SAGE Publications. https://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN9781847875488

Savin-Baden, M., & Howell Major, C. (2025). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice (2nd ed.)*. Routledge. https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/qualitative-research/9781000864472/xhtml/Ch24.xhtml

Siddique, A., Zainuddin, S. Z., & Cheong, H. F. (2025). Writer identity in transition: A narrative study of Pakistani MA TESOL students' academic writing. *Jurnal Arbitrer, 12(3)*, 424–436. https://doi.org/10.25077/ar.12.3.424-436.2025

Talasee, K., & Poopatwiboon, S. (2025). Second language writing anxiety of Thai EFL undergraduate students: Dominant causes, levels and coping strategies. *Journal of Education and Learning, 14*(1), 235–248. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v14n1p235

Tracy, S. J., Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & Alberts, J. K. (2024). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact (3rd ed.)*. Wiley-Blackwell. https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Qualitative+Research+Methods%3A+Collecting+Evidence%2C+Crafting+Analysis%2C+Communicating+Impact%2C+3rd+Edition-p-9781119390787

Twardowski, T. (2025). Toward a patterned theory of inner speech: Rethinking Vygotsky. *Cognitive Processing, 26*(3), 103–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11299-025-00319-y

Teng, L. S. (2025). Effects of utilizing self-regulated learning-based instruction on EFL students' academic writing skills: A mixed-method investigation. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 10*, 15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00317-6

Teng, M. F., & Zhang, L. J. (2024). Assessing self-regulated writing strategies, working memory, L2 proficiency level, and multimedia writing performance. *Language Awareness, 33*(3), 570–596. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2023.2300269

Truong, K. D. (2024). Mediation, emotion, and agency from an activity theoretical perspective as analytical tools in language teacher cognition research. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00296-8

Vygotsky, L. S. (1934/1987). *Thinking and speech*. In R. W. Rieber & A. S. Carton (Eds.), *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 1, pp. 39–285). Plenum Press.

Waked, A. N., El-Moussa, O., Pilotti, M. A. E., Al-Mulhem, H., El Alaoui, K., & Ahmed, R. (2024). Cultural considerations for the second language writing anxiety inventory: Saudi Arabian female university students. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1288611. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1288611

Verhaeghen, P., & Mirabito, G. (2021). When you are talking to yourself, is anybody listening? The relationship between inner speech, self-awareness, wellbeing, and multiple aspects of

self-regulation. *International Journal of Personality Psychology, 7,* 8–24. https://doi.org/10.21827/ijpp.7.37354

Wang, L., Lee, M., Volkov, R., Chau, L. T., & Kang, D. (2025). *ScholaWrite: A dataset of end-to-end scholarly writing process*. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/abs/2502.02904

Wu, Y., Ou, G., & Kanji, M. (2025). From socialization to internalization: tracing knowledge co-construction through sequential discourse interaction acts in high school English learning. *Frontiers in Education, 10.* https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1664093

Zhang, T. (2024). Effects of self-regulation strategies on EFL learners' language learning motivation, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, and creativity. *BMC Psychology, 12*, 75. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01567-2

Zhao, Y. (2025). Review on foreign language writing anxiety in second language context. *Communications in Humanities Research, 64,* 158–164. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/2024.19280