

Intersections of Culture and Language in Students' Writing: An Analytical Reflection on Style and Self-Perception

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection of culture, language, and identity in the academic writing of EFL students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Employing a case study design, it analyzes narrative essays and questionnaire responses from twelve second-semester students to investigate how cultural backgrounds influence rhetorical style and how students perceive their writing identities. The findings reveal that students often incorporate traditional storytelling, communal perspectives, and religious or emotional expressions in their writing, reflecting deeply rooted cultural values. Despite facing challenges such as linguistic interference, limited vocabulary, and unfamiliarity with academic conventions, students creatively negotiate meaning by blending local and academic discourses. However, many express uncertainty about integrating their cultural voices due to institutional norms that prioritize standard English. This study underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering inclusive writing practices that honor students' multilingual and multicultural identities.

Keywords: EFL writing, cultural identity, translingual practice, student perception, academic literacy, rhetorical style.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the relationship between culture and language has drawn growing attention in the field of applied linguistics, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. As globalization continues to reshape societies, classrooms around the world are becoming increasingly diverse, both linguistically and culturally. This shift challenges traditional, one-size-fits-all perspectives on language learning and calls for a more nuanced understanding of how students engage with English. Writing, especially, is not just a technical skill to be mastered—it is a socially and culturally situated practice that reflects deeper ways of thinking, communicating, and expressing identity (Hyland, 2022; Ivanič, 2011). For EFL learners, writing in English is shaped by the unique linguistic backgrounds and cultural experiences they bring into the classroom. These cultural frameworks influence how they structure ideas, build arguments, and develop their writerly voice. In this way, writing becomes a space where students continuously negotiate between their own cultural identities and the expectations of English-language academic norms (Sharifian, 2019).

Although scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of culture in language learning, most of the focus has remained on spoken communication. As a result, the role of cultural identity in shaping how students write is still not fully understood or appreciated. In many classrooms, writing instruction and evaluation tend to prioritize grammar, structure, and vocabulary. While these elements are important, they often ignore the deeper cultural patterns that influence how people express themselves in writing (Zhu, 2022; Zhang & Zhan, 2020). For example, students from collectivist cultures might prefer a more indirect style and emphasize community perspectives, whereas those from individualistic backgrounds are often taught to assert their own voice clearly and confidently. When these culturally influenced styles don't align with mainstream academic expectations, students can be unfairly seen as less proficient. In reality, they may simply be drawing from a different—but equally valid—way of making meaning (Canagarajah, 2012). Ignoring these cultural dimensions reinforces a narrow view of what “good” writing looks like and risks silencing students' genuine voices and lived experiences.

Moreover, many studies on EFL writing tend to treat student texts primarily as finished products to be graded, rather than as meaningful acts of communication that reveal something about the writer's identity and self-understanding. This product-oriented view often overlooks how students see themselves - as writers, as learners, and as users of English - within both academic and social settings. Writing in a second language is not just a matter of mastering grammar or vocabulary; it also involves navigating one's sense of belonging, expressing personal voice, and affirming one's right to use the language (Tardy, 2012; Zacharias, 2018). Yet, there remains a noticeable gap in research that brings together detailed analysis of student writing with their own reflections on how and why they write the way they do—particularly in multilingual learning environments. Without this kind of integrative lens, classroom strategies risk being culturally narrow, relying on fixed norms of “good writing” that may unintentionally dismiss or undervalue the diverse experiences and cultural perspectives students bring into the classroom (Dovchin, 2020; Nasiri, 2012).

This study sets out to explore how culture, language, and self-perception intersect in the academic writing practices of EFL learners. To do this, it adopts a twofold analytical approach. First, it examines students' written texts to identify stylistic and rhetorical elements that may reflect their cultural backgrounds. Second, it analyzes students' personal reflections—collected through questionnaires—to understand how they view themselves as writers of English, particularly within the demands of academic settings. By combining textual analysis with students' self-perceptions, the study aims to shed light on how cultural identity shapes rhetorical choices and influences how students position themselves as academic writers. Grounded in theoretical perspectives such as cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2019), identity in writing (Ivanič, 2011), and translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2012), this research approaches writing not just as a technical skill, but as a deeply cultural and identity-driven form of communication. Through this lens, the study views student writing as a space where language, culture, and self-expression come together in meaningful way.

Accordingly, the research questions that guide this study are: (1) In what ways do students' cultural backgrounds shape the stylistic and rhetorical features of their English writing? and (2) How do students perceive their writing abilities and identities within the context of academic EFL writing?. The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it adds to the growing body of literature that views language use and writing through the lens of cultural identity and self-construction. Practically, the study offers pedagogical insights for EFL instructors and curriculum developers, advocating for culturally responsive approaches to writing instruction that embrace students' diverse cultural knowledge rather than suppress it (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Nufus, 2022; Gülle et al., 2024). By centering students' voices and cultural experiences, this research contributes to a more equitable and inclusive vision of language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Cultural Linguistics, Identity in Academic Writing, and Translingual Practice. These perspectives provide a critical foundation for analyzing how cultural background shapes students' stylistic choices in writing and how they perceive themselves as EFL writers in academic settings. Each theory helps unpack a different dimension of the research problem: the cultural, the discursive, and the dynamic negotiation of language norms.

Cultural Linguistics and Cultural Conceptualizations of Language

Cultural Linguistics, as formulated by Sharifian (2019), provides a theoretical lens for understanding how language use is deeply influenced by the conceptual systems of cultural communities. Within this view, language is not simply a neutral medium of communication but a repository of cultural values, practices, and schemas. Learners from different cultural backgrounds often bring with them distinct cognitive and conceptual structures that shape the way they express ideas in a second language. These cultural conceptualizations influence not only lexical choices but also discourse organization, argumentation patterns, and rhetorical style.

In the context of EFL writing, this means that students' written texts are not only linguistic performances but also cultural expressions. When learners compose academic texts in English, they do so through the filter of their culturally shaped ways of thinking and knowing. As Zhu (2022) observes, these influences can be seen in narrative structuring, levels of explicitness, and use of personal voice—

features often evaluated through Western academic standards. Understanding these cultural imprints is critical to avoiding misjudgment of students' writing as simply "lacking" or "incorrect," when in fact it may reflect valid alternative rhetorical traditions. Cultural Linguistics thus provides a nuanced foundation for examining how students' cultural identities are articulated and negotiated through their writing.

Writing and the Construction of Identity

The concept of identity in writing, particularly in academic settings, has been extensively discussed by Ivanič (2011), who views writing as a social practice through which individuals construct and perform various identities. She proposes three interconnected dimensions of identity in writing: the autobiographical self (the writer's background and experiences), the discursual self (the image of self projected in the text), and the authorial self (the stance or authority adopted). These identities are constantly shaped by the expectations of the academic discourse community and by students' negotiation between their personal voice and institutional norms.

In second language contexts, the construction of identity becomes even more complex. As Tardy (2012) and Hyland (2022) argue, multilingual writers do not merely acquire linguistic competence but must also develop an academic voice that may be unfamiliar or even in tension with their own linguistic and cultural histories. Students may struggle to reconcile the formal expectations of academic English with their own preferred styles of expression, shaped by prior educational and cultural experiences. As Zacharias (2018) notes, these struggles often lead students to feel conflicted or unsure about how much of themselves they can "insert" into academic texts. Therefore, investigating how students perceive their identities as writers becomes a key aspect of this study.

Translingual Practice and the Negotiation of Norms

Translingual Practice, developed by Canagarajah (2012), challenges the traditional boundaries between named languages and promotes a view of multilingual communication as fluid, dynamic, and agentive. Rather than treating deviations from standard English as errors, this framework recognizes that multilingual writers skillfully draw upon multiple linguistic and cultural resources to negotiate meaning. Writing, in this view, is not about conforming to native-speaker norms but about making situated choices that reflect one's complex linguistic repertoire and cultural positioning.

For EFL students, translingualism offers a powerful way to reframe their writing not as deficient but as strategically hybrid. As Sun and Lan (2024) suggest, students' integration of culturally specific idioms, rhetorical strategies, and voice markers can be interpreted as forms of creative negotiation rather than interference. This perspective aligns with current calls for more inclusive models of academic literacy that acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple Englishes and local discourse traditions. By applying a translingual lens, this study seeks to highlight the stylistic innovations students bring to their writing and to explore how they navigate between linguistic norms and personal expression.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the intersections of culture and language in students' writing, particularly focusing on stylistic features and self-perception. Conducted at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, the study involved 12 second-semester students from the English Education Study Program. These participants were purposively selected due to their transitional stage as pre-service English teachers who are beginning to develop both academic writing skills and writer identity. Their backgrounds represent a diverse range of cultural and regional identities, including areas across Gorontalo, North Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, and Bali—making them ideal for exploring how cultural context influences language use and self-expression in English writing.

Data were collected through two primary sources: students' narrative essays and a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture students' perceptions regarding the influence of their cultural background, first language, and personal identity on their writing in English. While the student texts provided concrete evidence of cultural and stylistic features, the questionnaire offered insight into students' reflective self-assessments and writing experiences. Thematic analysis was applied to the writing samples to identify patterns related to cultural representation, language transfer, and authorial voice. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using content analysis to identify common perceptions and challenges. To ensure validity, the study employed triangulation of data sources, member checking, and researcher reflexivity throughout the analytical process.

FINDINGS

A. How Cultural Backgrounds Shape Style and Rhetoric in Students' English Writing

The analysis of twelve narrative essays written by second-semester English Education students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo reveals that their cultural backgrounds profoundly influence their stylistic choices and rhetorical strategies in English writing. These influences are evident in various aspects such as narrative voice, organizational patterns, use of metaphor, emotional expression, and epistemological perspectives. Rather than simply adopting standard academic English conventions, the students creatively incorporate elements of their local cultural identities, resulting in a unique blend of traditional storytelling and academic writing. This interplay highlights how deeply embedded cultural values and language ideologies from some regions such as Gorontalo, Buol, Banggai, Bola'ang Mongondow, Kotamobagu, Bali, etc, shape their meaning-making and engagement with readers.

Local Ways of Knowing and Storytelling Patterns

Many students chose to tell their stories in a clear, step-by-step way - much like the way people in their communities share stories out loud. These narratives often revolve around deeply personal experiences, closely connected to family life, spiritual practices, or moments of moral reflection. One student from Gorontalo, for instance, shared a tender memory of watching her father rise before dawn to pray. The way she told the story, with gentle pauses and repeated phrases, echoed the rhythms of traditional oral storytelling. It's a reminder of how storytelling in many of these students' cultures is not just about conveying information, but about honoring memory and showing respect. Through their writing, the students bring those familiar ways of speaking into English, creating stories that stay true to their roots while navigating a new language.

This natural tendency to tell stories in chronological order helps make the students' writing clear and emotionally engaging. It reflects a cultural way of thinking - one that values a smooth flow of events and connections between actions and outcomes. In one essay, for example, a student from Buol described their village's annual festival by simply walking the reader through the day, moment by moment. The focus wasn't just on what happened, but on who was involved and how everyone came together. Through stories like this, students don't just share events—they highlight the importance of community, relationships, and shared traditions. These familiar storytelling patterns allow them to express their cultural identity while writing in English, weaving their local ways of knowing into the fabric of a new language.

Stylistic Features and Emotional Expression

The students' stylistic choices reveal a strong connection to their cultural identities, particularly through the use of expressive and emotive language. Many employed repetition to emphasize key points and rhetorical questions to engage readers emotionally. For instance, a *Kotamobagu* student's essay ended with the poignant lines, "*Why did she have to leave so soon? Why do good people always go first?*" This rhetorical questioning clearly draws from oral lament traditions meant to express collective grief and invoke empathy. The use of repetition not only emphasizes emotion but also mirrors speech patterns familiar to the students' cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, vivid imagery and metaphors were common throughout the essays. One Gorontalo student described a metaphor comparing life's hardships to "*a river that never stops flowing*," creating a rhythmic, almost lyrical quality in their prose. The students' writing frequently blurs the boundaries between spoken and written discourse, offering an emotional and relational style that contrasts with the detached objectivity often expected in Western academic writing. This emotive expressiveness thus serves both as a stylistic choice and a cultural statement.

Interpersonal and Communal Identity

Many essays portray the self not as an isolated individual but as an integral part of a larger community or family network, reflecting a collectivist worldview prevalent in Southeast Asian cultures. Rather than focusing on personal achievement alone, students often included references to their parents or village beliefs. For example, one student wrote, "*My mother always says that patience is the key to happiness*," grounding their personal reflection in communal wisdom. Another student invoked village customs by writing, "*In our village, we believe that respect for elders brings harmony*." Such statements highlight how epistemological modesty and communal credibility are woven into their narratives.

This relational stance also shapes their rhetorical strategies, emphasizing consensus, respect, and shared values rather than direct argumentation or confrontation. These narratives often demonstrate humility, with students positioning themselves as learners or members of a collective rather than

autonomous agents. This approach aligns with cultural norms prioritizing social harmony and respect and challenges Western academic values that often prize individualism and assertiveness.

Voice and Agency in a Multilingual Context

Some essays feature deliberate code-switching or inclusion of untranslatable cultural terms such as *tabu* or *malu*, left unexplained in English. For example, a student wrote, “I felt *malu* when I failed my exam,” assuming the reader might understand or appreciate the cultural nuance. These choices reflect the students’ confidence in their multilingual identities and a desire to maintain cultural specificity within English writing. Such code-switches act as agentive rhetorical strategies resisting linguistic standardization, signaling layered identities and cultural pride.

Furthermore, first-person pronouns in many essays were not just markers of self-reference but tools to build solidarity or express humility. A student reflected, “*I am grateful to my teacher who always supports me,*” which emphasizes relational respect rather than self-promotion. This use of personal voice contrasts with Western academic norms that sometimes minimize “I” to maintain objectivity. Here, the first person is a deliberate rhetorical choice to connect with readers and assert moral clarity.

Identity Positioning and Academic Writing Norms

The students’ narratives frequently position themselves as respectful, humble, and grateful individuals, often invoking divine will or moral lessons as part of their storytelling. For instance, one student concluded their essay with, “*All things happen by God’s will,*” presenting moral closure rather than an argumentative conclusion. While this indirect style may seem tentative from some Western academic viewpoints, it aligns with cultural norms that emphasize humility, respect, and moral coherence deeply rooted in religious and social traditions.

Interestingly, many students attempted to incorporate academic transition phrases such as “furthermore” or “on the other hand,” but these were sometimes used awkwardly or disconnected from the surrounding text. One essay started a paragraph with “*Furthermore, I think that...*” which sounded formulaic rather than fluid. This reveals how students are still learning to integrate memorized academic expressions with their own storytelling styles, resulting in hybrid texts that blend local narrative habits with English academic conventions.

Negotiating Linguistic and Cultural Identity

The frequent presence of local idioms, religious references, and culturally specific expressions in these essays shows that students do not fully assimilate into the English academic discourse community. For example, a student wrote, “*Our village has tabu days when no work is allowed,*” inserting this term without translation or explanation. This selective adaptation reflects active negotiation of identity: rather than passively adopting English norms, students reshape the language to reflect their lived realities and cultural heritage.

These writings illustrate how English is not simply a foreign language for academic purposes but a dynamic space for expressing complex identities. By embedding local knowledge and values, the students challenge monolithic academic conventions and demonstrate that their cultural voices can coexist within and enrich English academic discourse. This hybridization affirms the multilingual and multicultural nature of their linguistic practices.

In sum, the students’ essays reveal how deeply cultural backgrounds influence their English writing, blending local storytelling, community values, and unique expressions with academic norms. This negotiation of identity creates rich, hybrid texts that highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse voices in education and writing.

B. Students’ Perceptions of Their Writing Abilities and Identities in Academic EFL Writing

This section presents the findings of questionnaire responses from twelve EFL students. The analysis aims to explore how these students perceive their own writing abilities and identities when engaged in academic English writing. Emerging themes such as cultural influence, linguistic challenges, self-evaluation, and identity expression provide a nuanced understanding of the complex factors shaping their writing experiences. Each of the following sub-sections addresses a distinct dimension of these perceptions, offering insights into how culture, language, and institutional expectations intersect in the students’ academic writing practices.

Cultural Influence on Writing Identity

The data reveal that several students recognize the influence of their cultural background—such as regional traditions, local values, and everyday social interactions - on their English writing. One

participant, for example, linked the informal tone of their English writing to their upbringing on a small island where conversational style tends to be relaxed and non-standard. This informal approach often manifests in their English compositions, which may not align with the conventions of formal academic writing.

Interestingly, not all students were consciously aware of this cultural influence. Some claimed that their writing was unaffected by their cultural background, which may indicate either a lack of reflection on this matter or a limited ability to identify the subtler ways culture shapes communication patterns. This duality points to varying levels of cultural self-awareness among EFL learners and suggests that more explicit instruction on the interplay between culture and academic literacy may benefit student reflection and development.

Perceived Constraints on Cultural Expression in English Academic Writing

A recurring theme among responses was the perception of limited freedom to express cultural elements in academic English writing. While students recognized their cultural backgrounds, they often hesitated to incorporate these perspectives into their writing due to a fear of not meeting formal or institutional expectations. Several students identified vocabulary limitations, lack of genre familiarity, and differences in rhetorical traditions as barriers to cultural expression.

This indicates that academic writing in English is often perceived by students as a culturally neutral - or even culturally exclusive - space that prioritizes Western norms of clarity, structure, and objectivity. As a result, students may self-censor or simplify their ideas, detaching their identities from their written texts in an attempt to conform to perceived academic standards. This can lead to feelings of disempowerment and alienation from the writing process.

Native Language Interference and Linguistic Challenges

Almost all students acknowledged that their native languages (e.g., Indonesia, or local dialects) significantly influence the way they write in English. They reported that syntactic structures, word order, and certain idiomatic expressions from their first languages often seep into their English compositions, sometimes unintentionally. This cross-linguistic interference was particularly noted in grammar and sentence structure, where students admitted to making errors due to the direct translation of ideas from their native language.

Moreover, lexical gaps between the two languages posed considerable difficulty, with students struggling to find equivalent English expressions for culturally specific concepts or phrases. This highlights the continued dominance of L1 transfer in shaping EFL writing and the need for pedagogical strategies that help students bridge the linguistic and cognitive divide between languages without losing their unique voice or identity.

Self-Perception of Academic Writing Abilities

In terms of self-evaluation, students tended to be highly critical of their own academic writing abilities. A significant portion of the respondents described their writing as “not good,” “lacking structure,” or “not well-developed.” Many confessed a lack of confidence and a recurring fear of making grammatical mistakes or choosing inappropriate vocabulary. These perceptions often led to hesitation in expressing ideas fully or writing with fluency.

This self-assessment suggests that students are acutely aware of the gap between their current proficiency and the expectations of academic writing in English. While this awareness can be constructive, it can also hinder confidence and risk-taking in writing. The emphasis on perceived inadequacy may reflect internalized standards of “native-like” competence, which are often unrealistic for EFL learners and potentially detrimental to the development of writing identity.

Disconnection Between Writing Style and Cultural Identity

A substantial number of students indicated that their writing style does not reflect their personal or cultural identity. While a few students saw a relationship - such as using informal structures that mirror everyday cultural norms - most struggled to articulate any link between their identity and their English writing. Some students explicitly stated that they did not know how culture could be conveyed through academic writing, while others assumed that academic conventions required the erasure of personal voice and cultural expression.

This suggests a prevailing perception that academic English writing is an identity-neutral activity, where conformity is valued over authenticity. The struggle to integrate one's cultural self into a second-language academic voice may limit students' ability to develop a distinct, empowered authorial identity. This points to the need for pedagogical approaches that validate and scaffold the expression of diverse cultural identities within the boundaries of academic norms.

Difficulties Navigating Academic Writing Conventions

When asked about the most challenging aspects of academic writing, students overwhelmingly pointed to grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary selection. Many explained that even when they had clear ideas, they struggled to express them appropriately in English due to lack of structural knowledge or fear of grammatical errors. The formal tone required in academic contexts was another difficulty, particularly for students more familiar with informal or conversational styles.

This struggle reflects the complex nature of academic literacy, which demands not only linguistic competence but also familiarity with disciplinary conventions, textual coherence, and rhetorical sophistication. For many EFL students, these demands create additional cognitive and affective burdens, such as anxiety, uncertainty, and a reluctance to take ownership of their texts.

Comparison Between Writing in English and First Language

All students agreed that writing in their native language felt more natural and fluent. They described the ability to express ideas more clearly, creatively, and confidently in their first language. In contrast, English writing was seen as more laborious, mechanical, and anxiety-inducing. The contrast in comfort levels underscores the cognitive load involved in second language writing, where students must simultaneously grapple with idea generation, language translation, structural accuracy, and genre appropriateness.

Additionally, some students acknowledged that while writing in their native language allowed greater freedom of expression, writing in English imposed more rigid expectations, limiting their creative and personal input. This linguistic dissonance further influences students' self-perceptions of competence and can reinforce the idea that writing in English is a performance rather than an authentic act of communication.

In summary, students perceive their academic EFL writing abilities and identities as shaped by cultural background, native language influence, and academic expectations. While they are aware of their challenges and eager to improve, rigid norms of academic writing often hinder the expression of their authentic voices. Educators should therefore create supportive environments that value students' linguistic and cultural identities while helping them develop academic writing competence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight how deeply students' cultural backgrounds shape their writing identities and rhetorical choices in EFL contexts. Essays and questionnaire responses show that many students draw on local knowledge systems, oral traditions, and relational worldviews rooted in cultures from Gorontalo, Central Sulawesi, North Sulawesi, and Bali. As Sharifian (2019) notes, such cultural conceptualizations influence narrative structures, metaphor use, and emotional expression, often diverging from dominant Western writing norms. Choices like organizing essays chronologically or including family and religious reflections are not just stylistic - they reflect culturally grounded ways of knowing. This resonates with Zhu (2022), who stresses the need to acknowledge the sociocultural roots of second language writers' rhetorical patterns rather than treating them as deficiencies.

Students often find themselves torn between staying true to their cultural voice and meeting institutional writing expectations - an issue that reflects broader challenges in academic writing pedagogy. Ivanič's (2011) theory of writing and identity helps explain how students' cultural values around modesty, collectivism, and spirituality shape their discursive choices. Many essays draw on shared beliefs or religious values, often concluding with moral reflections rather than argumentative closings. Though these moves might seem lacking from a Western perspective, Canagarajah (2012) frames them as part of "translingual practice," where students negotiate meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Still, questionnaire responses reveal students' struggles with linguistic insecurity and limited agency - what Zacharias (2018) calls the "voice dilemma" - as they try to balance personal expression with academic conventions.

Students' difficulties with English grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, combined with reliance on L1 structures, reveal ongoing cross-linguistic interference (Hyland, 2022; Sun & Lan, 2024). But these challenges are not just linguistic - they're tied to identity and belonging. Students often feel more confident writing in their native languages, where expression flows more naturally. Khan (2021) argues that cultural identity strongly shapes linguistic performance and self-perception. When academic writing insists on rigid formalism, it can silence students' cultural selves. Yet students resist this through emotional language, repetition, and code-switching - like using words such as *tabu* or *malu*. These

moves reflect their efforts to reclaim voice and craft what Tardy (2012) describes as “extra-textual identity” through writing.

Altogether, these findings point to the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in academic writing instruction. As Paltridge and Starfield (2013) argue, English for Academic Purposes must make room for diverse rhetorical traditions rather than enforcing standardized norms. Teachers should move beyond formulaic approaches and create space for students to draw on their cultural knowledge and preferred styles. This not only affirms students’ multilingual identities but also deepens their engagement with writing. The combination of narrative, moral, and expressive elements in students’ essays shows the potential of hybrid genres that reflect complex identities. As Gülle, Kurt, & Bayyurt (2024) and Dovchin (2020) suggest, recognizing and embracing this hybridity helps students develop academic voices that are both culturally authentic and critically engaged.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that students’ academic English writing is profoundly shaped by their cultural identities, local epistemologies, and native language influences. Rather than merely conforming to Western academic norms, students blend traditional storytelling structures, communal values, and expressive language rooted in their cultural backgrounds. While many experience tension between institutional expectations and personal voice, their writing demonstrates agentive negotiation through code-switching, metaphor, and moral reflection. These hybrid compositions highlight the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that validates diverse rhetorical traditions and fosters inclusive academic literacy. Ultimately, recognizing students’ linguistic and cultural resources can empower them to develop authentic, confident writer identities.

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