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# **Academic Identity Development: Insights of Doctoral Students from Pakistan**

A thesis

submitted in fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2024

## Abstract

The development of doctoral students' academic identity is an emerging area of research. However, there is limited research that has investigated the roles and activities which contribute to the transitions students undergo in the journey towards the formation of an academic identity. Research of this nature has become especially relevant as a number of countries, especially developing countries, are seeking ways to engage and socialise doctoral students into a professional or academic identity during their studies.

Pakistan is an example of a country which is trying to address these concerns. There has been an increase in doctoral enrolments in Pakistan, the site of this study, and the resulting growth in the number of those with PhDs has intensified competition for academic positions. The Higher Education Commission is struggling to provide sufficient support and resources to ensure doctoral programmes prepare graduates for professional roles and develop their academic identities. Recent reports indicate that doctoral students are facing numerous challenges which hinder their successful socialisation and academic identity development.

This narrative study aimed to scope doctoral students' expectations and experiences during their doctoral journey and transition towards an academic identity. The research focused on doctoral students in the field of Education. Six students from a prestigious Pakistan university were recruited through purposive sampling. All the participants were near to completing their PhD; they were working on their data analysis or waiting for their examination reports. All the participants intended to pursue academic careers upon completion of their studies. Each participant completed two online narrative interviews. Thematic analysis of the narrative interviews was completed using a guiding framework which integrated a doctoral socialisation perspective, a stage approach of doctoral education, and role identity theory. This framework provided rich opportunities to examine the role identity development of each of the students.

The analysis of each case revealed that students' academic identity development happened through shifts in their prominent role identities across three key institutional milestone stages. The students outlined different socialisation experiences and identification based on the prominent roles in each milestone stage. These prominent roles were consistent with their increasing competence, confidence, and independence to perform a range of academic activities. The first coursework stage developed students' prominent role identity as that of a learner. They developed a prominent role identity as an emerging researcher in stage two when crafting and presenting their research proposal. In the final stage, when they were writing their dissertation, students developed a prominent role identity as an emerging academic. In this stage students continued and expanded the researcher role and engaged in a range of academic activities (teaching, writing research papers, attending research conferences, managing research journals and research projects) beyond those involved in their dissertation work. The combination and dynamic development of multiple role identities (learner, emerging researcher, and emerging academic) served to prepare these doctoral students for an academic and professional identity. Importantly, while students had a learner

role identity in all stages, the focus of their learning moved from mastering prescribed content to application and then production of knowledge.

Cross case analysis identified that social interaction, personal motivation and the nature of academic writing were the dominant aspects in the composition and development of students' role identities. Social interaction was the key means through which students could gain support and validation from others for their different role identities. Motivation was a personal dimension which drove students' courage and persistence to engage in academic activities and seek to meet the expectations of each role identity. The writing aspect provided students with evidence for self-evaluation and evaluation by others in relation to their progress within the different role identities.

The study contributes to understanding of the complex socialisation processes doctoral students experience and the various roles they perform as they progress through their doctoral journey. Findings suggest that creating more opportunities for doctoral students to engage in learning activities and extend their interactions with teachers, peers, supervisors, and experts within an academic community would assist them to gain the competence, confidence, and the independence needed to perform relevant academic activities.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed to my PhD journey. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the mentorship, continuous support, prompt and valuable feedback from my supervisor, Professor Bronwen Cowie. I am fortunate and extremely grateful to work under her supervision who brought positivity in every situation while making sure my research performance and productivity. She has been a source of inspiration, guidance, discipline, and encouragement throughout my PhD journey. I would like to thank my co supervisor Professor Don Albert Klinger for his guidance and insightful feedback which helped me to gain in-depth understanding of my research area and theoretical framework I used. His constructive and critical feedback always pushed me towards reading and gaining better understanding of my research. I express immense gratitude to Dr Sarah-Jane Saravani who provided me with an initial induction in the university and supported me during the development of my research proposal and confirmation process. I would appreciate the support of Dorothy Spiller to proofread my thesis.

I am overwhelmed by the unconditional love, support and prayers of my parents and siblings which made me persistent in dealing with the PhD challenges. My father Khalil-Ur- Rehman has always been my guiding light, showing me the importance of hard work and dedication. His invaluable advice, unwavering support and encouragement have given me the confidence to pursue my academic dreams. The kindness, compassion and boundless love of my mother has provided me with the confidence and resilience to push through the PhD challenges. She always offers me a comforting presence and listening ear for emotional support. I acknowledge the support, patience, and love of my wife Mubashara Akhtar which was essential to bolster my confidence and potential to complete my PhD.

I would like to thank Higher Education Commission of Pakistan for offering me a scholarship which made this PhD possible. I appreciate the valuable contribution and patience of my research participants. They volunteered to give me the online interview amidst Covid-19, and shared their PhD experiences which made me able to conduct this research. I would mention the social support of my friends Mairaj Jafri and Imran Tufail during the critical time of Covid 19.

## Publications and presentations from this thesis

Khalil, A. (2022). Challenges in doctoral socialisation: A researcher's reflective experience. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 27(2), 97–101. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v27i2.927>

Khalil, A. & Cowie, B. (2020). A research note: Video conferencing interviews. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 25(1), 101–107. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v25i1.778>

Khalil, A. (2023, 3-6 January). *Shifting Role-Identities of Education Doctoral Students: A Qualitative Study*. Hawaii International Conference on Education, Hawaii, United States.

Khalil, A. (2022, 14-16 November). *An understanding of shifting role-identities: Narratives of doctoral students*. New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE). Wellington. New Zealand

Khalil, A. (2021, 15-17 November). *Socialisation factors in identity development: Narratives of doctoral students*. New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE). Wellington. New Zealand

Khalil, A. (2021, 28 October). *How do social interaction support socialisation of doctoral students?* Postgraduate conference, Hamilton. New Zealand

Khalil, A. (2020). *A Pilot Study for a Research Project on Identity Development of Doctoral Students*. Postgraduate conference, Hamilton.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of my research into doctoral education with a specific focus on academic identity development. Section 1.2 describes changing trends in doctoral education globally and doctoral students' aspirations to pursue an academic career after graduation. Section 1.3 explains my motivation and interest in the area of doctoral education. Section 1.4 presents the rationale for the study and Section 1.5 defines the context and sets out a statement of the problem. Section 1.6 explains the objective of and key research questions for the research project. Section 1.7 establishes the significance of the research study and section 1.8 provides an outline of the subsequent chapters.

### 1.2. Changing trends in doctoral education

Globally, over the last two decades, doctoral education programmes have undergone significant changes and evolved in their structure and consequently in students' experience of them (Cardoso et al., 2022; McAlpine, 2017; McKenna & Schalkwyk, 2023; Sarrico, 2022). The forces that underlie these changes include: increasing enrolment rates, increased societal demands for knowledge-based professionals, and a shift towards competence-based doctoral education (Shin et al., 2018). The competitive context and pressure surrounding future careers and opportunities have influenced doctoral education (Heron et al., 2023b). The need to improve the skills and competencies of doctoral students in order to enhance their access to a wide range of professional and academic jobs in the knowledge society has been a driver within these trends (Andresa et al., 2015; Disney et al., 2015; Durette et al., 2016; Sarrico, 2022; Vitae, 2010). In this context, scholars such as Schulze (2015) argue that a doctoral degree does not automatically develop students' professional identity to the extent they can integrate readily into their desired profession. In response to this situation, a number of countries, especially developing countries, are seeking ways to engage and socialise doctoral students into a professional identity during their studies (Willison & Buisman-Pijlman, 2016).

Rethinking the process of doctoral education needs to recognise the multiple factors that influence the experiences of doctoral students (Rooij et al., 2021; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Internal or personal factors include students' knowledge, abilities, and attitudes (Marie, 2008;

McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011), motivation and happiness (Ceglie, 2019; Geraniou, 2010; Hands, 2018; Sverdlik & Hall, 2020; Taylor & Adams, 2020; Wiegerová, 2016), and the requirements of academic or doctoral writing (Aitchison et al., 2012; Hands & Tucker, 2021; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2012). External and/or institutional factors include interaction with others, including supervisors (Cotterall, 2013; Janssen et al., 2021; Le et al., 2021; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017), faculty and peers (Douglas, 2020; Jeong et al., 2019; Mantai, 2019a; Posselt, 2018), and family and friends (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). The learning environment (Carvalho & Freeman, 2022; Falk et al., 2019), and university structures (Cardoso et al., 2022) are also institutional factors that influence students' experience of doctoral education.

Recognising these multiple determinants of doctoral students' experiences, several scholars have emphasised the importance of successful socialisation throughout students' doctoral education. Socialisation is a developmental process whereby students gain the knowledge, skills, attributes, and values that are required to perform the expected roles of their desired professions (Gardner, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001). Students need to develop an understanding of the cognitive and affective dimensions of the roles associated with their expected profession (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Due to the complex nature of the socialisation process, researchers have used a stage approach to describe the various academic activities and literacy practices involved in doctoral education (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Gardner, 2009b; Lovitts, 2001; Pifer & Baker, 2016a; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Tinto, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). This approach describes or marks students' transition and development based on the key activities or institutional milestones they achieve, labeling these milestones as stages (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) was the first to propose a stage approach to doctoral education. He conceptualised the doctoral education process as comprising various stages such as transition, candidacy, and completion. Based on this conceptualisation, many researchers have used the notion of stages to understand students' progress, development, and socialisation experiences in doctoral education (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Gardner, 2009b; Lovitts, 2001; Pifer & Baker, 2016a; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Weidman et al., 2001). This staged understanding of the doctoral process provides the framework for my research. I explore and categorise students' expectations and

experiences across the three stages of coursework and comprehensive exam, research proposal, and dissertation writing because these are the key institutional milestones within Education doctoral programmes in Pakistan. Within this framework, this research has a particular focus on students' roles and identity experiences. Currently, despite a growing body of literature on doctoral education comparatively little is known about students' roles and identity experiences in preparation for the academic profession. My study sought to address this gap and explore the stage wise socialisation experiences and identity development of doctoral students for a career as professional academics.

### **1.2.3. Doctoral education and students' expectations of an academic career**

Amongst other careers, doctoral education prepares students for entry into the academic profession; however, the transition from doctoral student to an independent and emerging academic involves numerous challenges (Choi et al., 2021; McPherson et al., 2018). McAlpine et al. (2009) reported that after obtaining a doctoral degree many graduates are not able to claim they have developed a professional academic identity and easily integrate into academia. These authors proposed that this may be because graduates have an incomplete understanding of academic life and experiences and are unsure if they can align their values with those of an academic profession. Inouye and McAlpine (2019) confirmed that the meaning of academic identity development for doctoral students is unclear in the literature. They assert there is a need for case studies that trace the pattern in academic identity development over time, revealing how students' thinking and behaviors evolve during various stages of doctoral education. The current research aims to address this need and explore how students trace their experience of developing the knowledge and research skills required to perform the various roles involved in an academic career.

In establishing the scope and boundaries of this research, the notion of academic identity needs to be clarified. A number of terms have been used to describe Identity formation within doctoral education. For example, 'academic identity' has been used interchangeably with 'scholar identity' (Choi et al., 2021; Inouye & McAlpine, 2017), 'professional identity' (Kovalcikiene & Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2018), and 'researcher identity' (Guerin, 2013; Mantai, 2017) to describe the way doctoral students are positioned in an academic community. During doctoral education, students' academic identity involves shifts in their positioning within the

institution while they are working to contribute knowledge in their area of interest, and to gain the knowledge, skills, confidence and independence needed to perform an academic role in an academic community (Aitchison et al., 2012; Guerin, 2013; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). Doctoral students gradually shape their academic identity as they engage in several academic roles and activities during the different stages of their doctoral education (Emmioğlu et al., 2017; Jazvac-Martek, 2009; Pifer & Baker, 2016a).

The area of academic identity development for doctoral students is growing in importance and needs exploration (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019; McAlpine et al., 2009). Pifer and Baker (2013) argued that if we intend to understand the academic profession and careers, we need to understand the academic identities of its prospective members and how these identities are associated with the formation of academic goals, behaviours, and outcomes. Tracing the socialisation experiences of doctoral students can provide an understanding of the formation of their academic identity for an academic profession.

Recently, researchers have identified the need to investigate students' experiences at different stages in their doctoral journey and to consider the multiplicity of roles they need to take on, particularly in relation to their professional academic preparation (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Colbeck, 2008; Emmioğlu et al., 2017; Leonard et al., 2006; McAlpine et al., 2009). The proposition is that we need to better understand the experiences, the potential identity formation and related challenges which may be faced by doctoral students in the process of induction into academic practices and establishing themselves as emerging academics. The current study aims to illuminate these experiences.

### **1.3. My background and interest in researching doctoral education**

I am aware that students undertake doctoral studies for a range of good reasons, but my interest in doing a PhD started after I gained my Masters and MPhil in Education and had an opportunity to teach at university level. I recognised that I really enjoyed the teaching and the research environment, which encouraged me to think that doing a PhD was a good idea. I was also cognisant that I would not be able to progress in my academic career without a PhD. Many of my teachers motivated and guided me about the significance of a PhD for teaching at university level. It was fascinating for me to think about myself as part of a doctoral cohort and becoming an academic at a higher education institute. Fortunately, I

succeeded in securing a Higher Education Commission overseas scholarship to do a PhD. I planned to choose a university in New Zealand as I had heard that this was a peaceful country, having natural beauty, good research-oriented universities, and most importantly, that the people were very kind. Therefore, I decided to apply to the University of Waikato, which is one of the prestigious research universities in the field of Education.

I already had doctoral education as a research area in my mind when thinking about doing a PhD, an idea I discussed with one of my supervisors before coming to New Zealand. I wanted to conduct research on the experiences of doctoral students in Education, particularly in Pakistan, because I had talked with several doctoral students about the changes they experienced in terms of knowledge and research competence, and their future plans after the PhD. I was astonished to know that they were not always very confident and satisfied with their progress and were facing a range of challenges. They were also not sure about gaining an academic job after graduation because many institutions required experience as a basis for hiring. When I looked for literature in the area, I realised that not much research has been conducted on doctoral education in Pakistan and so I decided to research doctoral education with a specific focus on Pakistani students' perspectives on their university experiences.

Based on the literature, I found a significant gap in the research on students adopting multiple roles in order to perform the different activities involved in doctoral study and the way that these roles impact on their identity development as emerging academics. This gap in literature aligned well with my initial interest in exploring if students' knowledge and research skills assisted them to develop an academic identity.

#### **1.4. Rationale for the study**

There are substantial reasons for undertaking this research inquiry. As described earlier, there has been a global debate about how to ensure that doctoral students' knowledge and skills prepare them appropriately to participate in the competitive academic job market. A further reason is that a limited number of frameworks have been used to understand students' experiences of doctoral education, and there was an imperative to explore further the academic socialisation of doctoral students. The perspective for viewing doctoral students' experiences is also important. In this respect, researchers have primarily focused on supervisor and management viewpoints of student socialisation. Correspondingly, there is

limited research on students' views of their experiences and their contribution to their own socialisation. Furthermore, recent research has tended to be on a specific stage and has not covered all the stages of doctoral education and therefore research is required that covers students' experiences over time to explain students' stage wise transitions in their identity development. Equally important is the fact that while recent research has examined a range of factors in doctoral education, there is limited literature on the key factors involved in the socialisation and identity development of Education students who aim to pursue academic careers. The final rationale for the current study is methodological: most of the scholarship on doctoral student socialisation has been conceptual rather than empirical and so there was space for further empirical study.

Clearly, there are wide-ranging reasons for inquiring further into how doctoral students experience their roles and activities at key stages in the doctoral process. A theoretical framework is needed to understand the formation of doctoral students' academic identities, especially in developing countries.

### **1.5 Context of the study**

My research focus is on doctoral education in Pakistan. Doctoral education gained a boost after the Higher Education Commission (HEC) was formed in 2002 and it made rigorous efforts to develop doctoral programmes. The government provided strong support to the HEC which developed a mechanism to promote doctoral education and increase the number of doctoral graduates. HEC provides a range of indigenous and foreign scholarships for students and undertakes quality assurance to enhance the quality of teaching and supervision in the doctoral programme across universities in Pakistan.

In 2006 HEC introduced a composite model of doctoral education to all public and private universities. This composite model is a combination of the American, and the British models (Halai, 2011). The initial stage of the composite model comprises coursework for two semesters in formal classroom settings followed by a comprehensive examination. In the second stage, students develop a research proposal and present this to a panel of experts. For stage 3, students conduct their own research, write up their findings, present their research in a seminar and submit their thesis.

In the Higher Education Vision 2025 (Higher Education Commission, 2017), the main concern was the connection between academia and industry, the professionalism of university-based academic staff, and increasing the number of staff with PhDs. That is, this Vision included a strong focus on increasing the quality and strength of doctoral education. The HEC is providing substantial support and resourcing to achieve this so that students are prepared for academic positions in universities. HEC is also offering support to PhD graduates to join universities as academic staff through the Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs Program (Higher Education Commission, 2019). The purpose of the programme is to support universities in attracting doctorally qualified faculty and to provide employment to fresh doctoral graduates. This programme has motivated doctoral students to become academics because it means they are placed as Assistant Professors on a tenure track system (Higher Education Commission, 2019). On the other hand, owing to an increase in the number of doctoral graduates, media reports suggest that academic job opportunities are becoming limited (Siddique, 2021). While the pool of unemployed doctoral students keeps growing, decision-making authorities like HEC and the federal government seem to ignore this fact (Hashmi & Iftkhar, 2019), despite this being a burning issue that is reported widely in newspaper articles. Many protests have been organised by jobless PhDs demanding jobs at university level.

There are likely to be several reasons why doctoral graduates are challenged in securing immediate academic jobs, but one important reason may be their weak professional and academic preparation during their doctoral education. Bari (2019), reporting on the situation in Pakistan, argues that the ineffective professional training of doctoral graduates means that they are not likely to secure academic jobs in universities. He further argues that doctoral programmes do not assist students to become good teachers and that a narrow focus dissertation completion is inadequate preparation to become a university faculty member. In this context, where the number of doctoral students is rising, job competition has increased and the quality of doctoral education is being questioned, there is a need to conduct a study to capture the voices of the doctoral students about their roles and identity development for academic jobs. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the career and professional preparation of doctoral students by exploring the expectations and experiences of a group of doctoral students in a prestigious university of Pakistan.

## **1.6. Introducing the research questions**

The overall objective of this study was to explore students' expectations and experiences about their academic identity development. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How do students' expectations and experiences shape their role identity in doctoral education?
2. How do students shifting and multiple role identities during their doctoral education contribute to their academic identity development?

## **1.7. Significance of the Study**

This research is an effort to enhance understanding of doctoral education in Pakistan through a focus on students' socialisation and experiences. A further aim is to contribute to understanding of student development of the multiple roles and skills that constitute an academic identity is a way that enhances the quality of research and teaching in Pakistan universities.

There is limited research on doctoral students in a developing country that explores their experiences and the roles they assume to ensure their progress towards academic identity and securing an academic job. Greater understanding of the opportunities and challenges students face during their socialisation has the potential to benefit doctoral education in Pakistan and in other developing countries that are struggling to develop their own models of doctoral education.

This study was designed to develop a framework for conceptualising the academic identity development of doctoral students. By exploring the multiple role identities and experiences of doctoral students, the study aimed to inquire into the ways of learning and acquiring new skills and thinking that promote the development of doctoral students as academics.

It is expected that academic staff, especially supervisors who are involved in doctoral education, may gain insight into how students' academic experiences and professional preparation are productive. Educational administrators who manage doctoral programmes

could be informed about the reflections of students on their doctoral graduation regarding their personal and professional development. In addition, future doctoral students may gain awareness of the different day-to-day activities that might be useful for developing their academic identity. The findings of this research may be helpful for the universities in recognizing the importance of developing academic identity of doctoral students, especially in the field of education.

### **1.8 Research design**

This research adopted a qualitative approach and narrative research design to explore the students' expectations and experiences that contributed to their academic identity development in doctoral education. The research was based on the students in the field of Education in a University of Pakistan. Six doctoral students were recruited as participants who were near to completing their PhD. Each participant was invited for two online narrative interviews. Thematic analysis of the narrative interviews was completed using a guiding framework which integrated a doctoral socialisation perspective, a stage approach of doctoral education, and role identity theory.

### **1.9 Thesis structure**

Chapter 2 provides an overview of global and historical perspectives on doctoral education, including the American and British models. It covers the recent literature on doctoral socialisation and the stage model approach and provides a comparative review of all the stage models, which have been presented in the last two decades. The chapter scopes ideas to do with the identity development of doctoral students with special emphasis on role identity perspectives. Finally, it illustrates the conceptual framework for this research.

The project research methodology and its rationale are described in Chapter 3. The chapter includes a philosophical discussion on the nature of research ontology, epistemology, and methods. It also defines the research approach used to address the objectives of this research. I have included instrumentation, and data collection procedures and the techniques used for data analysis. This chapter outlines researcher ethical considerations, and ways of ensuring reflexivity as means to increase the research transparency and reliability.

Both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 describe the research findings. Chapter 4 encompasses six student narratives/cases based on the theoretical and conceptual model, which integrated doctoral socialisation, stage models, and role-identity perspective. Chapter 5 cross-examines themes from the student cases, including student social interaction, motivation, academic writing.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of my research findings in relation to previous literature on doctoral socialisation and identity perspectives as presented in chapter 4 and chapter 5. I structured the chapter around two main concepts, (i) key aspects of students' role identity development which were social interactions as supportive networks, motivation as an internal driver, and writing as a marker of progress, and (ii) shifting students' prominent role identities in different institutional milestone stages.

Chapter 7 concludes the study and establishes the contribution of the research based on the key research questions. This final chapter also identifies the limitations and implications of the research study. Finally, this chapter highlights some directions for future research in the area.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Overview

This review establishes the basis for my research into the nature of a stage approach socialisation in doctoral education and the transformation of students' academic identity based on their primary academic roles. While there is evidence of an increasing number of doctoral students globally and that students can face several socialisation challenges there has been comparatively little research on doctoral students' identity development and the contextual variables that impact this, especially in developing countries. This chapter presents a theoretical and conceptual overview of current research on doctoral student socialisation and transition towards an academic identity. First, the literature on the historical and global context of doctoral education is outlined including the range of challenges students face during their studies (see section 2.2). This section also details two commonly applied doctoral education models, these are the American model and the British or European model. Section 2.3 provides the theoretical stance on doctoral socialisation and a wide-ranging review of the stage approach to doctoral student socialisation. These aspects of the review illustrate the gradual development of doctoral students' knowledge, skills, and independence over the long journey of their studies. In section 2.4, I survey current understanding of the identity development of doctoral students. This section highlights the literature on the basic assumptions of role identity theory and the implications of role identity theory in doctoral education. At the end of this chapter, section 2.5 provides the integrative conceptual framework for this research.

#### 2.2 The wider context of doctoral education

The emergence of the doctorate as an academic degree is closely linked to the rise of universities in medieval Europe. The University of Paris, established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century awarded the first doctoral degree around 1150 (Obara, 2023). It was referred to as the "License to teach" (*licentia docendi*) which provided recipient with the right to teach Latin within university system. The doctorate was part of a process for entry into dominant position in guilds or professions (Verger, 1992). It was primarily associated with theological studies,

however, in the later Middle Ages, its scope expanded to other fields such as law, medicine and the arts.

Contemporary doctoral education has a basis from Humboldtian model of higher education which dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Doctoral education was introduced for the first time as a research degree by the University of Berlin in 1810 in Germany, which was considered the first modern research university (Wyatt, 1998). A doctoral degree was awarded on the fulfillment of requirements to attend seminars, pass comprehensive exams and submit a dissertation (Goodchild & Miller, 1997). From 1815, many competent students from America and Britain went to Germany for doctoral education because there were not enough facilities in their own countries (Simpson, 1983). Many students gained German doctoral degrees and returned to their countries to serve in universities (Schatte, 1977). In 1861, Yale University was the first university to award a doctoral degree in America and then. Harvard, Michigan, and Pennsylvania universities followed suit. In Britain, doctoral research degrees were introduced in 1917 (Noble, 1994) with the University of London, University of Edinburgh, University of Oxford, and University of Cambridge amongst the first to award doctoral degrees (Park, 2005).

Historically, the major purpose of doctoral education was to prepare students to become independent scholars and academics in their field of study (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). This preparation includes mastery of content in their respective field of study, the conduct of a comprehensive research project, and demonstration of being an independent scholar. Spronken-Smith (2018) concluded that doctoral degrees are awarded based on a student's ability to undertake research and write a comprehensive thesis. The assessment criteria for a thesis are universal with evaluation based on evidence of significant and original contribution to knowledge, a critically compiled literature review, sound application of research methods and presentation of the findings that meets international standards (Bernstein et al., 2014; Mullins & Kiley, 2002). However, the description of these purposes does not capture the complex demands of the doctoral process and the multiple challenges that doctoral students may face. Recent research has highlighted that doctoral students around the world face a number of challenges. These generally include writing concerns, inadequate knowledge of research, limited scope of training, relationships with supervisors, depression and anxiety, and student personal crises.

Jones (2013) identified the need for academic writing and research-related issues such as training for research and publication during doctoral education. Kiley and Wisker (2009) defined six essential research threshold concepts for doctoral students which were argument, theorising, framework, knowledge creation, analysis and interpretation, and paradigm. These threshold concepts were major conceptual challenges for students who wanted to become researchers. Others have highlighted that doctoral students often lack knowledge of and expertise in research (Knox et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2008). A study by King and Williams (2013) indicated that doctoral students' lack of knowledge could become a barrier to their writing of a doctoral dissertation. Students in the King study reported that they lacked knowledge when they were asked about coursework, examinations, research proposals and identification of a research problem. Shin et al. (2018) highlighted that many doctoral students faced issues such as inadequate scope of training, poor training, and a paucity of funding and job opportunities.

Relationships with supervisors have also been found to affect the progress of doctoral students (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Lovitts, 2005). Maintaining a good relationship with a supervisor is challenging and important because it can create problems for doctoral students in completing a dissertation (Hunter & Devine, 2016). Students have reported conflict with supervisors or an absence of expected support from their supervisors (Naylor et al., 2018). Indeed, Lovitts and Nelson (2000) reported that relationships with supervisors or faculty advisers was one of the primary factors in students' decision to continue or withdraw from a doctoral programme. Jones (2013) also argued that doctoral research was affected by poor relationships between the researcher and his/her advisor regardless of other factors. In addition, Gardner (2010) and Vekkaila et al. (2013) attribute significance to good relations between doctoral students and advisers asserting that these were essential for the well-being and success of a student. Availability of supervisors is also important and crucial for doctoral students. This does not only refer to the physical presence but also having regular meetings with students and providing timely feedback on their written work (Overall et al., 2011; Pyhältö et al., 2012). Importantly, Baydarova et al. (2021) reported that there was incongruence between the expectations of doctoral students and their supervisors which affects their completion time. They confirmed that students and their supervisors rarely make

expectations clear to each other, and not many researchers have examined such alignment/misalignment of expectations in depth.

In addition to inadequate training in core competencies and troublesome supervisory relationships, doctoral students have also been found to experience crises of a more personal nature. Depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion are some of the other challenges students face during doctoral education (Hunter & Devine, 2016; Pyhältö et al., 2012). Guthrie et al. (2017) reported on the emotional challenges faced by doctoral students in different countries. They found almost 40 percent of postgraduate students in the UK identified depression and high levels of stress as barriers to their performance. These researchers found that high work demands, low job opportunities, work-life balance and less support from supervisors were sources of stress and depression among higher degree candidates in Australia. Furthermore, Holbrook et al. (2014) explained that many doctoral students underestimate the effort involved in completing a dissertation which causes emotional pressures and depression. Ali and Kohun (2007) explained that stress and isolation are prime contributors that lead to doctoral students leaving their studies. Sometimes, differences between doctoral students' expectations and their experiences can lead to their dissatisfaction (Bair et al., 2004; Holbrook et al., 2014). Holbrook et al., (2014) explained that stories of doctoral students frequently highlighted a mismatch between their expectations and subsequent experiences that reduced their self-efficacy, impeded their progress, and caused distress. Covid 19 also introduced exacerbating factors and research identified that it had affected the wellbeing of doctoral students in Finnish universities. The students in this research had reduced access to research participants for data, scholarly support networks and institutional resources (Pyhältö et al., 2023).

Specific types of crises that create problems for doctoral students in their research work were identified by Katz (2018). These were: (i) an expectation crisis arising from degree and supervisor requirements which can develop stress and anxiety among the doctoral students and lead them to think that they are wasting their time; (ii) an emotional crisis or sad and overwhelming feelings that might divert their concentration away from doctoral research work; (iii) a survival crisis associated with the financial and practical aspects of doctoral research work, and (iv) an international student crisis which is one specifically faced by the

international students in the form of language, culture and isolation when their country of study is not their home country.

Students who enter a doctoral program have different motivations. These can be external or internal (Hands, 2018; Sverdlik, et al., 2018). External motivations can be career competence and employment opportunities (Brailsford, 2010; Templeton, 2016; Stubb et al., 2012), and they can be the prestige associated with obtaining a doctoral degree (Leonard et al., 2005; Stubb et al., 2012). Internal motivation includes a desire for personal development or achievement of personal life goals (Lynch et al., 2018), valuing intellectual development (Dust, 2006; Leonard et al., 2005; Wellington & Sikes, 2007). This can also be an interest in the field (Austin, 2002; Brailsford, 2010; De Welde & Laursen, 2008), and desire to gain research experience (De Welde & Laursen, 2008; Stubb et al., 2012). Students who are more internally motivated (engage in learning activities for reasons that are personally important) tend to demonstrate better performance outcomes (Lynch et al., 2018). They likely to choose and to persist in challenging tasks, to enjoy learning, to exhibit greater creativity, and in general to experience greater psychological well-being (Lynch et al., 2018).

Compared to other education levels, doctoral education provides a less structured environment, demands greater independence, involves extensive workloads (such as coursework, conducting and publishing research), and encompasses complex tasks (Litalien et al. 2015). Hence doctoral students' motivation is commonly cited as a leading contributor to student achievement and persistence (De Clercq et al., 2021; Mason, 2012; Litalien et al., 2015, Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Templeton, 2016). Doctoral programmes require students to be self-motivated throughout their PhD studies (Flynn et al., 2012; Gardner, 2010; O'Meara et al., 2013). Motivational factors are critical in the initial stages and for persistence towards completion in doctoral study (Lynch et al., 2018). During the early stage of doctoral education students tend to be comparatively well but in the later stages, due to the solitary nature of data collection, analysis, and writing for dissertation students may experience low motivation. The writing of the thesis in particular relies on students' internal motivation (Lynch et al., 2018). Across research on doctoral education, it is evident that students' motivation fluctuates during the different phases/stages of their doctoral education.

In response to the above challenges, universities have focused on structural transformation of doctoral education, its foundation, objectives, methods, organisation, and processes (Cardoso et al., 2022). Several models and approaches to doctoral education are being practised by universities around the globe (Nerad & Heggelund, 2008). However, there are two dominant models or approaches: the British/European model of doctoral education and the American model of doctoral education (Shin et al., 2018). These are discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.1 The British/apprenticeship model of doctoral education**

The oldest and most widely accepted approach to doctoral training is referred to as an 'apprenticeship model' (Schneijderberg & Teichler, 2018). This is also called the 'British model' (Spronken-Smith, 2018) and 'European Model' (Shin et al., 2018) of doctoral education. This model largely focuses on supervision and research projects to develop students' disciplinary knowledge and skills with these evidenced through a thesis. Teaching and learning in this model take place within a one-to-one arrangement between a doctoral candidate and a supervisor/s within an apprenticeship relationship (Nerad, 2012). Golde (2007) writes that apprenticeship learning requires students to work closely with an advisor to prepare for the multitude of roles that they will need to be able to fulfill upon graduation (i.e., research, teaching, service, management and advising). Nerad and Heggelund (2008) linked the apprenticeship model with the academic profession and argued that the notion of doctorate as an apprenticeship for academia is based on two assumptions: all academics need a doctoral degree to practice their profession, and the doctorate provides an appropriate level of experiential learning to equip the individuals for academic life.

In this model students take admission to PhD after a Bachelor with Honors or a Masters degree. They have usually completed courses on research methods and been involved in research in their earlier degrees, so they are immediately directly engaged in research work in their PhD study (Spronken-Smith, 2018). In this model, doctoral students are not required to undertake extensive coursework before conducting a research project; rather they begin their PhD by developing and presenting a research proposal, although some students may be offered research methods courses on the recommendation of their supervisors (Shin et al., 2018). The British/apprenticeship model of doctoral education is widely employed in the

United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Shin et al., 2018; Spronken-Smith, 2018).

### **2.2.2 The American model of doctoral education**

In contrast to the British model, the US/North American model of doctoral education is highly structured and has a substantial focus on coursework. The coursework is regarded as the equivalent of a Masters degree in the British/European model, but the US/North American model has integrated taught elements as a part of PhD programs (Kyvik & Olsen, 2014). This model encompasses extensive coursework for one year, followed by a qualifying comprehensive exam. After completion of the coursework component, the American doctoral programme follows the same pattern as the British model, - development of a research proposal, and completion of a dissertation (Willetts et al., 2012). Doctoral students are required to study several courses related to the knowledge and research skills in their fields. Coursework makes this model distinct from the British model, so few researchers have explored the students' experiences of study courses. Recently, Rogers-Shaw and Carr-Chellman (2018) and Noonan (2015) reported that coursework helps students to select meaningful learning experiences which are viewed as an important aspect of their identity development and socialisation during Stage 1 or first years of their doctoral education. During this phase, learning, both in and out of the classroom, expands students' knowledge (e.g., content knowledge, specialised vocabulary, methodological skills). The knowledge gained during the coursework provides a foundation for students to participate in the academic community (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). Most prominently the USA and Canada practise this model which begins with coursework.

Commentators have highlighted the shortcomings in both of these models. For example, Spronken-Smith (2018) argued that neither the American nor the British model guarantee the desired outcomes and professional development for doctoral students. Universities need the doctoral training programmes which can promote a more holistic development of desirable skills and attributes among doctoral students (Spronken-Smith et al., 2023). Likewise, Carvalho and Cardoso (2020) suggested that traditional models of doctoral education need to be replaced with new and comprehensive model(s). They argue new doctoral models need to emphasise wider aspects such as integration of practice-based and problem-solving

knowledge development, a multidisciplinary approach, a teaching component, and employability skills. Regardless of the model of doctoral education, doctoral students develop advanced knowledge through successful socialisation (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001). This socialisation can involve a range of complex processes, literacy practices, experiences, and interactions in the academic community. Informed by the literature, these processes are discussed in the next section.

## **2.3 Socialisation in doctoral education**

This section provides an overview of the literature on doctoral student socialisation and the key elements or doctoral literacy practices involved in it. Section 2.3.1 provides a theoretical understanding of socialisation in doctoral education. Some researchers have categorised the activities or milestones of doctoral students into different stages in order to explain the long and complex process of doctoral socialisation, which is covered in section 2.3.2. A sub-section compares the key doctoral milestones and their socialisation elements across the stages.

### **2.3.1 Theoretical understandings of socialisation**

Socialisation has been defined as a process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and values that make them effective members of a community (Brim, 1966). Bragg (1976) explained that socialisation is a learning process through which individuals acquire the knowledge and skills, the values, and attitudes of the society to which they belong. More contemporary thinking about graduate/doctoral student socialisation views it as an interactive and dynamic process involving various elements. Weidman et al. (2001) defined socialisation within doctoral education as a process through which students gain the knowledge, skills, attributes, and values required to complete a PhD and for successful entry into a professional career in their respective fields. Weidman and colleagues suggested that socialisation works at both the institutional level (how students integrate into the professional community of the institution and fulfill its expectations by adopting the culture of the community), and the individual level (how students' expectations evolve as they reshape their roles in the academic/professional community). According to Weidman et al. graduate student socialisation is specifically accomplished through three core elements: (a) knowledge acquisition, or acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed for the profession; (b) investment, or a commitment of time and energy for the profession; and (c) involvement which includes interaction with more advanced professionals. They proposed that these

elements help students to internalise the identification of their prospective professional role. Gardner (2007) built on Weidman et al.'s framework to explore the socialisation of doctoral students from the disciplines of Chemistry and History in a university of the USA. She found that students' socialisation occurs on multiple levels within distinct contexts/disciplines that also influence their satisfaction and success in their doctoral program. Gardner (2010) later traced faculty perspectives of the socialisation of doctoral students using the same framework. Faculty members confirmed that they had a crucial role in their students' socialisation and keeping them involved in professional activities. Gardner concluded that for the "involvement" aspect of Weidman et al.'s model, faculty members engaged their students in some professional activities as part of their preparation for professional roles.

Austin and McDaniels (2006) presented a framework that summarises what the literature to that point had suggested are the desired outcomes of doctoral student socialisation. These researchers described the socialisation of doctoral students to a university setting, and more importantly, to faculty roles and responsibilities as essential, because the ultimate objective for students was to enter their new roles within an academic discipline (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). After an extensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature on graduate student socialisation, these authors concluded that graduate students aspiring to faculty roles would be well served if they developed sets of: (a) conceptual understandings; (b) knowledge and skills in the core areas of faculty work; (c) interpersonal skills; and (d) professional attitudes and habits. Later, McDaniels (2010) elaborated on these areas. She described "*conceptual understanding*" as including understanding themselves to be prepared as a teaching member, understanding of their discipline, understanding institutional type, and understanding the purpose and history of higher education. "*Knowledge and skills in the core areas of faculty work*" included knowing different ways students learn, and the usefulness of different teaching strategies. "*Interpersonal skills*" included communication, collaboration, and the ability to interact with diverse students. "*Professional attitude and habits*" included ethics and integrity, ongoing professional development and cultivation of teaching networks, and nurturing teaching passion. In this study I explore the use of this four-part framework as a guide to highlight what is known about the desired socialisation outcomes of Education students related specifically to the faculty and academic role.

To better understand the socialisation process of doctoral students, researchers have conceptualised and described students' doctoral journey or key institutional milestones in terms of a number of stages. Key studies in this approach are described in the next section.

### **2.3.2 A stage approach during doctoral socialisation**

Over time different researchers have categorised doctoral students' experiences in different ways. Writers have given these experiences a variety of names and grouped activities that mark students' development towards an independent identity as a scholar and academic in different ways (Gardner, 2010; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Weidman et al., 2001). This grouping of activities can be viewed as representing a series of stages in students' journey where a stage can be about the particular activities students need to perform to achieve key milestones such as completing coursework, developing a research proposal, and dissertation writing. In what follows, I outline a number of studies that describe how students progress through the different activities/stages involved in a doctoral journey. The review tracks the development of these studies in chronological order.

Tinto (1993) was the first prominent researcher to describe the idea of a stage approach for doctoral education. His work in the context of the American model was primarily on the persistence of undergraduate students, but he also developed the idea of persistence for doctoral students. His theory of doctoral student persistence is based on a socialisation process which prepares students from the local community to enter a larger community or profession. He identified that students' persistence requires their academic (formal learning and performance) and social (informal interactions with faculty members and peers) integration into an institution. This broader conception of socialisation suggests a need to consider this as an initiation in and preparation for an academic lifestyle. Moreover, Tinto separated the longitudinal nature of doctoral education into three stages. The first stage is the "transition stage" which covers the first year of doctoral education. In this year, students try to secure their position/status in the academic and social communities of their universities, and their persistence relies on the nature of their social and academic interactions. The second stage is a "candidacy stage" in which students acquire the knowledge and competency considered necessary for the completion of research work and students sit a comprehensive examination. During this stage students tend to develop personal relationships with faculty and peers which support their persistence. The final stage is the

“doctoral completion stage” which covers the phase from research proposal to completion of a research dissertation. During this stage, students seek professional interactions and roles such as teaching/teaching assistance. Tinto’s work highlighted both the academic and social integration of students. It provided a foundation for the study of doctoral education in stages and for research into the socialisation and persistence of doctoral students.

While Tinto (1993) focused on supporting persistence, a later study by Lovitts (2001) approached the doctoral socialisation process from the perspective of reducing attrition numbers as well as promoting persistence. For her empirical study, Lovitts (2001) collected data from surveys and interviews with 816 students in two research universities in the USA. She concluded that socially and academically engaged students are likely to complete their doctoral degree. Conversely, she found that the absence of community, a negative advisor-advisee relationship, and a poor fit between the student and the programme all contribute to attrition. Lovitts presented four stages of development for doctoral students to avoid attrition and support persistence. The first stage is the “zero stage” in which students attain anticipatory awareness or understanding about their degree programme. In her view, stage two is “entry and adjustment” which continues over the first year of coursework and doctoral students begin to move from feeling like an outsider to an insider in the doctoral program. The third stage is called ‘development of competence and skills’ which covers the second year of doctoral education in which students complete coursework and a comprehensive exam in order to proceed to the next phase. Finally, the fourth stage is the “research stage” which covers the phase from developing a research proposal to completing a research dissertation. The stages provide an indication/mark of students’ progress and development in the activities required to graduate.

The conceptualisation of doctoral socialisation as a staged process was further clarified and given additional momentum in subsequent work by Weidman and his colleagues (2001), who worked in parallel with Lovitts (2001) on an ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report for the US Department of Education. These researchers defined socialisation as a process through which students gain knowledge, skills, and values to perform the various roles of a profession. They conceptualised doctoral education in terms of four stages that reflected different levels of investment, involvement, and engagement in relation to the professional roles for which students were being prepared. Weidman et al. identified these stages as follows: (i) the

anticipatory stage covers the preparatory and enrolment period of doctoral students as they enter a programme with stereotypes and preconceived expectations. Students become aware of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral expectations for their role in the program. (ii) the formal stage in which they are provided with formal knowledge in the form of courses or research that introduces them to the knowledge and skills that will serve as a base for their professional authority in the future. At this time, the students observe the activities of others (role incumbents like seniors, and faculty members) and learn normative role expectations attached to the profession. Moreover, they interpret their institutional environment, establish their future professional goals, seek positive feedback and modification in their continued development. (iii) the informal stage leads to collaborations and interactions, students learn the role expectations of their desired profession, and gain recognition among peers and faculty members through interactions and sharing. Students become aware of the expectations required for their expected professional roles. (iv) the personal stage in which students develop competence in the skills needed to be independent scholars and claim a professional identity by securing a professional role. In this stage they become ready to take on a formal role as a professional. The stages delineated by Weidman et al (2001) are not based on a linear model of development, but rather describe socialisation development that might occur simultaneously at any time during a student's doctoral education. This study assists understanding of formal, informal, and personal experiences of students in their doctoral stages.

Gardner (2009) extended Weidman et al.'s work on socialisation by providing more specifics about the nature of each stage but with different labelling and breakdown of doctoral components. She presented a three-phase conceptual understanding of doctoral student development. The three phases are: (i) the entry phase that is like the anticipatory stage of Weidman et al.'s model. In this phase, students make an effort to gain awareness of PhD requirements and admission to a doctoral program. This phase usually lasts for a few months until students are enrolled and start their coursework; (ii) the integration phase in which students spend time in completing coursework and examinations, and as a result improve their skills and competence in preparation for the research phase. In this phase students start developing relationships with peers and faculty and begin to understand the professional role that they might seek to obtain in academia, (iii) the candidacy phase in which students

transition from students to emerging scholars through conducting and completing a research thesis. In this phase students also seek out experience in the various aspects of an academic professional role and work to identify job opportunities. Gardner's three-phase approach gives a general overview of the activities involved in doctoral education; it does not clearly mention or describe a "comprehensive exam" and a "research proposal", which are major milestones for many students during doctoral education in many institutions. Gardner does not consider these phases to form a clear sequence that students move through in a linear fashion one phase at a time with no overlap in their social and academic development. Despite an ambiguity in defining milestones in each phase, the study assists understanding of students' academic and social development through a three-phase socialisation process.

Further research-based evidence for the pertinence of Tinto's stage-based conceptualization of doctoral socialisation and persistence was provided in the work of Ampaw and Jaeger (2012). Their study also highlighted key transitions in students' doctoral education. Their study used the transcripts and admission information of 2068 doctoral students enrolled between the years 1994/1995 and 1998/1999 in one USA institution. They identified and described three doctoral stages: (i) transition stage (students start coursework and develop supportive relationships with faculty and peers), (ii) development stage (after acquiring research competency through coursework, students develop a research proposal in their area of interest. This stage ends with a research proposal presentation), and (iii) the research stage (students collect and analyze data) complete their write up and present their research in the academic community). While Ampaw and Jaeger's data was collected 20 years ago, their findings also connect persistence with students' academic and social integration into their institution.

Other authors have demarcated the stages in doctoral education in different ways. The research-based understanding of the stages in doctoral progression and socialisation is also evident in works that are designed as help books for doctoral students. For example, Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) identified five stages in doctoral student progress in their guide for doctoral students. Their work highlights the challenges in each stage and offers strategies for students to persist in their doctoral journey. Their first stage is the "entry stage" in which students' main challenge is to identify a university and program by analysing their own interest, personality, and values. The authors suggest that students can deal with

challenges in this stage by choosing the right institution and program, communicating, and understanding family concerns (time management) which might arise due to a PhD, and carefully allocating resources to their doctoral studies. The second stage is “the knowledge and skill development” in which students complete coursework to enhance their critical thinking and knowledge. Students develop relationships with faculty and peers that help to ensure their successful integration into the program. The authors explain that students need to set goals for learning, enhance cognitive functions to perform academic activities, manage burnout and stress, and develop a network of collegial support in order to persist in this stage. The third stage is “consolidation” in which students pass a comprehensive exam and transition from students to self-directed learners. The comprehensive exam is taken as a benchmark and demonstrates readiness for undertaking the research process. In this stage students develop professional relationships with faculty which are important to their success in the next stage. The fourth stage is the “research and scholarship” stage, where students transition from students to researchers by going through the various research processes needed to complete their dissertation. Students need to critically and metacognitively engage in their research work during this stage. The last stage is “completion” which involves graduating, contributing new knowledge, trying to publish findings and applying for academic positions. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding portray the process of doctoral education as a sequence of linear activities starting from thinking about a doctoral degree to completing a thesis and seeking to secure a position in a university.

A helpful overview of the literature on the stage-based challenges in doctoral education was compiled by Pifer and Baker (2016) who summarized the previous 15 years of literature in this area. They sourced articles published via the ProQuest database from 2000 to 2015 using the term “doctoral education”. They organised the challenges they identified in the literature into three stages, which they referred to as the three practical stages of doctoral education. These stages can be seen as a progression from induction into the culture of doctoral education, the discipline, and the academic institution towards the gradual development of an identity as self-directing scholars and members of the academic community. In this progression, the authors identified the first stage as a *knowledge consumption stage* in which students gain admission to a doctoral program and start to learn the content, values, and language of their chosen discipline through coursework. Pifer and Baker (2016) propose that this early stage

involves the cultivation of identities as doctoral level learners, when students learn the sociocultural norms and expectations of their field. They identified the second stage as a *knowledge creation stage*. During this stage students pass a comprehensive exam and develop a research proposal. The knowledge creation stage is a critical transition period when students move from a structured classroom setting to a phase of being responsible for and starting to do their own research. Students can face difficulties in transitioning to independence as they engage in the development of their scholarly identities through the ongoing development of their research skills and research agendas. According to Pifer and Baker (2016), this stage ends with the successful defense of a research proposal. The third and final stage of Pifer and Baker's model is the *knowledge enactment stage*. This is the time when doctoral students work to mark their identity as emerging scholars and experts in a particular field by completing their dissertation. During this stage, students continue their role as learners and refine their abilities. At the same time, students continue to develop their identity as scholars by engaging in professional roles which can include acting as a research assistant, applying for, and winning fellowships, and teaching. These roles align with the wider responsibilities of those who hold an academic position, and their pursuit of these roles is consistent with the aim of an academic position and a career aspiration.

A more detailed view about what some of the stages might look like has also been offered by Pifer and Baker. These authors conducted research on stage 2 (proposal writing) and stage 3 (dissertation writing) (Baker & Pifer, 2011, 2014). The features of the journey from student to independent scholar are also evident in their discussion. For their research work on stage 2 students, they conducted interviews with 31 doctoral students and identified the significance of relationships/interactions for students' transition from doctoral student to independent scholar. Students potentially struggle with balance in their multiple identities at this stage because they require parallel identity development of a student role and the emergent understanding and enacting of the identity of a scholar (Baker & Pifer, 2011). Likewise, during their longitudinal research study on doctoral students who were engaged at stage 3, Baker and Pifer (2014) found that the process of identity development was ongoing as students focused on completing their research and on seeking a job. Pifer and Baker found the roles of student and scholar were both crucial at this stage but students' approach to learning evolved into the roles of students-as-learners and scholars-as-learners. The

dissertation and job searching required students to remain firmly grounded in their student identity, while also requiring them to learn and display the identity of emergent scholars. The following section summarises and compares the nature of the studies in the doctoral stages.

Each of the above-mentioned studies explained the complex and longitudinal nature of doctoral socialisation in terms of a series of different activities and stages. They depicted doctoral education as a process of development whereby doctoral students gain the knowledge, skills and values needed for successful completion of a thesis and entry into a profession, and in the process experience significant shifts in their identity formation. The following table details the stages/activities and names the different authors gave to students' doctoral journey.

**Table 1***Doctoral stage approaches*

<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Stage 4</b>	<b>Stage 5</b>
Tinto (1993)	<i>Transition</i> (First year of the doctoral education)	<i>Candidacy</i> (Completion of coursework and comprehensive exam)	<i>Doctoral completion</i> (Research proposal and completion of thesis)		
Lovitts (2001)	<i>Zero Stage</i> (Anticipating awareness and securing admission)	<i>Entry and adjustment</i> (First year of education)	<i>Development of competence and skills</i> (Completion of course work and comprehensive exam)	<i>Research stage</i> (Research proposal and completion of thesis)	
Weidman et al. (2001)	<i>Anticipatory stage</i> (Securing admission and understanding of required behaviors)	<i>Formal stage</i> (Gain formal knowledge and pass all examinations)	<i>Informal stage</i> (Gain informal role expectations while interacting with peer and faculty members)	<i>Personal stage</i> (Students form their own professional identity and securing professional roles)	
Gardner (2009)	<i>Entry phase</i> (Securing admission and getting awareness)	<i>Integration phase</i> (Completing coursework and examination)	<i>Candidacy phase</i> (Completing research work including research proposal phase)		
Ampaw and Jaeger (2012)	<i>Transition</i> (Coursework and examinations)	<i>Development</i> (Research proposal phase)	<i>Research stage</i> (Completion of research work)		
Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014)	<i>Entry</i> (Securing admission and gaining awareness)	<i>Knowledge and skill development</i> (Coursework phase)	<i>Consolidation</i> (Passing comprehensive exam)	<i>Research and scholarship</i> (Completion of research work)	<i>Completion</i> (Gaining a status of doctor and securing job)
Pifer and Baker (2016)	<i>Knowledge consumption</i> (coursework)	<i>Knowledge production</i> (Comprehensive examination and research proposal)	<i>Knowledge enactment</i> (Dissertation writing)		

### ***2.3.2.1 Comparing and contrasting stage approaches***

All the seven stage studies identify that student anticipation and integration into the institution and doctoral program is an important initial aspect of student socialisation. They all describe that doctoral students are likely to understand the criteria for a PhD, observe and become aware of the learning environment, and seek resources that help their orientation. For instance, the “Zero stage” in Lovitt’s study, the “anticipatory stage” in Weidman’s work, and the “entry stage” of Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spauldin’s approach emphasise students’ understanding of program requirements, securing admission, and adjusting to the new learning environment.

All the studies identify the importance of students’ relationships with others, especially with faculty members, peers, and research supervisors in their development and socialisation. More prominently, the “informal stage” of Weidman (2001), the “integration stage” of Gardner (2009), the “consolidated stage” of Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spauldin (2014), and “knowledge production stage” of Pifer and Baker (2016) reported that relationships/interactions are important for students’ informal learning during their socialisation. Interactions help students to gain recognition in the scholarly community for collegial support and understand the expectations of a professional role they hope to perform in future.

Four of the seven studies were based on the idea of students' persistence in doctoral education, while Weidman (2001) and Gardner (2009) are the exceptions. Tinto (1993) was the first to differentiate the long journey of doctoral education into stages and explain the kinds of persistence required of students to achieve different milestones. Lovitts (2001), Ampaw and Jaeger (2012), and Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) also highlighted student persistence in the different stages of their professional development. These researchers have associated students’ persistence with their successful involvement and interest in academic activities, and social integration through interactions in each stage of their program.

The structure of the stages is another important aspect of the studies. Except for Weidman, the studies present the doctoral journey as a linear and gradual development of students’ skills, knowledge, and confidence via their socialisation. Weidman and colleagues' work

identifies that doctoral students can experience different kinds of development and socialisation simultaneously at any stage. They focused on knowledge acquisition, involvement, and commitment of doctoral students during each stage. Their approach to socialisation is significant for understanding students' experiences regardless of the nature of the doctoral program and institutional structure.

The development of students' research skills and knowledge through formal settings is an important shared aspect of the studies. All studies mention that in the early stage/s of doctoral education students are involved in enhancing their knowledge of how to conduct research. For instance, the "development of competence and skills stage" of Lovitt's (2001) approach, the "knowledge and skills development stage" of Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spauldin's (2014), and the "knowledge consumption stage" in Pifer and Baker (2016) describe the development of students' research skills and knowledge through formal courses. Some of the four studies also report on the value of courses and gaining formal knowledge and skills for students' socialisation.

Interestingly, only Weidman's (2001) "personal stage", and Rockinson-Szapkiw's (2014) "completion stage" mention that students take on professional roles on completion of their research. Both studies note that students are expected to have acquired the required professional knowledge and skills while completing their degree and thus be ready to secure a formal professional position at the end of their studies. Pifer and Baker's study also described that students seek job positions and professional roles at the knowledge enactment stage".

All studies reviewed here have contributed to my conceptual understanding of the doctoral journey and doctoral student socialisation. However, for my study I draw on Pifer and Baker's extensive work on the stage approach to guide me in understanding and categorising students' experience. They have not only produced a summary of recent literature on doctoral student experiences (Pifer & Baker, 2016), but have also conducted research studies into the different stages of doctoral education. Their work encapsulates the key ideas of challenges, persistence, social interaction, knowledge, and skill development and seeking professional roles/positions that are included in other studies. Moreover, they have discussed the aspects of identity development or multiple identities of students which my research is

aiming to understand. In the next section I describe the concept of identity and identity development especially with respect to doctoral students.

## **2.4. Identity development**

It has been observed that identity development is implied in the studies on doctoral socialisation, but there is also a strand of literature that focuses explicitly on the identity development of doctoral students. This section reviews the literature on the identity development of doctoral students. It begins in section 2.4.1 which discusses recent research on student identity in doctoral education. Section 2.4.2 describes the origin and components of role identity theory and its implications for doctoral students.

### **2.4.1 Identity development in doctoral education**

The concept of identity and identity development has gained prominence in the literature of higher education including doctoral studies over the last two decades. In general, identity is an amorphous concept which is understood and used in a range of ways (Castelló et al., 2020). For example, Gee (2000) a widely cited researcher, described identity as the product of interactions with others that allow an individual to be recognised as a certain kind of person by themselves and by others in a given context. People have multiple identities which are linked to their performance in society, and the kind of person they are recognised as at a given time and place, which might change from situation to situation and context to context (Gee, 2006). The term 'identity development' describes how people develop a sense and understanding of themselves within the socio-cultural demands and norms of the different informal and professional communities of which they are a part (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008; Blair & Monske, 2009; Creme & McKenna, 2010; Gee, 2000; Guerin, 2013; Illeris, 2014; Jazvac-Martek, 2009; Kajfez & McNair, 2014; Leshem, 2016, 2020; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2018; Stets & Harrod, 2004). While different researchers have employed different theoretical frameworks, the consensus is that identity development is a complex and ongoing process that influences and affects and is affected by many aspects of our daily life (Boulton, 2019; Kovalcikiene & Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2018; Leshem, 2016).

Several researchers have explored the notion of individual identity and identity development in relation to both the formal and informal experiences of doctoral students. In this section I review some of the most recent and widely cited studies on doctoral identity development.

For example, McAlpine (2012), whose work has influenced the pre-eminent studies on the identity development of doctoral students. McAlpine argues that doctoral students develop identity through an identity-trajectory that is embedded in their personal lives and their experiences in the institution. She identified students' identity-trajectory as the interweaving of three strands: an intellectual strand, a networking strand, and an institutional strand. The intellectual strand included students' identity based on their learning, agency, individual ability, and contribution to their field. Her networking strand focused on relationships and collaboration with others in their field. The institutional strand included the roles, responsibilities and resources in the institution that influenced identity. McAlpine argued these three strands can help in understanding the complex nature of doctoral students' identity and how it evolves over time.

While McAlpine (2012) draws attention to the intersecting strands in the development of doctoral students' identity, other studies focus on particular aspects of this identity development. For example, some researchers have investigated the development of the researcher identity of doctoral students. Mantai (2017) focused on students' development of an identity as a researcher. She reported that doctoral students develop their identity as researchers through engaging in research-related experiences. She conducted interviews with 30 PhD students from two Australian universities and found they engaged in formal, semi-formal and informal research experiences. Formal experiences and expectations of a PhD student included research output in the form of publication and presentation at conferences. Semi-formal experiences included doing research such as reading literature, making proposals, working with participants, using Endnote to organise references, and data analysis. Informal experiences included talking and sharing research with others. All these research experiences and expectations of research output, doing research and talking about their research had a significant role in the development and gaining validation of an identity as researchers. Subsequent work by Matai (2019) recognised that the evolution of doctoral identity involved a number of other components in addition to the role of researcher. Mantai (2019b) later recorded narratives from 16 doctoral students to trace their experiences related to identity formation in the academic community. She reported the students assessed and realised their academic identity and development with respect to skills demands in the academic profession. Students engaged in university teaching and focused on networking to

develop their academic identity and increase their employability. She concluded that doctoral education focuses only on researcher identity development, but this is insufficient to prepare students for an academic career.

However, the focus on researcher identity continues to be evident in some studies on doctoral students' identity formation, for example, the work of Castelló et al. (2020). These authors conducted a systematic review of the past 20 years of literature to unpack the notion of researcher identity in higher education. They proposed that a continuum of different theoretical frameworks starting from positivism and moving to post-positivism have been used to explore the concept of researcher identity (PhD and postdoc students). They highlighted four major dimensions for understanding variations in the concept of researcher identity: from social to individual, from dynamic to stable, from multiple to single, and from thinking to actions. Based on their review of past literature, a majority 71% (n=27) of the research studies they reviewed considered that identity is socially constructed rather than an individual attribute. They reported that 73% (n=28) of research studies assumed that researcher identity is a dynamic construct rather than a stable one which meant identity could change through time. Moreover, 76% (n=29) of research studies confirmed that identity was multiple rather than single which involved the transition from one identity to another such as from a doctoral student to a researcher identity. Finally, 63% (n=24) of research studies emphasised that identity is based on actions rather than thinking, because identity is shaped through participation in different contexts. They concluded that the literature confirmed that a social nature, dynamism, multiplicity, and actions were the key aspects involved in the formation of researcher identity of students. Another recent study conducted by Heron et al. (2023a) also reported researcher identity development of doctoral students. These researchers conducted interviews with the PhD students who had completed the phase of their proposal confirmation. They found that the confirmation process developed students' researcher identity through external validation, recognition, and legitimisation of their research work. They added that talking about research was also an aspect of the process of researcher identity. However, I conceptualise the identity of doctoral students as emerging researchers, as they position themselves beginning to contribute to knowledge, gain confidence, independence and validation of the aspects involved in conducting research.

Other studies have focused on the writer and scholar identity development of doctoral students. Kamler and Thomson (2014) are notable within this group; they emphasise that writing is integral to the scholarly identity development of doctoral students. These authors viewed students' research writing as an institutional and a social practice that is about meaning making and learning to produce knowledge in a discipline. They argue that making a scholarly contribution to new knowledge involves text and identity work: making the transition to an identity of a scholar is about acquisition of knowledge and competencies in research writing.

Feedback dialogue between doctoral students and their supervisors has also been examined for its role in scholar identity development. In their study, Inouy and McAlpine (2017) conducted interviews with two first year PhD students at the University of Oxford who were developing their research proposals. The focus of the research was to explore the students' writing effort and how feedback from supervisors and revising their research proposal could inform their scholar identity development. The results showed that students exhibited agency through critically engaging with feedback in relation to their self-assessment and clarifying their research thinking which contributed to growth of their scholarly identity. Inouy and McAlpine defined students' scholarly identity development in terms of their sense of confidence, independence in thinking, and positioning themselves in relation to others. They concluded that there was a strong relationship between supervisor feedback and evolution of the scholarly independence of the students.

Literature reviews in the field also help to shed light on the various factors that are influential in the scholar identity development of doctoral students. For example, Inouy and McAlpine (2019) conducted a literature review to explore the association between doctoral students' writing experiences and their identity development. They found that students develop their academic identity through a continuous process of writing and feedback within the groups with which they engage. They also found that prior research studies had not emphasised variations in students' agency in relation to seeking out and using feedback, and the potential influence of feedback on students' thinking and writing within their identity development. In the current study I pay attention to these factors. Choi et al. (2021) also reviewed the previous literature on doctoral student identity to identify the key aspect of their identity as scholars. They reported that students' scholarly identity emerges through recognition by oneself and

others that he or she possesses and exhibits adequate levels of competence, confidence, autonomy, and agency with respect to scholarly activities, products, and communities. Their review of research showed that the journey towards a scholarly identity has a number of challenges including the need to accommodate and balance multiple identities such as those of students and academic professionals. They also noted that research had identified that sometimes there was a perceived mismatch between students' idealised notion of what it means to be a scholar and what was attainable for them. Choi et al. (2021) suggested that there is a need to explore the specific activities and processes which can aid the identity development of doctoral students. They also recommended continuing research to identify the interactions which are important for students' identity development as scholars.

Exploring the identity development of doctoral students also needs to be located within the broader concept of academic identity. The term 'academic identity' has been used in higher education to refer to those who are employed in higher education institutions (Djerasimovic, 2021; Obexer, 2022). Recently some researchers have associated the term academic identity with doctoral students as well. For example, Frick and Brodin (2019) reviewed the literature on doctoral education and creativity/identity of students. They identified three key dimensions of creativity and identity development in doctoral students. The first is students need to become responsible scholars in order to contribute to the academic community that is connected with their social identity. Identity formation is not merely a student effort but also involves supervisors who judge students' research work in a process of socialisation. In the second dimension, doctoral students must act with an informed agency to realise the expectations associated with their role/s connected to their academic identity. Finally, Frick and Brodin identified that doctoral students express their individual voice through their research work which is connected with students' independence and their personal identity. They concluded that all three dimensions are important to support students' academic identity. In another study, Emmioğlu et al. (2017) explored the experiences and roles of doctoral students. They delimited two categories of doctoral student experiences: doctoral specific and academic specific. Doctoral-specific experiences included students meeting the expectations of the institution such as coursework, research proposal, comprehensive exam, research-related activities, writing their dissertation, meeting with peers and their supervisor. They identified academic-specific activities such as teaching, submitting a journal article,

meetings and conversations with academics, conference presentations, scholarly writing and research, job applications, review work, organising conferences and seminars as activities which can develop positive feelings among doctoral students towards being a part of an academic community and serving as academics. Similar academic activities had been reported by Jazvac-Martek (2009) as contributing to students feeling connected with an academic community. Other specific contributions to doctoral students' academic identity have been reported by various scholars. Matai (2019) and Xua and Grant (2020) reported that research publications and teaching opportunities supported academic identity development of doctoral students. Inouye and McAlpine (2019) defined academic identity in terms of the way that doctoral students position themselves in contributing knowledge in a field and identify themselves as members of the academic community after possessing skills, independence, and confidence to read, write, speak, and act in the academic field. Nonetheless, Inouye and McAlpine confirmed that the term academic identity development of doctoral students still has an amorphous understanding in the literature. They recommended that case studies be undertaken that might be helpful to trace the pattern of academic identity development over time and reveal how students' thinking and behaviors evolves during various stages of doctoral education (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019).

Each of the above studies, especially the review studies, have offered a reflection on doctoral identity development. They have highlighted different doctoral identities such as researcher identity, scholar identity, social and personal identity, and academic identity, and identified these as part of the development of doctoral students in terms of their knowledge, skills, confidence, and independent ability to perform academic activities. These researchers proposed that doctoral student identity development occurs in an academic community where interactions play a crucial role in the development process. They also emphasised independence as an important aspect of identity development through which students can initiate and successfully engage in academic activities. Furthermore, the researchers also considered doctoral writing as a key determinant which influences student identity development. In this respect, studies identify a strong association between writing and feedback in the evolution of the identity development of doctoral students.

This literature sets the scene for my current inquiry into doctoral students' progression towards an academic identity with a specific focus on doctoral students in Pakistan. This is

the expectation of most doctoral students in Pakistan, but academic positions are limited, and universities are of the view that graduates do not have the skills and knowledge required. However, academic identity and its development does not have clarity and precision in definition. Academic identity is an umbrella term which covers all other doctoral identities for the academic profession. From reading the literature on doctoral identity development, I have concluded that multiple identity perspectives such as learner identity, researcher identity or scholar identity are part of the academic identity development of doctoral students. I conceptualise academic identity as doctoral students positioning themselves to contribute to knowledge in their field and possess adequate level of competence, confidence, and independence to perform a role in the academic community.

A comprehensive study on students' socialisation, and different role identities can help us to explain their skill development and preparation for academic professions. However, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of students' socialisation and different identity perspectives which students have during their doctoral education. Role identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) offers a useful framework for exploring the personal and social/institutional perspectives that together contribute to doctoral student identity development.

#### **2.4.2 Role identity theory**

McCall and Simmons (1978) developed role identity theory based on symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) as a way of understanding identity through the nature of an individual's social roles or positions. The authors propose that role identity is a character or role that an individual devises for him or herself as an occupant of a particular social position. In this conception, each role comprises a set of meanings which are formed through an imaginative view of how an individual might act in a position and the nature of the expectations others attach to that position/role. The imaginative view of role identity provides a frame of reference for action and establishes the criteria for evaluating one's actual performance in a role. Role theory focuses on the different actions of and perceptions shared by individuals, such as an individual's effort to coordinate and interrelate their identity with those of others in a social context. In this view, identity is also relational and not limited to the characteristics of an individual. In keeping with the relational nature of identity, the development and change

of an identity is interactive and is based on continuous, reflexive dialogues, and relations with others. Role identity considers role expectations (conventional and idiosyncratic), role validation (personal and through others), multiple role-identities, and role prominence in order to understand identity development.

As defined by McCall and Simmons (1978), role-identities are not purely idiosyncratic (as in an imaginative view), but also include many of the conventional standards and expectations that are associated with an occupant of a particular social position. Therefore, each role-identity combines psychological (interpreted by self) as well as sociological (interpreted by others) aspects to define its meanings. These two aspects of (i) idiosyncratic and (ii) conventional expectations are central to role identity, but the balance of these two aspects varies from person to person and identity to identity (Carter & Mangum, 2020; Carter et al., 2023). In the idiosyncratic aspect, individuals reflect their personal nuances and choice in how they see themselves and how they behave as a role holder. In this aspect, the role meanings reflect one's unique interpretation and definition of who one is when engaging in a specific role. Idiosyncratic meanings can assist an individual to achieve the goals linked with a role. On the other hand, the conventional aspect includes rules and expectations associated with the particular position which the role occupies in a social structure. The conventional meanings of a role reflect the cultural guidelines and behaviors expected by others of those who hold a position or role within society, and, as such, these expectations are external to an individual. Conventional role meanings are typically reinforced by social agents who provide feedback through interaction processes. These meanings are embedded within the specific social structure for identity enactment and presented in the specific forms and norms of socialisation in a specific context. In my research, I consider idiosyncratic expectations as the individual and personal expectations which students hold, and the conventional expectations as the institutional expectations attached to students' roles and identity development over the time of their doctoral study. Both personal and institutional aspects of expectations are involved in successful socialisation processes and have the potential to be useful lenses to address gaps in doctoral education research.

The literature suggests that in the evolution of role identity, there are certain contributory factors. For example, McCall and Simmons (1978) argued that individuals need to gain validation of their role-identities through role-performances. Role-performance is evaluated

from two different perspectives: internal (someone's own assessment about their performance) and external (others' assessment of the performance). If someone performs in a manner consistent with the content of his or her imagination of self-perception, then they gain internal validation of their role-identity. On the other hand, the audience or community provides role-support and validation through their reactions and or feedback on a person's performance in a particular role-identity. This form of role-support is an implied validation by others of a person's imaginative conception of him or herself, but it may also counter the self-view. This said, any role-identity is in continuous need of legitimation/validation because of inconsistent context-based role-performances by individuals and the variability of role-support by the audience (McCall & Simmons, 1978). In my research, I investigate if students need to gain validation of their role-identity (through self and others) at each stage of doctoral studies.

Role identity theory recognises that individuals take on various positions, functions and responsibilities within a social group, and the associated meanings and expectations of the role performance of these positions (Stets & Burke, 2000, 2014). The theory recognises that everyone occupies multiple role identities and that these are associated with different social positions and contexts (Caza & Creary, 2016). Role identities are dynamic, based on both the context constructed by others who bring expectations, motivations and actions, and the individual who acts, reacts, and enacts expectations through interactions. Some researchers who employ role identity theory have argued that multiple role-identities are organised in a hierarchy of salience and prominence (Brenner et al., 2014; Carter & Mangum, 2020; Colbeck, 2008). The prominence of an identity represents the idealised conception of oneself when one assumes a role. Prominence is understood as a subjective ranking of role identities according to the relative value an individual puts on an identity. The relative prominence of an identity is the result of many factors such as the degree of self and social support for a role, the degree of personal investment and commitment, and the extrinsic and intrinsic gratifications/rewards associated with that particular role (Brenner et al., 2014; McCall & Simmons, 1978). The prominence hierarchy of identity might reflect what and how an individual views his or her ideal self in a particular context and what they envisage to be the particular support and rewards associated with that identity (Brenner et al., 2014; Carter & Mangum, 2020). On the other hand, identity salience reflects the number of opportunities

that a person has to engage in a particular identity (Carter et al., 2023; McCall & Simmons, 1978). Identity salience indicates the probability of a person enacting an identity across social situations. The salience hierarchy represents the situational self rather than the ideal self. In this research, I use the idea of prominence of role identity because it might help to reflect the students' identities which mostly value and enact and can possibly be linked with doctoral stage or milestones.

The notion of role identity theory is useful because it allows us to consider both interpersonal experiences (the way idealised views of role identities are verified by others), and intrapersonal experiences (the meaning and expectations which are used to determine the idealised views of role identities). As a particular view on identity, this theory can invoke an active exploration of emotional, cognitive, and social repertoires of students embedded in doctoral education.

#### ***2.4.2.1 Implication of role-identity theory for doctoral education***

Comparatively few researchers have explored the identity development of doctoral students using role identity theory, as proposed by McCall and Simmons (1978), as a conceptual framework. Those scholars who have used it, have only applied some of the assumptions and investigated particular parts of the doctoral student journey. For instance, Bale and Anderson (2022) used role-identity theory to explore the identity development of doctoral students who were also engaged in the role of Graduate Training Assistants (GTAs). They conducted interviews with nine GTAs and found that their role was situated between being students and being teachers. Some students said teaching was an additional role with their main role being a researcher, and some believed that their role intertwined both researcher and teacher roles. This study concluded that students were in constant negotiations to develop their teacher role identity which was mainly influenced by the reactions of others and to maintain autonomy. In another study, Jazvac-Martek (2009) employed role identity theory to explore doctoral student experiences in a Canadian university. Her study emphasised the oscillating nature of students' roles. She described that students need agency to seek out and initiate interactions with others which she proposed is a core element in identity development. She reported that doctoral students need to perform a number of roles and identities and they frequently oscillate between roles. Within the oscillation, students move between

experiences of dependency and independence in their activities, thereby experiencing multiplicity and fragmentation in their roles as they move toward a larger sense of independence. Svyantek et al. (2015) focused their research on a specific disciplinary context. They used role identity theory to explore science and engineering graduate students' experiences which aligned with the roles of teachers and of researchers they might perform as academic professionals. Their study examined an intervention related to students' professional identity formation. They invited students to create professional ePortfolios as a reflective tool. Students were asked to write narratives and log evidence about their accomplishments as teachers and researchers, and in other professional activities. Svyantek et al. concluded that students perceived a misalignment between their current and desired role identity as teachers, but there was congruence between their current and future role identity as researchers. Role identity theory helped them to categorise doctoral students' role identities associated with the pursuit of an academic position and their expectations of those identities. In another discipline-specific context, Sweitzer (2007) used theoretical aspects of role identity theory to explore the professional identity development of business doctoral students at Pennsylvania State University, USA. Through interviews, this research focused on students' social networking and the ways in which students learned the expectations of being doctoral students, research assistants, and teachers through those networks/relationships. Sweitzer concluded that students differed in terms of their social networks which led to variations in gaining support, in expectations communicated by their interactions, and their socialisation into the roles of doctoral students, research assistants, and teachers.

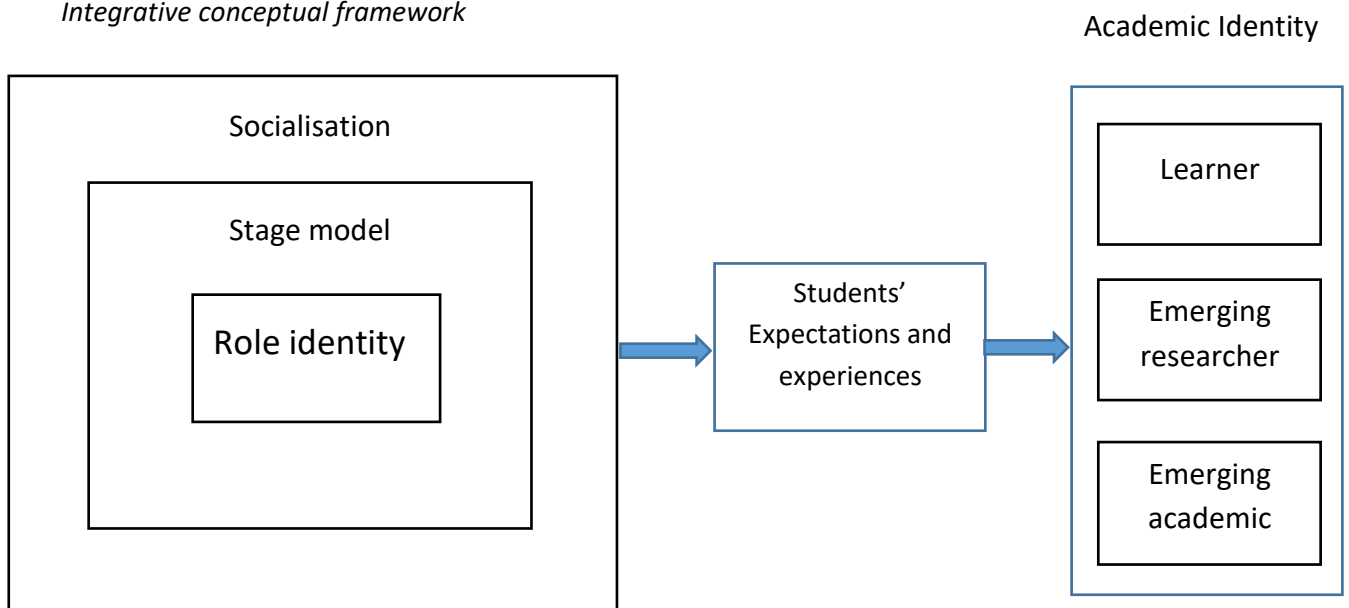
In summary, the studies which have employed role identity theory have confirmed the multiplicity of role identities (student, researcher, scholar, teacher) doctoral students have. However, these studies have not provided organisation or relative prominence of multiple role identities in different doctoral stages and the core aspects involved in developing doctoral role identities. Moreover, the notion of academic identity development is an emerging area, and not many researchers have described what is involved in the academic role and academic identity development.

The body of literature on identity development asserts that we have insufficient understanding of the breadth of developmental activities and instances in the PhD experience that promote students' identification as emerging academics. We also know little about how

students' social networks support and validate their identity development process. Positioning the student as an active agent in the development of academic identity, the current research applies the notion of role identity theory which can consider both personal and social aspects to highlight the students' development. Narrative research presents a widely accepted methodology to investigate the concept of identity, as stories of identities make the abstract graspable (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Specifically, the research aims to answer these questions: (i) How do students' expectations and experiences shape their role identity in doctoral education? (ii) How do students shift multiple role identities in doctoral education that contributed to their academic identity development? The next section outlines the integrative conceptual framework which is used to shape and structure this research and address the research questions.

## **2.5 An integrative conceptual framework**

There are different models of doctoral education; the main ones are the apprenticeship model from the UK and Europe and the coursework model from North America. In this review I have focused mainly on the US model because universities in Pakistan, the site of my study, follow this model. The literature on student experience of doctoral education depicts it as involving a range of activities and complex processes, influences, and social interactions. Typically, socialisation refers to a process through which students incorporate the knowledge, skills, attributes, and values required to perform in a particular profession. In spite of the complexity of the socialisation process, research to understand doctoral student socialisation over time is rare. On the other hand, there is literature that shows identity is an appropriate framework for exploring doctoral student development over time. Researchers have associated different identities (researcher, scholar, academic and so on) with doctoral students but it is not always very clear what these identities consist of and the way these identities are structured, developed and are connected. In my research, I examine how role identity theory can help understand doctoral students' socialisation and academic identity development. Given the structure of doctoral education in Pakistan, I explore the potential of an integrative conceptual framework that combines socialisation, role identity development, at the discipline and student level with a stage approach at the institutional level. I anticipate that this integrative model will help me understand student expectations and experiences over the course of their doctoral education journey.

**Figure 1***Integrative conceptual framework*

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research methodology and methods**

#### **3.1. Overview**

This chapter describes the methodological procedures and methods that have been used to conduct this research. Firstly, the chapter provides an overview of the research paradigm, discussing the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological stances of the study. Secondly, it explains the research population and sampling procedure, the research instrumentation, data collection and data analysis techniques used in this research. Finally, this chapter sets out ethical and validity concerns related to this research.

#### **3.2. Research paradigm**

Initially, the word “paradigm” was used by an American philosopher Kuhn (1962) to indicate a philosophical way of thinking (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). A research paradigm provides a set of beliefs and assumptions that explain an individual’s understanding of the world; it serves as a framework which guides a researcher’s thinking (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). A paradigm describes a researcher’s approach or world view (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). According to Patton (2002), a paradigm is a way of describing the world by considering three major areas of philosophy which are: the ontological assumptions (nature of reality), epistemological assumption (source of knowledge) and axiological assumption (ethics and values). Ontology deals with the question of reality and what constitutes reality while investigating a social phenomenon (Scotland, 2012). Epistemology deals with the question of knowing, ways to know about reality and what counts as reliable knowledge (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011). Epistemology defines the basic forms of knowledge and how it can be transferred to other people. Axiology deals with the question of ethics and values; for researchers it helps to define limitations and make decisions about the methods used in and for the research.

To identify the most suitable paradigm for my research questions, I read about the assumptions that underpin the four paradigms that are most common in education: positivism, interpretivism, critical paradigm, and pragmatism (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The positivist paradigm employs scientific methods and proceeds on deductive reasoning, hypothesis, experimentation, calculations, and formulating conclusions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). By contrast, interpretivism is based on assumptions about

human action in a real social context. This paradigm recognises that people's views, ideas, thinking, and meanings are significant and can be explored through their social and contextual experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The critical paradigm adopts ethical, moral, and political standards to evaluate a situation. Research includes consideration of the social, economic, and political context (Hammersley, 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Pragmatist philosophy assumes that flexible and contingent research methods are best for providing insights into a research problem (Creswell, 2014).

The key purpose of my research was to identify the experiences which influenced doctoral students' academic identity development. The anticipated experiences included the interpretation of students' knowledge and skills and views of their classroom, institutional, and wider academic community experiences. The interpretivist paradigm is commonly used to understand the subjective world and meanings of human experience (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) as it sees reality as being socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this reason, it is also called the 'Constructivist' paradigm. It emphasises accessing individuals' subjective thoughts and feelings to understand their interpretation of the world around them (Cohen et al., 2011; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This paradigm claims that our knowledge and understanding of realities are only knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings of experiences (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Consequently, interpretivist researchers try to understand participants' actions and experiences based on the interpretations which are grounded in context and the environment (Bryman, 2016; Grix, 2019). When applied in educational research, this paradigm enables researchers to build a rich understanding of the lived experiences of teachers and students (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Therefore, this paradigm can provide appropriate guidelines to explore doctoral students' lived experiences in different stages of their education and how these experiences influence their academic identity. I briefly explain ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions below with reference to this research.

### **3.2.1. Ontological position in this research**

The ontological position in the constructionist paradigm is that social phenomena and their meanings are defined and constructed by social actors (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016). This view asserts that social phenomena are not only constructed through social interaction, but

they are also in a state of constant revision. People make assumptions that something makes sense or is real, and about what can be known about reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Being an education researcher, my personal ontological position leans towards constructionism and I believe that doctoral students' actions are based not only on their intrinsic characteristics (knowledge, feelings, and attitudes), but also on the social interactions that they may have at different times during their education. I assume academic identity has some sense or meaning when students are involved in different academic roles and experiences during their education. As they are engaged in various academic roles and experiences, students have personal meanings and interpretations of reality in their minds. Further, this reality can be explored through an interaction between researcher and participants where participants can share their experiences in a comprehensive manner.

### **3.2.2. Epistemological position in this research**

A person's ontological understanding of reality influences his or her understanding of the nature of knowledge, that is epistemology (Grix, 2019). This deals with *what* we know and *how* we know (Cresswell, 2014). It provides an understanding of knowledge bases, nature, and form, how we acquire it, and how we transfer knowledge to others (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). According to my epistemological assumption, knowledge is a unique construct which is subjective and personal to each individual (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers and participants need to be engaged in interactive research methods in which they can have dialogue and questions through a process of careful listening, reading, writing, and recording research data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This theoretical stance informs my understanding of the knowledge that I need to answer my research question as to how students' expectations and experiences influence their academic identity development in the academic community. Thus, in this research, participants were selected who were directly involved in the construction of knowledge related to academic identity, and tracing their narratives of their doctoral experiences provided the foundation for my interpretation of their knowledge. I remained open to new and subjective knowledge throughout my research and let it develop with the narratives of doctoral students.

### **3.2.3. Methodological position in this research**

Methodology is a broad term that refers to several research methods like research design, and approaches and procedures used in an investigation in order to answer research questions (Keeves, 1997). Methodology articulates the logic and flow of the research process in conducting a research project (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

By following constructionist guidelines, researchers adopt naturalistic methodology while selecting the research approach, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. I believe there might be several methods that can be employed in natural settings in order to gain insight into student subjective understanding about the phenomena of academic identity. Therefore, as a researcher, I define the following methods in detail that were most appropriate to conduct the research on academic identity development of doctoral students.

### **3.3. Qualitative research approach**

This section includes recent understanding of using a qualitative research approach in education research. Section 3.3.1 explains narrative research inquiry which is one of the designs employed in qualitative research, while 3.3.2 elaborates on the use of narrative interviews in narrative research inquiry.

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that builds narrative and holistic descriptions of a social phenomenon (Astalin, 2013). These social phenomena are the life experiences of people, the behaviors of individuals and groups, and the ways in which interactions form different relationships (Teherani et al., 2015). Moreover, these phenomena are observed in natural settings and make sense through the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). An inductive way of reasoning is applied to inquire into people's perceptions about a social context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Poni, 2014). I employed a qualitative research approach because of the basic premise that objective reality cannot be traced, and we only know things through representations of specific realities.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term which is used to refer to theoretical perspective designs such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, case study, ethnography, historical research, and content analysis (Creswell, 2012). This research study

employed a narrative research design to align the research objectives with the research method, because identity formation of individuals is best explored through capturing their past and present experiences. In turn, these experiences can be best explained in the form of stories or narratives.

### **3.3.1 Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry refers to the fact that we make sense of our lives through narratives (Bruner, 1990). The primary purpose for a narrative inquiry study is for participants to provide the researcher with their life experiences through thick rich stories. Researchers usually aim to explore the social and contextual experiences of one or more individuals through narrative research (McCarthy, 2007). These experiences can be personal, focusing on what individuals experience, and/or social which is about the experiences of people in interaction with each other (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a process in which stories are used to explore broad experiences of people (Durdella, 2019). Moreover, Elliott (2005) reported that by telling stories about past events, individuals become capable of actively reconfiguring their past experiences in the light of the present to construct and maintain a sense of their own identity.

The first overview of narrative inquiry research design in the field of education was by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). They discussed the usability of narrative research in the context of teaching and learning. Since their study, and based on their work, there has been ongoing development of narrative research within the field of education. These researchers have defined three elements or common places of a narrative inquiry; temporality, sociality, and place which specify the dimensions of an inquiry and serve as a conceptual framework for it (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Temporality means a temporal transition, participants always have a past, present, and future. A narrative inquiry tries to understand people's experiences and events which are in transition. Sociality means that a narrative inquiry focuses on the social conditions of the participants (feelings, hopes, desires, reactions) along with researchers' personal conditions. Place means the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of the place where narrative inquiry is conducted (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). These commonplaces are dimensions which need to be simultaneously explored while undertaking a narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry has several characteristics which made it a good fit with the central concerns of this research. First, narratives provide a nuanced means to explore identity as participants reveal who they are while talking about their experiences (Taylor, 2010). The second characteristic of narrative research is that it is suitable to explore experiences which unfold over time. Narrative inquiry allows for different meanings to be attributed to the same events at different times, rather than seeking an overarching coherence in stories across different times (Murray, 2009). The third is that the narrative understanding of doctoral journeys provides for substantial attention to the affective, emotional, and social dimensions of the journey. A narrative inquiry also helps to consider the way personal dimensions intersect with an institutional context (Taylor, 2011). The fourth characteristic is that narrative inquiry is well suited to exploring the 'particularities' of doctoral students' lives and documenting their views on their experiences (Cotterall, 2011).

In addition, narratives are inherently associated with identity because stories provide the meanings of events and self when individuals create a sense of their belonging in relation to a group and create their own identity (Allen, 2017). Recognising that identity is a central phenomenon in doctoral learning, narrative inquiry can be an appropriate choice because individuals construct their identities through their stories (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011; Riessman, 2008). In particular, this research adopted a narrative inquiry approach to explore the socialisation experiences of doctoral students.

### **3.3.2 Narrative Interviews**

In narrative studies, in-depth interviews provide a structure for the exchange and construction of knowledge and meanings (Mears, 2012; Silverman, 2011). Narrative interviews provide a setting that encourages and stimulates an interviewee to tell his or her story about some significant events in a social context. Narrative interviews can develop connections among events, clarify the passage of time to carry an action forward, and highlight the intentions of individuals for future goals (Coulter & Smith, 2009). This is the reason I opted to conduct narrative interviews for this study. A narrative interview can be understood as comprising a number of phases; these have been defined in the study of Bauer and Gaskell (2000). According to these authors, the first phase is "initiation" in which participants are introduced to the topic and areas to be researched. The second phase is the

“main narration.” In this phase, the researcher actively listens to the participant's story without interrupting him or her. Then at the third or “questioning phase” the researcher tends to ask probing questions after carefully listening to the participant’s story. Acknowledging these phases, I developed two interview protocols. The first interview consisted of two phases: initiation (introduction and providing interview guidelines) and the main narration (stories of stage wise experiences). The second interview covered the “questioning” phase in which I asked specific questions related to different factors which directly or indirectly influenced the academic identity development of the doctoral students who agreed to participate.

### **3.4. The research population and project sampling**

This section explains the methods for selecting an appropriate research population, research sites, and research participants. Section 3.4.1 defines the process of gaining consent from the university site to conduct a research study. This section also includes the process chosen to approach and select the research participants (Section 3.4.2).

The research population for a study is the group of people with the attributes that the researcher is concerned with, and can identify and study (Creswell, 2012). Doctoral students enrolled in the field of education in Pakistan were a potential population for my study, but I restricted the sample to doctoral students studying in University X. I did this because I had to conduct narrative research which could provide rich data and understanding of students' experiences that contributed to their academic identity in a particular context.

Qualitative researchers mainly use purposive sampling to recruit participants (Gopaldas, 2016). Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich participants (Patton, 2002). This sampling approach involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced in the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Moreover, this form of sampling comes with the potential to provide rich cases and deeper insight into the questions under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). Several different methods can be used for purposive sampling: (i) Maximum Variation Sampling, (ii) Homogeneous Sampling, (iii) Typical Case Sampling, (iv) Extreme/Deviant Case Sampling, (v) Critical Case Sampling, (vi) Total Population Sampling, and (vii) Expert Sampling, (Etikan et al.,

2016). A homogeneous sample is chosen when a researcher aims to address specific characteristics of a particular group of interest in detail. In this research, all doctoral students were from the same discipline and in the same institution. To identify participants within the group of doctoral students at University X, I used a purposive sampling technique. The following section involves the details on selecting and obtaining the consent of the participating university and the students.

#### **3.4.1. Selection of and informed consent from the participating university**

The state-run universities were the best choice for this research because they have been playing a significant role in the higher education sector. Moreover, these universities have been the focus of education policies in Pakistan. I selected a university which was one of the pioneer institutes of advanced studies in the field of education and established in 1960. This particular university enrolls students in Bachelors, Masters, MPhil, and PhD programs. Some other features also made this institute an appropriate context for exploring the phenomenon of the academic identity development of doctoral students. For instance, as one of the largest and oldest institutes, the internal state of affairs is relatively stable and consistent with the HEC policies. Another feature was that this institution has been striving to promote research activities and higher education to keep itself aligned with the changing context at national and international level. The quality of higher education research is evidenced through its national ranking which is in the top 5 institutes in Pakistan.

Initially, I faced challenges in gaining consent to conduct the study because the university officials were away due to the pandemic. I sent an email to the relevant Dean to gain consent to conduct the study, but I did not receive a reply for three weeks. I then contacted an office assistant in the Dean's office who helped me to contact him. I directly asked him to reply to my request for consent to conduct my research study. Once this was given, I asked for access to a list of doctoral students who were possible participants. I contacted 15 students on the list by email.

#### **3.4.2 Recruiting and gaining informed consent from student participants**

Twelve (12) doctoral students replied with their informal consent to be a participant. I selected the six students who met my criteria for purposive sampling:

1. The students from the field of Education voluntarily agreed to be a part of this research and share the experience of their PhD journey without any pressure.
2. The students wanted to pursue academic careers after their PhD. This was a criterion because my research aimed to explore the students' preparation for the academic profession.
3. The students agreed to give me video conferencing interviews through Zoom. I needed to consider this criterion because some students might not be able to give online interviews due to lack of resources or cultural obligations.
4. The students were full time and had completed their coursework and research proposal stages because those students could better describe or reflect on their experiences of doctoral journeys starting from coursework to research proposal, and then dissertation writing.
5. The students had diverse background areas of research (such as administration, economics, assessment) and job status (such as school/uni teaching or administration). These students could share their experiences and provide insights from multiple perspectives.

I thanked all those who offered to participate and formally sent a consent form to the selected sample, which they returned signed. I began interacting with the selected participants via email in order to build a rapport and establish their time of availability for the interviews. I found it somewhat challenging to keep in contact with all the possible participants to fix schedules, as there was a possibility of mixing schedules and losing track of participants' correspondence. To manage this, I set up a research logbook for the selected participants which detailed their names, schedule of meetings, and specific days to send them emails to keep in contact. I reviewed the logbook regularly, including before confirming the interview schedule with each of the participants.

**Table 2***Participants' information*

Sr. No	Pseudonym	Gender	Doctoral Stage 3 activities	Status
1.	Munaza	Female	Thesis submitted for evaluation	School teacher
2.	Amir	Male	Undertaking data collection	Full time study
3.	Maani	Female	Thesis ready for research seminar	Full time study
4.	Waqas	Male	Thesis ready for submission	School admin. job
5.	Kiran	Female	Undertaking data analysis	School teacher
6.	Amina	Female	Undertaking data analysis	College teacher

*Note.* Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

### 3.5 The development of the video conferencing interviews

I was in New Zealand at the time when the interviews needed to be conducted. In the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was impossible for me to go to Pakistan to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, I changed my plans and conducted online video conferencing interviews with my participants. Before conducting the online interviews, I conducted an extensive review of the literature on online video conferencing interviewing to ensure the trustworthiness of my data collection processes (Khalil & Cowie, 2020).

Access to the internet has had a prominent impact on people's social interactions as they use internet communication technologies to share and explore their everyday life realities with others. As internet use has expanded globally, this has become an opportunity for social science and education researchers to use it as a research tool to explore human interactions and experiences (James & Busher, 2012), although online interviewing is still an area for development (Archibald et al., 2019). Two uses of online interviewing have been discussed in literature — synchronous (real-time conversation through phone or video conference) and asynchronous (conversation through email or other messages at different times) (James & Busher, 2012; Sullivan, 2012). Synchronous interviews are thought to be more reliable due to real time interaction, which is why researchers have identified the utility of video conferencing for these interviews (Archibald et al., 2019; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Nehls et al., 2015).

Over the last two decades, Skype has been used widely to conduct video conferencing interviews (Hanna, 2012; Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Weller, 2015). Recently, zoom software has extended its usability with a number of features, such as

simultaneous recording, accessibility (e.g., cell phone, tablet, computer), economically affordable and user-friendliness (Archibald et al., 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2018). After my review into online interviewing, I chose to use video conferencing Zoom interviews with the participants for my research.

### **3.5.1 Pilot testing of the interview protocol and conduct**

A pilot study is a process or small-scale study in which a researcher obtains feedback from a small number of participants in order to check the suitability and credibility of planned research methods with the intention of making changes accordingly (Creswell, 2012; Kim, 2010). In qualitative research, the primary purpose of conducting a pilot study is to identify ambiguity in interview protocol and to have a chance to recheck or review the interview questions (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). Researchers can carefully evaluate the interview guide, relevance of questions (Secomb & Smith, 2011), and most importantly, the language of the questions that should not be complex and difficult for participants to understand (Colton & Covert, 2007). This process can also be called “pretesting”, whereby a researcher makes sure that there is no ambiguity and complexity in the research instrument and that the produced data helps to ascertain the validity and reliability of research instruments (Colton & Covert, 2007).

Generally, a pilot study is conducted at the beginning of a main research project, and it can save a lot of resources (time and money) if it is done properly (Bordens & Abbott, 2018). Moreover, a pilot study might help researchers to gauge the suitability of participants, their recruitment process and content validity of the interview guide (Secomb & Smith, 2011). Researchers are also able to undertake data collection procedures on a small scale to have some practice and receive useful feedback for the intended interviews in the main research project (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Majid et al., 2017; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). Furthermore, a pilot study can help researchers to gain some idea about the potential results of their proposed research (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Secomb & Smith, 2011). Consequently, after completing a pilot study, researchers can have a chance to step back and review their procedures and finalise any revisions to their research methods based on their reflections on the pilot initiative (Seidman, 2013).

After consideration of the recent literature on the emergence of video conference interviews for research purposes, and significance of pilot testing in qualitative research, I approached two participants from the target population and conducted video conferencing interviews with them through Zoom. I developed a narrative interview protocol based on my knowledge and experience of research. My supervisors also provided their expert opinion on the interview protocol. The protocol consisted of two main phases, so I decided to cover both phases in two different interviews. The first interview was based on carefully listening to the narratives that doctoral students provided about their experiences followed by some prompts about their experiences of different stages of the process.

In the second interview, I asked some specific questions based on the theoretical framework of the research. The participants were asked about factors that influenced their experiences and the different roles they had been involved in during their doctoral education.

In the course of the pilot stage, I aimed to examine three main areas: the interview protocol, the data collection process, and possible data analysis techniques, to elicit conceptual and contextual understanding for my subsequent research project (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). In the next section I set out my findings about each of these aspects and the revisions which I made based on the results of the pilot study.

#### ***3.5.1.1 Pilot testing insights***

I anticipated that it might be exhausting or tiresome for me and the participants to cover all phases in one interview. The pilot study helped me to confirm the value of conducting two interviews rather than one, as the participants were also comfortable to provide the information in two interviews.

I found that some interview questions were not easy for one participant to understand and had to explain these questions further. Correspondingly, after conducting the pilot interview, I modified the particular questions to clarify them. I also had the opportunity to review the language and sentence structure of the questions. After listening to the participants' responses, I recognised that two or three interview questions had a very similar meaning or were overlapping, so I removed such questions. In addition, the response of the participants triggered me to change the order or sequence of some questions.

The pilot study interviews were also an interesting rehearsal for the process of data collection. I acquired some experience in using appropriate devices, equipment, and software for conducting video conferencing interviews. I preferred to use a laptop because it was handy and had an inbuilt camera. I also had the option of different software to be used for video conference interviews but above all Zoom was quite easy to access, affordable, user friendly and had good audio-video quality as well as simultaneous recording feature. Moreover, during the interview I observed that the participants were quite comfortable and confident with Zoom because they had been involved in meetings with his supervisor through this software.

I also faced the challenge of conducting the interviews late at night due to the different time zones in Pakistan and New Zealand. I conducted the interview at 4am because the participants agreed to give the interview at evening time in Pakistan after they had completed their professional and domestic responsibilities. This was a learning lesson for me to keep myself active and fully involved in the late-night interview. I mentally prepared myself for the formal interviews ahead.

Furthermore, I had planned to conduct the pilot interview in English, but at the start of the first interview, I observed one of the participants was not very confident about sharing his experiences in English. Recognising this, I gave him the option of sharing his experiences in his native language. As a result, he started speaking confidently in Urdu language and sometimes mixed the English and Urdu languages. In this way, he provided me with rich information, which was the requirement of a narrative interview.

According to my plan, I had anticipated one hour for the first interview, but the pilot study interview showed me that I should not expect the interviews to fit a rigid timeframe. I learned not to interfere when a participant speaks about his or her experiences and recognised that participants may take longer than expected to share their narratives. Although literature has reported that it is possible to observe nonverbal cues during video interviews, I was unable to clearly observe situational factors and the body language and other nonverbal cues of my participants.

By conducting a pilot study interview, I also had an opportunity to gain an enhanced understanding of reliable data analysis techniques. Here, I was mainly concerned with the translation of the interview from Urdu to English language. I learned that it might take a long time to translate when a native speaker uses some jargon, contractions, and half sentences in their common conversation. I used a dictionary to translate some typical words in Urdu language and tried my best to provide the same meaning in the English language.

During the pilot study, organising and categorising rich data was also a learning experience for me. In the first interview, I tried to organise the data in MS office, but it was somewhat problematic to manage. Therefore, I realized I should use appropriate software (NVivo) for organising and analysing the data of the second interview, which was quite helpful. After the practice in data analysis, I succeeded in developing an understanding of emerging themes and how I could link these themes with the theoretical framework.

I developed confidence and understanding for conducting formal interviews through the experience of the pilot study interview. This pilot study led me to adopt appropriate research methods to conduct reliable research and data collection.

### **3.6 Data collection procedures**

After the pilot testing and making significant revisions to my interview protocol, I emailed the participants to ascertain their availability for the online interviews. I wanted to find a time which would be convenient for me as well as the participants. I aimed to conduct two interviews with each participant to avoid tiredness and exhaustion of the participants. In the first interview, I asked them to tell me the story of their expectations and experiences in different PhD stages (coursework, research proposal, and dissertation) in order to explore their changing experiences and identity development in different stages. In the follow up interviews, I asked them some questions about individual factors (such as family support, interactions, motivation, and writing) that influenced their PhD experience and academic identity development. I digitally recorded all the interviews, and took notes while observing the participants, which was an important tool for later data analysis. In keeping with the narrative inquiry and interview methods, I let the participants lead the conversation in the interviews and share the story of their experiences in as much detail as they wanted. I gave the participants authority and control to go beyond question-answers without intervening in

their talking time, use of language, and expressions. I positioned myself as a good listener all the time.

The logistics of the formal interviews were generally positive with a few issues. These interviews were conducted at night time in New Zealand (evening in Pakistan due to 8 hours difference) because that was convenient for the participants in Pakistan. I already had some practice in the pilot testing, so I managed the interviews well and conducted the interview actively as I had planned. I used Zoom to conduct the video interviews as it was user friendly and easily available for my participants and me. I had a good experience when using this software because it had good audio and video quality that gave me some help in understanding the nonverbal cues of the participants. Moreover, this software has a video recording feature. One participant was interested in giving the interview on the phone via WhatsApp, but I shared a download link of Zoom and requested her to use Zoom software because I wanted to record the interview which is not possible on WhatsApp. The participant agreed to this and gave an interview through Zoom. Some of the same issues arose as in the pilot testing. While I asked participants to ensure they had reliable internet connections, some participants still had internet connectivity issues which disrupted the interviews on a few occasions. For instance, during one interview, the participant went offline due to a power outage and came back online after ten minutes. In addition, there were some issues with lag in sound and video, and indistinct sound from the participant's side.

Many researchers have talked about the accessibility and flexibility of online interviews with such interviews being less expensive and more time efficient than in-person interviews. This view was generally validated by my experience, although there were some challenges for interviewees. Participants were willing to be interviewed once they were free from their professional and domestic responsibilities. It was easy for the participants to find a quiet space for the online interviews, something that could have been difficult in face-to-face interviews. The participants were relaxed and able to provide information without any distractions while sitting in their homes. However, one of the participants experienced some disruptions from his children during the interview. One of the aspects I recognised was that participants with family members around found it hard to maintain attention during the interviews. Also, participants' fatigue after day-long professional and domestic

responsibilities affected the interview time, and I noticed that participants wanted to wind up interviews as soon as possible.

Some aspects of communication required special attention. Non-verbal communication was one of these areas. It was difficult to make eye contact and read the emotions and body language of the participants over the screen as easily as one could in face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, I tried to use facial expressions to indicate attention and to affirm their commentary through sounds like 'hmm' and 'yeah'. I hoped that these indicators would help to make the participants feel comfortable so they would be prepared and able to provide me with the maximum information. I believe this practice helped me to gain rich data from the participants. Social and cultural aspects were also very important during the video conferencing interviews. These factors included using the participants' preferred language to conduct the interviews. As I noted in the pilot study, I invited the participants to speak in any language that was easy for them, either Urdu or English. Another challenge arose when interviewing a female participant. Having a background from Pakistan, I could anticipate that some people have rigidly bound social norms and traditions whereby talking across genders does not often happen. Due to such social norms, female doctoral students might be hesitant to participate and share their experiences. Therefore, I was conscious of ethical and social protocols while interviewing the female participants. I was afraid that hesitancy in asking questions and vice versa would risk the reliability of the data and lead to incomplete information. I also considered that the recording of the interview with a female participant needed to be handled carefully. Due to some social and religious obligations, some women do not want their video or pictures to be shared publicly. I had to convince the participants that this interview recording would be viewed only by me and the supervisors, that no harm would come to anyone, and I would use the data only for my research. Moreover, as a male researcher, I was more comfortable during the interview with my male participant. Similarly, the male participants appeared relaxed and comfortable while providing me with information.

The length of the interview was also important in the video conferencing interviews. I was expecting a one-hour interview, but all interviews extended to almost two hours. I had planned to let the participant respond to an open question in the first part of the interview,

and in the second part, I would ask specific questions based on my theoretical framework. However, I felt that the participants were exhausted and would not be able to provide in-depth answers to the crucial questions from the second part. After the first interview, I thought I should have taken a break for five minutes between the parts, but at the same time, I was worried about the disruption to the interview momentum.

### **3.7 Analysis and reporting of narrative interviews**

Narrative analysis is an analytical frame through which the researcher can interpret the stories and experiences of the individual and present substantial and meaningful interpretation while considering all the elements of a particular context (Parcell & Baker, 2018). These researchers explained that qualitative researchers intentionally collect stories about a certain type of experience or series of experiences for the purpose of thematic analysis. Then, by analysing the content of the stories researchers aim to determine what experiences are noteworthy and meaningful for respondents. Finally, researchers begin to extract prominent themes from the narratives to look across other narratives describing similar experiences (Parcell & Baker, 2018).

Thematic analysis is a useful approach to examine the multiple perspectives of each participant, highlight similarities and differences, and also supports generating insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has been widely used for qualitative research analysis, but there is no consensus about the exact way it should be done (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Nowell et al., 2017; Tuckett, 2005). Thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyse and report themes within a data set, and a theme reflects something significant in the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While having theoretical freedom, thematic analysis offers a flexible approach which can be modified according to the objectives of studies and provides rich and detailed understanding about phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2019), in their recent work reported that researcher's role in knowledge production is at the heart of reflexive thematic analysis. They viewed that themes reflect considerable analytic work and are actively created by the researcher at the intersection of data, analytic process, and subjectivity. Themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding rather they need to be identified by the researcher. Reflexive thematic analysis basically creative and interpretive stories about the data which is produced at the

intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytical skills, and the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

From a constructionist perspective, experiences and meanings are socially produced and reproduced by individuals to theorise about the socio-cultural context and structural conditions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis can be a constructionist method, which can examine and report the experiences, meaning and reality of the participants with a particular context. Furthermore, an inductive approach of analysis is a process of coding the data without relying on the preconceptions of the researcher and fitting it into a pre-existing coding framework. Hence, I employed an inductive approach of analysis in which themes may have a minimum association with the theoretical framework and analysis was based purely on the narratives of the doctoral students.

I followed six phases for thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), (i) familiarizing yourself with data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the report. Each phase was followed rigorously to enhance the trustworthiness of thematic analysis.

### **3.7.1 Familiarisation with the data (translation and transcription of the interviews)**

Transcription produces textual data for analysis and establishes a foundation for rigour in the research process. A transcript captures participants' words, language, and expressions, which are particularly valued in qualitative research and help the researcher to decode the behaviour and cultural meanings attached to a phenomenon (Hennink & Weber, 2013). However, transcription is not only the words used by participants, but also the meanings and concepts attached to the words, descriptions and expressions that provide a deeper understanding of the research issues within the socio-cultural context of the study (Hennink, 2008). Students in my study were more comfortable telling me the stories of their experiences in mixed languages (Urdu and English). So, I began to translate and transcribe the interviews at the same time. I had to translate only parts of students' interviews which were in the Urdu language. Importantly, all students used English language to explain their research-related terms because they were writing their own research dissertation in English language. Correspondingly, I did not have to interfere with or translate their research-related terms such as topics, research objectives, methods used for research.

Once translation and transcription were completed, I read the interviews and listened to the recording of the interviews. My aim was to deepen my familiarity with and general understanding of students' stories, and to check the accuracy of my transcriptions. This process helped me to complete the incomplete sentences and eliminated extra words, such as *hmm* and *aah*, without distorting the expressions and meanings of the students' stories. Then I reread the transcriptions without audio to gain more familiarity with the students' stories.

### ***3.7.1.1 Member checking summaries of the interviews***

The member checking technique involves returning an interview transcript or analysed data to participants to validate (Doyle, 2007). Member checking is also known as participant validation and enhances the credibility of the research as a result of the approval of the participants (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The checking process provides an opportunity for researchers to gain an accurate picture of participants who are allowed to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretations of data, which adds credibility to qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After I transcribed the interviews, I prepared short summaries of each interview for member checking. I was concerned that the participants would not have the inclination or the time to read the lengthy transcriptions of their interviews. So, I read the transcriptions thoroughly, and wrote summaries highlighting the main points and experiences that emerged from their interviews. I wanted to nurture the trust of the participants, make sure my assumptions were correct, gain further insights, and deepen my understanding of the data. To this end, I emailed a copy of the summaries to the research participants and requested them to re-check their interviews and to indicate if they would like to add, remove, or clarify any point in their interview summaries. All participants appreciated reading the summaries of their interviews and approved their use for my research analysis.

### **3.7.2 Generating initial codes**

Coding was the second step in analysing the students' stories. Codes are considered to be the most basic elements of raw data that can be seen as meaningful for further analysis of a phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). In the coding process, I had to review the students' stories and dissect the data into chunks. Guest et al. (2011) suggest that developing a codebook is an

important analytical tool which helps to maintain a systematic and replicable approach towards source data and 's interpretation of those data. Moreover, a codebook supports incorporating the elements of texts directly into initial codes to highlight emerging themes rather than creating a dense layer of codes throughout the text. Consequently, I developed a codebook to organize and distribute extensive data into codes. The next section details the steps I followed in the initial coding process.

First, I divided students' experiences into three different stages or prominent milestones: course work, research proposal, and dissertation (See Section 1.5). I put the content of students' narrated experiences in three different columns respectively. For the next step, I assigned a code or label to each chunk of the data which contained descriptive or inferential information. As I was employing an inductive approach for thematic analysis, the codes were not predetermined but rather extracted from the students' stories. I reviewed those stories again line by line to generate either new codes or sub-codes based on the initial codes that I had assigned to the data. Throughout the coding process I was trying to make sense of what the stories were telling me.

My decision to assign a code to the chunks of data was not merely based on the recurrence of keywords; rather the process involved identifying some part of students' stories where they talked about an experience, continued to describe that experience, used any metaphor to illustrate that experience, and the context in which that experience was mentioned. The excerpt below provides an example of my coding process. The extract is a part of the story narrated by a participant. This chunk of data indicates how doctoral students explained their intention of learning through interactions.

My teachers were good; they developed a desire to get knowledge and learn. They showed us the other side of the academic world, the world that is going to stay. Come into the world of academic writing, write something and you will get eternity in the world of knowledge. Write something and your name will be remembered.

The text was coded as *“teacher Interactions”* and further into sub-code labelled as *“improving writing”* and *“inspiration for learning”*.

*Extracted from the story of Waqas.*

The things I shared with you regarding my learning a major part of it is due to my fellows. Because a variety of students were there. Some

students were good in analysis, some were good in philosophy, quantitative, qualitative etc. I was on very good terms with my fellows in respect of learning.

The text was coded as “*peer Interactions*” and further into sub-code labelled as “*shared learning*” and “*unique expertise*”. *Extracted from the story of Waqas.*

An important aspect of the coding process was finding appropriate definitions for the codes. As codes were developed inductively, they were guided by a set of criteria defining each code and assigning a chunk of data to that code. I defined each code with some description about the code and the part of the data. With reference to the same example, which is provided above, the codes and their definition were as follows:

**Code:** *Teacher interaction*

Definition: students interact with teachers who provide academic and emotional support.

**Sub-code:** *improving writing*

Definition: Teachers guide students to improve their writing.

**Sub-code:** *inspiration for learning*

Definition: Teachers provide inspiration to their students for learning.

**Code:** *Peer interaction*

Definition: students’ interaction with peers who provide academic and emotional support.

**Sub-code:** *shared learning*

Definition: students engage in shared learning activities with their peers

**Sub-code:** *unique expertise*

Definition: students interact with peers who have unique academic interests/expertise

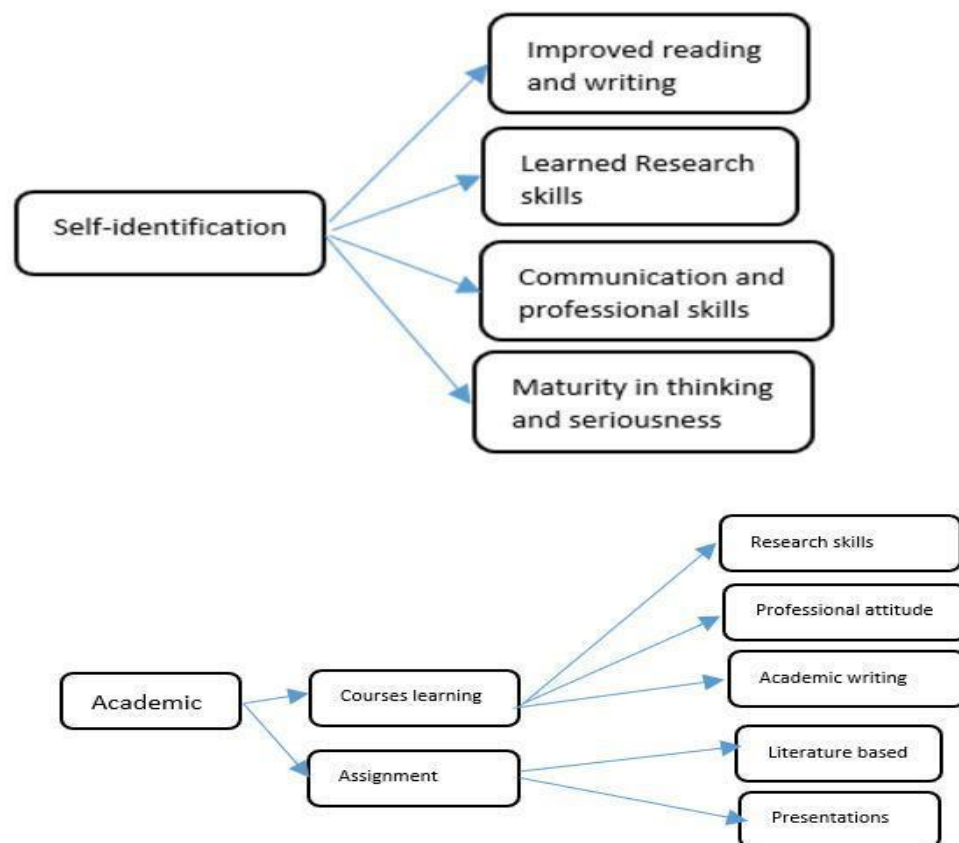
It was an iterative method to expand the definitions of the codes. It involved a continuous review/reflection on the definitions of the codes and instances of selecting data for them. This system also helped me to ensure that data within a code or sub-code was consistent throughout the process.

### 3.7.3 Searching for emerging themes

The next step in the analysis was to identify the themes that were emerging from the codes. This phase involved sorting the different codes into potential themes. I thoroughly reviewed the initial codes in the students' narratives within and across three stages and started to consider how different codes may combine to form overarching themes. I tried to combine the codes into potential themes which gave some sense of the big ideas. The following is an example thematic map that I used to identify themes in the narrative of Waqas.

**Figure 2**

*Example of emerging themes*



*Extracted from the story of Waqas.*

In the example, I considered self-identification as a theme which was one of the assumptions of role identity theory that students assess themselves or self-evaluate their performance while improving their reading and writing skills, learning research skills, positive change in thinking, and improving communication. And in the second example, I considered academic

and non-academic activities of students during the first stage (coursework). Academic activities included the courses students studied, and the nature of assignments they done.

#### **3.7.4 Reviewing themes**

After the initial identification of the emerging themes, I thoroughly reviewed and compared the codes and how they could come together to form emerging themes. For this purpose, I also reviewed some themes that did not make sense independently and also instances where I did not have enough data to support those themes. In some cases, I had to merge two or more themes into one large theme, and sometimes I had to break down a theme into two different themes because they had a different meaning. There should be meaningful data for each theme, and themes should be clearly distinct and identifiable from each other. Moreover, researchers should be careful of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990).

Additionally, I had to review and re-read all data to verify that the emerging themes were consistent with students' stories of their experiences, and to check if some distinctive code was missed in the previous process of data coding. I had to make many thematic maps linking different codes with different themes. The main problem was that there were many possible ways to connect and interpret the codes and themes. I wanted to ensure that my combination of codes and the emerging themes accurately conveyed the significant aspects of participants' narratives. I recognised that data coding is a continuous process until the eventual clarification of the themes and writing the report of research findings.

#### **3.7.5 Defining and naming the themes**

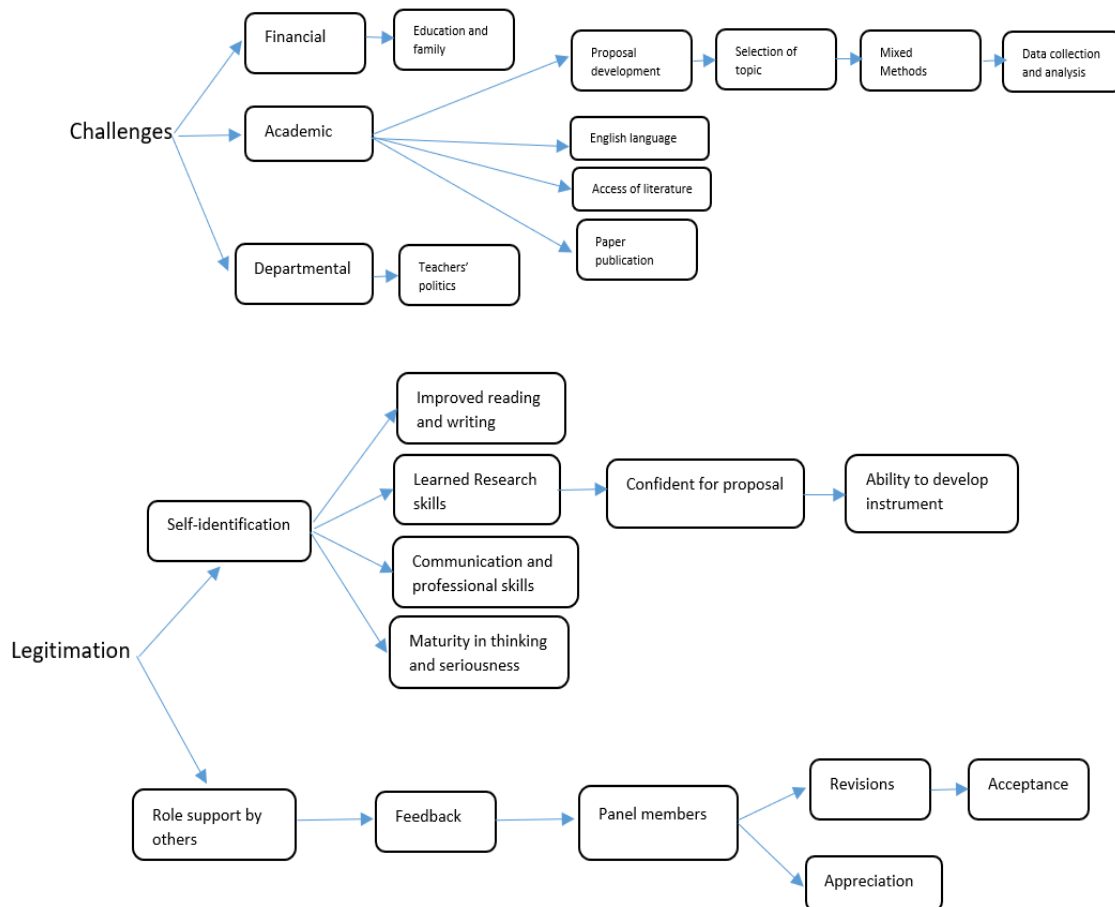
This was the final step in identifying the emerging themes in a way that accurately represented the students' stories and provided the foundation for analysis based on those themes. I had to name the themes accurately to convey the meaning of different parts of the data set. Furthermore, I had to consider how those themes would contribute to an overall structure of a written account which would communicate the ways in which students reported that their experiences influenced their academic identity.

I was mindful that I would have to write a detailed story/analysis for each theme and then integrate the themes into a coherent account. At the same time, I recognised that each theme

was important for its separate contribution to the narratives as well as its place within the overall structure of the analysis. Moreover, it was important to consider how each potential theme and its relationship with sub-themes would contribute to answering the research questions without ambiguity. This larger picture perspective helped to develop a structure and hierarchy of meaning within the data. The following is an example from Waqas’s story in which I combined the codes of financial, academic, and departmental, into a potential theme that was named “challenges”. Likewise, I made “self-identification” as a theme earlier, but then I considered it as a sub-theme to combine with another sub-theme namely “support of others”, Finally I combined both themes into one emerging theme named ‘role legitimation’ which was a potential theme for analysis and writing about the students’ narratives.

**Figure 3**

*Example of finalising themes*



*Extracted from the story of Waqas.*

At the end of this phase, I named and defined all the themes independently to clarify their scope and the nature of the content. I made my mind clear about the interpretation of each theme, their relationship with the data set, and their contribution in the structure of the research analysis. Based on the above example, I then identified and named the themes as illustrated here:

***Theme: challenges***

Definition: All the problems students face during their doctoral experiences and their academic identity development

***Theme: role-legitimation***

Definition: Students gain validation of their role identities through self-identification and support of others.

### **3.7.6 Reporting results/findings**

After completing the code book and extracting potential themes from the students' stories, I began the process of crafting my thesis chapters. The purpose of the write-up of thematic analysis is to write a coherent story which convinces the readers of the validity of your analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Correspondingly, I aimed for a write-up which would present a concise, logical, coherent, and non-repetitive account of stories that the data tells within and across themes.

I planned a write-up of the analysis in two phases. In the first phase, I created six different case studies based on the particularities and potential themes in the stories of the participants. For each case, I divided students' stories in three different categories: role of learner (coursework), role of emerging researcher (research proposal), role of emerging academic (dissertation writing) based on role identity theory and the stage approach of doctoral milestones. Then I wrote narratives around potential themes for each specific section leading to an account of participants' gradual identity development with respect to their knowledge, confidence, and independence in performing academic activities. In the second phase of the analysis, I examined all six cases together and extracted three broad themes (interaction, motivation, writing) which were common within and across the cases in the development of their role identities.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested providing sufficient evidence of the themes from the data. During the writing stories of students' experiences and their identity development, I used various quotes from the data to demonstrate each theme so as to ensure the validity of the data analysis.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research involves numerous ethical issues owing to the intensive personal contact between the researcher and their participants (Yin, 2011). Ethical issues arise in different ways depending on the nature of the problem being investigated and the methods used to obtain data (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the researcher is responsible for protecting study participants from any harm whether it is physical, social, or psychological (Cohen et al., 2007). I adopted the following procedures to avoid personal bias and protect study participants from any sort of harm.

#### **3.8.1 Position of the researcher or researcher reflexivity**

Broadly, reflexivity is based on the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm which aims to highlight subjective and multiple realities (Cunliffe, 2004), because reflexivity questions the values and preconceptions of the researcher's subjective understanding that is involved in constructing reality and claiming new knowledge (Haynes, 2012). Reflexivity is defined as a process of self-evaluation or awareness of a researcher's own role in research. It explicitly acknowledges that the researcher's position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015; Gemignani, 2017; Haynes, 2012; Lambert et al., 2010; Pillow, 2003). Through reflexivity researchers openly acknowledge the changes that take place in themselves as a result of the research process and the way these changes may affect the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017).

Edge (2011) characterised reflexivity as comprising two different aspects, - prospective reflexivity and retrospective reflexivity. Prospective reflexivity deals with the effect of the researcher on the research and retrospective reflexivity concerns the effect of research on the researcher. Prospective reflexivity has been more focused on in recent qualitative research as a way to counter the impact of the researcher's status, gender, ethnicity, and their insider or outsider standing in the research setting (Attia & Edge, 2017).

In my research study, there were many aspects that necessitated a sustained reflexive stance. I intended to investigate the phenomenon of academic identity of doctoral students in the country and the university where I had completed my recent education. Moreover, my position as a doctoral student conducting research on doctoral education has a paradoxical aspect. In relation to my research study, I was both an insider and an outsider.

My position related to the research site (country and university) may be viewed as that of an insider due to completing my recent education from the same university, but an outsider due to studying at a university in New Zealand where I was actively conducting this research. On the other hand, because of my insider standing, it was relatively easy for me to acquire access to the university, something that could be difficult for an outsider researcher (Mercer, 2007). Besides, I already had some familiarity with the learning culture, policies, and procedures of the university and this was helpful for me to understand the complexities of conducting research in that university. Thorne (2016) pointed out that it is often difficult and time consuming for an outsider researcher to understand the context and complex procedures and policies of an organization.

My position in relation to the research participants was that of an outsider because I did not know the participants currently enrolled in the university, and an insider because I was also a doctoral student. At the same time, my doctoral degree programme in New Zealand is based on the British model whereas students at the university where I conducted this research were experiencing the American model. In this situation, I was an outsider to the participants, someone who had been involved in different academic experiences due to a different model of doctoral education. Communication was aided by my insider status as I had some familiarity with the context (norms and culture of people), so I was able to engage with and access the participants easily, which could be difficult for an outsider researcher. Due to a familiar context, I was more mindful and conscious of the potential cultural concerns of the female participants and could provide them with a comfortable space to record their narratives.

In recognition of my insider position, I adopted several ways to remain neutral, open, and reflexive in my position as a doctoral student and as someone researching doctoral education. I was vigilant in reflecting on my reactions to the participants' stories so that I was able to

negotiate my position between an insider and outsider. Thorne (2016) advises that documenting whatever is happening conceptually and subjectively during research engagement can guide the researcher in their inductive and analytical process. Therefore, I used a reflexive journal as a tool to support my reflexive practice as a researcher working within qualitative research (Engin, 2011; Mann, 2016; Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

### ***3.8.1.1 Reflexive journal***

A reflexive journal or research diary is often described in research methodology as a way to log decisions made and write down reflections on the research process (Gibbs, 2007; Silverman, 2011). Maintaining the diary provided me with insights into my own experiences and reactions to conducting the research process and interpreting the data. This journal acted as a repository of my personal reflections and supported my understanding of the role of reflexivity in my research. In reflexive practices, researchers need to incorporate multiple layers and levels of reflections within the research process (Haynes, 2012). Therefore, throughout my research endeavors, I had a reflexive diary to record my own thoughts, ideas, reflections, brainstorming, and mind maps. I tended to write everything (especially challenges) whenever I felt I needed to get something off my chest. I used to write something every day or every week depending on the research stage I was at any particular moment. I could record more entries at the later stage of my PhD because I had to do a lot of analytical and conceptual work in my research. Sometimes journal entries covered issues not directly relevant to my PhD research; for example, I liked to write about my journey as an international student. Sometimes I wrote about matters such as conferences, seminars, and career options which were linked to the wider context of my PhD.

Overall, the research journal provided me with a space to reflect on my journey through the PhD and helped me to be vigilant about my potential personal bias and influence in my interpretation of the participants' narratives. My notes were messy and scattered because I had to write about many aspects of my research journey. The observations were primarily handwritten, used informal expressions, contained typos, and sometimes written in Urdu language as well. The journal was a place to keep taking stock of myself in the research journey and helped me to record my PhD challenges and the ways I countered those

challenges through personal reflections (Khalil, 2022) as well as assist me to limit personal bias.

### **3.8.2 Informed consent**

This was a procedure through which respondents were informed about the facts that can affect their decision to participate in this study (Diener & Crandall, 1978). I followed four basic elements of this procedure: (i) competence: It means the participants are responsible and can make the right decision about their participation, (ii) voluntarism: ensures that participants are freely taking part in this research, (iii) full information: participants should be provided with maximum information about the research study, and (iv) comprehension: the researcher makes sure that participants have understood the purpose of their inclusion and the objectives of the study. It is argued that informed consent might limit the data from respondents because they can be over conscious about the research (Cohen et al., 2011). In this research I approached and sampled senior PhD students who already knew the limitations and significance of PhD research, so they were willing to provide data without any pressure. Moreover, I informed them about the purpose of the study and the implications of obtained information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Ryan et al., 2008). I explained to them about the amount of time required for participation, methods, and devices to be used for data collection, intended use of the data and issues of confidentiality. They were assured that the completed study would not disclose their personal identity. The foregoing explanations were openly issued prior to data collection using both verbal and written accounts, as I provided the full information relating to the study.

### **3.8.3 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Participants' right of privacy is ensured through anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity means the information provided by the participants should not reveal their identity and confidentiality means not revealing any information about the participants by which they could be traced or identified (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, I ensured that the participants remained anonymous by making certain that their identity could not be determined from the provided information. Surrogate numbers or names were used instead of real names of the participants to protect their identity. Moreover, participants were completely assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. Prior to all interviews, I requested and informed the participants about the purpose of recording the conversation through Zoom

technology and note taking. I assured the participants that the information provided would remain confidential and only be used for the intended research purposes.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented the research paradigm, approaches and methods employed in the conduct of this research. I followed the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm and defined my ontological, epistemological, methodological stances based on my research questions. I adopted a qualitative research approach and chose a narrative inquiry research approach to conducting narrative interviews of PhD students about their doctoral experiences. I selected six PhD students from a renowned university in Pakistan through purposive sampling. I conducted two narrative interviews with each participant on Zoom. The first elicited their stories of experiences in the different doctoral stages of their doctoral education and the second covered some questions about factors derived from literature. I chose a thematic analysis approach for analysis of students' stories about their expectations and experiences in their doctoral education. I wrote individual case studies for each participant, and then cross cases analysis in the following two chapters.

## Chapter 4

### Six cases: participants' stories

#### 4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the individual cases of the six students who shared stories of their PhD Journeys. Each case includes a description of the participant's background and their goals when enrolling in the PhD. The cases explore the expectations and experiences of students that shaped their role identities as a learner, emerging researcher, and emerging academic in the different stages of their doctoral education. Students' expectations and experiences are presented in the three key institutional milestone stages of coursework and comprehensive exam, research proposal, and dissertation writing. All participants in my research were on stage 3. The variation in students' expectations and experiences is emphasised and the different role identities available and possible in each stage are highlighted. A short summary is also presented at the end of each case.

#### Case-1

#### 4.2. Introducing Munaza

Munaza was a female school teacher who had recently completed her MPhil. She had good research experience in her MPhil which inspired her to continue her learning and research aspirations to do a PhD in Education. She had a successful academic background which helped her to secure an HEC indigenous scholarship for her PhD study. She also decided to enroll at a different institution which would provide her with a new learning environment, because she had spent eight years of her education in the previous institution. She commented, "*there were many expectations at the time of the admission that there would be a good learning environment [in the new institution]*". Although education of women has not generally been given much encouragement in Pakistan, fortunately, Munaza had the full support of her family to do a PhD.

Munaza narrated that she had had mixed feelings of confidence and nervousness throughout her PhD journey. She appeared to have a dynamic nature or personality, sometimes negating or contrasting with her comments about her experiences. She was strongly influenced by and reflective about her prior academic experiences throughout her PhD studies. The following

sections set out her expectations and experiences which shaped her role identity development in different stages of her PhD.

#### **4.2.1 Role identity as a learner**

In the coursework of one year (two semesters), Munaza wanted to improve her disciplinary knowledge and research skills and so she was excited to be embarking on new learning experiences. She was offered several foundational and research courses, which were compulsory, to enhance her understanding and knowledge of the field of education. She had the support of her teachers and classmates in classroom learning activities.

##### **4.2.1.1 Nervousness, and support of student peers and teachers**

At the start of the first semester, Munaza did not feel very confident because she had little knowledge of the learning culture at the institution. She explained, *“my excitement was gone somewhere, and I was nervous. I had mixed feelings”*. She was expecting a lot of support from her classmates and the course teachers. During this phase, she tended to compare herself with her fellow students who had previously studied in the institution and so were familiar with each other, the teachers, and the learning culture. Her interaction with classmates was supportive and collaborative on a daily basis, which helped her to understand the learning culture and to complete course assignments. She commented *“we cooperated in the assignments whenever we needed help.”* Additionally, Munaza appreciated the course teachers who provided her with substantial support in her learning and engaged her in research-based activities. She was actively involved when the teachers engaged her in activity-based learning and writing activities. She explained *“that [activities] were different from the traditional way of lecturing”*. The activities included *“projects, presentations in each course, short assignments on a daily basis and quizzes were also there.”*

##### **4.2.1.2 Learning research methods through formal and informal events**

Munaza believed that formal classroom and activity-based learning helped her to understand the practical implications of different research methods. She learned about various research designs and paradigms. She also improved her academic writing skills and explained that *“we learned a lot in the [academic writing] course like how to take up ideas logically”*. Furthermore, she emphasised she had learned the purpose of a literature review and *“how to see and cite the literature”*. Research design, research paradigms, data analysis, exploring

and citing literature, and writing logically are the fundamentals of research, and all researchers need to be proficient in these aspects to be regarded as a good researcher. Munaza's comments suggest that she recognised that she had gained competency in these key research aspects as part of her learning during the first semester of coursework.

Moreover, Munaza reported that during the coursework she had sought out and taken up the opportunities to understand and or further clarify research concepts through participation in the informal academic events arranged in the department. She purposefully attended seminars and workshops to help her to clarify research concepts and methods. She explained that:

*When I was completing my coursework, my understanding about qualitative research was not very clear. I was very clear after attending some sessions [seminars and workshops]. I developed more about the things [concepts] that I already had an understanding about.*

We can see in this comment that Munaza had taken a proactive approach to enhance her learning based on her self-assessment that her understanding was not as robust as she would have liked.

#### **4.2.1.3 Getting confidence in her area of specialisation and revision of concepts**

Moving into the next semester, Munaza was feeling quite confident as compared with the first semester. Her motivation was strong when she chose her specialty courses which were "comparative assessment, and large-scale assessment", both topics that were new for her. She had an interest in educational assessment because this had been her focus in her MPhil. She commented: "I got many things to learn from that. It made my thinking and attitude stronger towards assessment because assessment was my area of interest". Consequently, she intended to conduct a research project in the area of educational assessment.

At the end of her first year, Munaza had to pass the university's comprehensive examination before she could start working on her research proposal. The examination was a multidisciplinary examination based on the courses she studied during the two semesters of the coursework. She commented that this experience provided her with an opportunity to revise the main concepts from the courses she had taken. She thought this because she was going to conduct research in that area.

#### **4.2.1.4 Concluding comments**

In analysing her first-year experience, Munaza sometimes contradicted herself over the course of an interview. For example, later in the interview she stated: *“very frankly I say I did not learn many things in the content I studied in the first semester.”* This statement was made when she was talking about the courses in the area of specialisation in the second semester. The contradiction may be due to her memory and dynamic nature, or it could be owing to her prior experience, as she acknowledged *“I had a very good experience in my MPhil.”* Perhaps she was reflecting on what new learning she had gained in the coursework.

Munaza concluded that she had worked hard to enhance her understanding of research methods and had adapted to the learning culture in the new institution. She explained that *“I came from another institution, so I was a bit nervous, and it took almost one semester or two in understanding the system and seeing things through different perspectives.”* She observed a change in her confidence and capacity to perform research and academic activities and said, *“I had developed to minimise my nervousness. I got an idea to handle things like how I was to manage the assignments or research. Overall, this stage had led to her improving her disciplinary knowledge and research skills. This foundational knowledge and understanding were preparation for her to begin a research proposal and move into the stage of the research proposal.”*

#### **4.2.2 Role Identity as an emerging researcher**

While developing a research proposal, Munaza was required to demonstrate a practical application of her research knowledge. This was a critical stage transition for her, as she needed to adapt her thinking to formulate a research proposal and apply her theoretical research knowledge to a practical research project design. She aimed to start this research period with the support of a supervisor in her area of research, which was educational assessment.

##### **4.2.2.1 Identifying research ideas for further investigation**

Munaza had some ideas for the focus of her PhD research project when she started her PhD. She aimed to make a significant contribution to the field of educational assessment: *“I was motivated to start my research and explore the things [the area of student assessment] with different dimensions”*. Munaza explained she had positive prior research experience, and she

wanted to extend her research in the same field in her PhD. She read the extensive literature in her research area and aligned the ideas in it with her own practical experience in school teaching. She considered “*feedback methods*” as part of assessment that had not been common in the education system in Pakistan and so by doing research on feedback, she could make a significant contribution. She explained:

*I felt that I could not give feedback to the students, especially at school level through the feedback strategies which I had used. I had to adopt other techniques and feedback methods so I could provide them [my students] with feedback according to [literature-based] feedback methods. I carried this idea [exploring feedback methods for student assessment] into my PhD research.*

#### **4.2.2.2 Interest in a research experiment and contribution in new knowledge**

While teaching at the school level, Munaza realised she could not give feedback to her students based on the feedback strategies advocated in research. She had experience of conducting experimental research into classroom assessment based on one aspect of Bloom’s Taxonomy in her MPhil study. For her doctoral study she wanted to use research-based feedback methods and assessment techniques covering all aspects of Bloom’s Taxonomy for her research experiment in a graduate Education class at university level. Her MPhil research experience, teaching at school level, and reading literature for her PhD all helped her to relate to and apply the theories of assessment to her experimental research. She was also conscious of anticipating and avoiding practical challenges when selecting research methods in her research proposal. She explained:

*Like when you write something about methodology, I ask myself how would I apply the ideas when I go to the field? And what kind of hurdles I might face? I developed my proposal while keeping all these things in my mind.*

She was quite confident that she had read enough literature to allow her to develop a research proposal which would make a significant contribution to understanding feedback as part of assessment. She explained:

*I aligned the assessment with the course objectives. So, based on the course objectives, I selected assessment methods which were aligned with them. And there were six assessment methods which aligned properly. I*

*developed my course objectives [lesson plans for teaching a course to the experimental group] in that sense.*

#### **4.2.2.3 Influence of supervisor and peers in the same area of research**

Munaza knew that the support of a supervisor was important for her development as an emerging researcher and conducting a research experiment, saying, *“I preferred to select a supervisor from my area who could better help me and guide me which could not be guided better by the teachers of other areas”*. She worked with a supervisor who had expertise in educational research and assessment. She had regular meetings and a good academic relationship with her supervisor. She believed this was important because *“You must have a cooperative and good understanding with your supervisor, and both need to understand the academic situation and challenges of research you are facing”*. Her supervisor provided her with extensive support in selecting and refining her research area, finding resources, and making decisions about research methods.

Although Munaza’s interaction with her previous classmates became limited during the proposal development stage, she extended her connection and collaboration with others in her area of specialisation and senior research students in this area. They were able to guide her about the requirements and procedures of a research proposal. She explained, *“Our seniors who had done this task [proposal], and been through this process, they told us we needed to follow the university format for developing a research proposal.”* From this comment we can see she had developed a good network of her seniors and subject area peers who could provide her with useful advice and guidance.

#### **4.2.2.4 Presenting and defending her research proposal**

Munaza had mixed feelings, saying she was *“excited and nervous at the same time”* when she presented her research proposal to the panel of experts at department and university level. They would usually review the research proposals, ask critical questions, and provide feedback to either accept or suggest revisions to the research proposals. While presenting at department level, an expert raised questions about the terms she had used in her research proposal, claiming they were confusing. Munaza openly accepted this feedback and used it to bring clarity and precision to her research proposal. She used it to remove any ambiguity in the language she used in her research proposal. She commented: *“I had to make it [the terms] clear in my research proposal. This [feedback method] should have looked like an assessment*

*technique rather than a teaching method.*" The panel approved her research proposal with minor changes [to be verified by her supervisor] at department level.

Munaza was also required to present her proposal at the university level. In this case the panel consisted of the Vice Chancellor and the Dean of different faculties. She was quite confident at this time, which might be due to her presenting her proposal earlier to the department. She had a long discussion with the panel members [Deans of Natural Sciences] about her experimental research design and successfully persuaded the panel, with logical arguments and references to past research, that it was appropriate. She mentioned.

*I had to defend and convince them [the experts on the University panel]. It was difficult. The Vice Chancellor understood it [my research design] to some extent when I quoted different references. They [the advanced panel] said I could carry out research after discussion [revising and getting verified] with the Dean [of her own department].*

Although Munaza had gained approval of her research proposal at the department and university level, she had further expectations of herself. She explained: *"I was not satisfied with my research proposal even after the proposal was approved."* She thought she could add some more literature and cover different aspects in her research proposal.

#### **4.2.2.5 Concluding comments**

Munaza observed that she had to put a lot of effort into the critical stage of the research proposal, which she contrasted with the course work saying: *"The coursework phase was like a pudding compared to my research proposal phase which was like a mount."* At this stage Munaza was vacillating between her learner identity and her emerging researcher identity because she had to apply her research knowledge in developing an extensive research proposal. She commented: *"You know theory and its practice are different, definitely I had to face difficulty in applying that [theory] but I learned a lot"*. She continued her learning in her area of research, noting that *"some practice-based learning [application of research knowledge] took place."* By dealing with all the challenges and equipping herself with research capabilities, she prepared herself to embrace an advanced role identity in the next stage.

### **4.2.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

At the time of the interview, Munaza had been at this stage for around three years. She continued her learning and research activities as part of her earlier role identities (learner and emerging researcher), but she also started to participate in a wide range of academic activities. This next stage provided her with more responsibilities, confidence, and independence to perform research and the academic activities associated with an academic role in the community.

#### ***4.2.3.1 Confidence and motivation for the research experiment***

Following the acceptance of her research proposal, Munaza had to assume responsibility and confidence for conducting her research and other academic activities. She was confident in her research experiment because she already had prior experience in her MPhil. She started by *“developing all the manuals and activities and getting them approved”* for her study experiment. She developed MCQs type tests which were based on the six phases of Bloom’s taxonomy integrated with assessment theory. Reflecting on this process she commented *“I learned a lot, like, during the instrument development.”*

Munaza could not manage to conduct the research experiment with the class she had mentioned in her research proposal because *“the class did not have the required number of students [for experimental groups]”*. However, she managed to gain access to a different graduate class of students within the same department. She was mindful about gaining the ethical consent of the participants for a research experiment, explaining *“I gained the consent of the students first if I wanted to arrange some activities or use participants’ pictures”*.

While conducting the study experiment, Munaza was enthusiastic and confident about her research endeavor and had high expectations of contributing to the field of educational assessment: *“I took motivation on a daily basis like, when you were getting and exploring something new.”* She knew the importance of building a rapport with the research participants to ensure their involvement; she saw this as part of ensuring the validity of her experiment. She described her participants’ interest as a source of motivation, commenting that *“the way your participants are behaving and how much they are enthusiastic for the things [processes of experimental research]. You get a boost in your motivation if they are motivated.”* She believed in her confidence and research skills for data collection through

assessment tasks as she had some experience with these previously and so, in her view *“all the things were carried out smoothly”*.

#### **4.2.3.2 Crucial phase of data analysis and seeking support of others**

After the completion of the class experiment, a major challenge arose when she planned to analyse the research data. Munaza had data analysis skills, but she needed support from someone to guide her in the analysis of her experimental data [MCQs type tests]. Her supervisor pushed her to keep reading and work independently, saying to her that *“you have the data now you have to apply the test on it by yourself and then bring it”*. This was a critical and transformational phase where she needed to extend the data analysis techniques she had learned in earlier stages. Overall, she was stuck at this point because she was not confident with her analysis skills to interpret her experimental data, and *“there was not any course related to data analysis, nor was any workshop organised.”* She re-read her MPhil research thesis and reflected on and compared her MPhil experiences with her current situation, saying, *“[in MPhil] we were provided data analysis experts, we were referred to them and then we analysed the data with their help”*. She explained, *“I told my supervisor that I was not satisfied with my data analysis”*. Her supervisor then referred her to a data analysis expert so she could receive more guidance and refine her experimental data analysis. While visiting the field expert and receiving an expert opinion on her analysis, she learned many new topics in her area of interest, and about some of the software she could use for her analysis: *“before that I believed we could not develop MCQs on a higher cognitive level. Then I came to know that we could develop. I learned some software and I got access too”*.

She also gained some academic support from her friends who were studying in foreign universities. She said: *“I had to request them to send me the articles after downloading. Even books were downloaded by friends, so I carried out work this way.”* This support was important because Munaza did not have access to recent literature in her area of research at her university. Emotional support was important for her at this crucial stage, and Munaza shared her experiences with her family and friends. She believed her family and friends kept her going and enabled her to complete her research work. She explained, *“friends motivate in a way that they have a check on me like, what I am doing and how am I doing things, whether I am feeling depressed in something and then they try to cool me down”*.

#### **4.2.3.3 Credit to her independent reading and enhancing writing skills**

When she was interviewed, Munaza had completed her data analysis. Reflecting on the process, she mainly gave credit to her reading of the literature and learning experimental data analysis independently: *"I didn't know but carried out after reading the things by myself"*. Based on her self-reflection and maybe her high expectations for perfection as in the previous stage, she thought she could have extended her data analysis if she had been provided with more support and guidance. She commented: *"I still feel after the reading that I could extend my analysis; I could explore the data of my research with more different dimensions"*. Nonetheless, she believed she had learned a lot and had met the requirements of a quality research study, as she commented: *"The work should be 100% in respect to academic writing and research skills, and other tasks like formatting and so on"*.

#### **4.2.3.4 Receiving feedback in research seminar**

After completing her research write up, Munaza took part in a compulsory seminar to share her research findings. She was looking forward to this as an opportunity to receive feedback from experts to improve her research write up before the final submission as she mentioned *"they [audience] give you different suggestions"*. She was disappointed because it was mostly students who attended the seminar, explaining that *"in our viva [seminar] there were only two or three people [teachers] and apart from them there was no expert"*. Nevertheless, she considered she had positively answered the questions asked by the students, which enhanced her confidence to defend her research work.

#### **4.2.3.5 Active participation and supervisor's support in the academic activities**

While conducting her research project, Munaza was very active in participating in many of the academic activities that are usually performed by university teachers. Supervisory interaction was a key support in her experiment since her supervisor would visit her classrooms at random to ensure that everything was going well. He also engaged her in the academic and professional training/activities which are outlined in the next section.

She applied for a temporary job teaching some courses to graduate students who were studying in the field of Education. She had some experience of teaching at school level but not at university, therefore she considered this opportunity would be helpful for her to develop some understanding of the academic norms and attitudes of students in higher

education institutions. As she had a good academic record, knowledge of her area, and confidence to teach the graduate students, she was selected as a visiting faculty member (institutions offer temporary employment to postgraduate/PhD students to teach undergraduate students during the semester) in the same institution where she was doing her PhD. She explained, *“I taught for one semester before starting my experiment. Then I continued teaching over there”*.

She had gained the research skills needed to guide and supervise the masters/MPhil students by working with her supervisor’s students. Her supervisor provided her with the opportunity to review the research work of his students and she prepared initial recommendations/reports about their work. She explained, *“I dealt with them initially and boosted their research skills like how they would write their thesis ... but definitely the final decision was on the supervisor”*. She also used to guide his students on how to write and present papers at research conferences.

Munaza’s supervisor offered her the chance to be a part of the team managing a research journal published by the Education department in her thesis university. Through this experience she learned a lot about how to build academic connections, have conversations with international researchers, and refine her interpersonal skills. She also learned about the academic/research culture of different universities across the world. She commented:

*I had been given the responsibility of initial scrutiny [of submitted papers]. I had to decide whether a manuscript should be accepted or rejected [aligning it with the objectives and theme of the research journal] and I contacted the authors accordingly. I managed all the review processes of the articles.*

She broadened her understanding of international research trends through managing the review process. She said: *“I also got an idea that we can find many qualitative researchers all over the world compared to quantitative researchers. “It was a hard task to find evaluators for quantitative research”*. These experiences also enhanced her appreciation of the value of qualitative research, as she had previously seen quantitative methods as the most valuable approach. Consequently, she recognised that she needed to extend her qualitative research skills as well.

Munaza also gained an understanding about how to secure and carry out funded research projects because she was part of two different research projects with her supervisor *“one from the University of the Punjab and second one from the Higher Education Commission”*. This opportunity helped her to understand and observe the research culture in the universities and what can be involved in managing large scale research in her area of research.

Munaza was aware about writing research articles because she had two research papers published in local research journals, as she explained *“we just need to follow the limitation/scope of the respective journal where we are to send the paper”*. Overall, she was quite disappointed with the local research journals which did not easily accept the students’ research work. She had critical views that such journals did not provide positive and timely feedback which delayed her submission of her research thesis because one research paper was required for it. She observed: *“The research culture is not supportive towards students and research scholars in Pakistan. When we submitted an article, we were not given any response”*.

#### **4.2.3.6 Becoming a member of the academic community**

The various interactions and activities helped Munaza to develop her individual agency and understand the demands of being an academic. She considered herself to be a part of the academic community at the University within the group of peers and teachers who were working in the same field and with her supervisor. She believed *“when your supervisor has 20 to 25 students of MPhil and PhD then it becomes an academic community in which you can have different professionals and administrators who are working on different positions in education”*.

Munaza sought out interaction with the faculty members as she always gained inspiration about a possible academic career by listening to and learning from their experiences. This was supportive for Munaza to understand the nature of academic culture and practices at university level.

*You talk with a faculty member. They share their students’ experiences or even their own personal experiences or someone has discussed with them. You can say a faculty member keeps interacting with people in 360 angles. They*

*interact with other faculty members in the same department and faculty members of other institutions; likewise, they interact with students within the department and the students at other universities. So, a chain develops in this way, they have vast experiences. When you discuss your experience then they share some experiences in response. And professionally you get mentoring.*

Munaza portrayed herself as performing multiple role identities such as a student, researcher, and teacher in the academic community. She indicated she needed to manage these as part of her relationships with different groups of people, her research participants, the students she was teaching, her supervisor and those in her research field:

*I am a student as well as a researcher because I am doing research and exploring new things in a specific field which is PhD research. I am also a teacher for the people who learn from me. As I discussed taking classes in the department as a visiting teacher, I am a teacher for the students over there. Your own learning also takes place there along with students because you take views of students also. So, there are different roles which I am playing. I feel like I am a part of the academic community.*

At the end of her interview, Munaza was confident she had developed her capabilities through her PhD in ways that had helped her to maintain a respected social status and would allow her to secure a decent career at some higher educational institutions. She said: “You can secure a permanent position in society or at least in an academic community after doing this degree. You can secure a good job in Pakistani society where jobs are already short”. She considered herself a part of the academic community.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

Munaza started her coursework with high expectations that he would experience a positive learning environment in her new institution. She expected to gain knowledge and improve her research skills through the coursework that was part of the doctoral programme. Although she was nervous at the start, good interactions with her teachers and fellows were helpful for her integration and adjustment into the new learning environment. These interactions also helped her to understand the expectations in the courses. The teachers engaged her in activity-based learning which was productive for her knowledge development

and aligned with her imaginative view of herself as a learner. Her teachers supported her to refine her research skills (e.g., tracing and reviewing literature, research design and paradigms) and her ability in argument writing which was a validation of her role identity as a learner. She compared her learning in her current institution with her previous experience which made her feel unsure and think that she would not meet the standard of learning she needed to as a doctoral student, Munaza felt he was more satisfied with her experience in the courses in her specialist area than disciplinary courses because she had a background and interest in that area, and she learned new concepts such as large-scale assessment. Her new learning about educational assessment enhanced her interest in undertaking research in this area.

During the research proposal stage, Munaza shifted her expectations and imaginative view of herself towards a role identity that involved her applying her knowledge of research methods to developing a research proposal. Strongly influenced by her prior research experience, she planned to extend her MPhil area of research and make a significant contribution in the area of educational assessment. Her supervisor had this research specialization and shared a good understanding with her, so she had found it was productive to share research issues and take guidance from her supervisor. She initiated reading literature which supported her capability to refine the research gap and plan for a research experiment for university level students. She also extended her networking with seniors because she considered gaining good advice and guidance about the requirements (formatting) and expectations to develop a research proposal. Her most crucial experience during this stage was to present and defend her research proposal before a panel of experts. She was able to actively engage in intellectual arguments with panel members in response to their questions about the terms she used and the methods she proposed. At this moment, she had to provide the evidence from the literature which persuaded them to accept her research proposal. The approval and her interactions were evidence for her that her role within the community had shifted from that of a student to that of an emerging researcher, from someone whose dominant role was to learn from others to someone who could, with support, frame a research question, craft an argument, and design a research study.

In the next stage, Munaza had to conduct a research experiment and write a dissertation which shifted her imaginative view of identity towards that of an emerging academic. She expected to perform her research experiment activities smoothly because she had experience with them as part of her MPhil. She was excited and confident to develop rapport with her research participants and to manage all documents (lesson plans) for a research experiment. She conducted the experiment successfully and collected data through assessment tasks. Her supervisor visited her classes at random to support and assure her that everything was going well. The real challenge for Munaza was her data analysis. She had basic data analysis skills, but she needed to refine her skills to an advanced level so she could analyse experimental data. She got some guidance from an expert referred by her supervisor, but she was still not satisfied that she had the required skills and knowledge to meet the expectations of analysis. At this time, she lost her motivation, she mainly relied on her own reading (MPhil thesis and other literature) to manage her data analysis and complete the thesis write up. She considered that her analysis could have been better if she had been provided with more support from her supervisor or department.

Once she finished her thesis write up, Munaza had to organise a compulsory (institutional requirement) seminar to share or disseminate her research findings. She was hopeful of receiving expert opinion in order to clarify and refine her research but not many experts attended her seminar. Nonetheless, she considered her seminar a positive moment because she was able to answer the questions posed by students. Her interaction with her supervisor was very productive for her understanding of the requirements and expectations of the wider academic community. She was selected as a visiting teacher by the same institution where she was studying. This enhanced her confidence about and satisfaction in performing teaching activities for the first time at higher education level. Being a part of a research journal team and research projects enhanced her understanding of broader research culture around the world and managing large scale research. She was aware of the process and criteria to submit research articles due to her prior publications, so she wrote and submitted an article based on her thesis. These activities were in line with her expectations of what was involved in performing in an academic community and her participation in them meant she gained role validation as an emerging academic.

## Case-2

### 4.3 Introducing Amir

Amir's decision to do a PhD was driven by intrinsic motivation, as he did not associate a PhD with any external or material benefit. He explained his view as follows: *"As a human you can also take up and look into the worldly benefits but the major concern and motivation of mine to start a PhD was its intrinsic value, my personal development, to improve my academic and research skills"*. He decided to continue his higher education through a PhD in the same institution because he had good learning and research experience in his Masters and MPhil degrees. He wanted to keep learning from the overseas qualified faculty at the institution, as he said: *"it was also my intention to be able to learn from a faculty having an international outlook and to get benefits from them"*.

He was very keen to interact with a range of scholars, to develop in-depth research skills, and to produce a high quality and innovative thesis. Moreover, because the institution had several professors who had international exposure and qualifications, he was confident he would learn and refine his research skills to an international level. His family, especially his brothers, were able to support him in his studies so he did not have to worry about financial challenges and could focus on his learning and development. The following section illustrates his various roles and experiences in different stages of his PhD.

#### 4.3.1 Role identity as a learner

The stage of coursework, which lasted for one year, provided a foundation for Amir to enhance his knowledge and refine his research skills. He was ambitious about enhancing his learning and understanding of research at the advanced PhD level. He was provided with a substantial amount of academic support by his teachers and peers so that he could fulfill his learning expectations and meet the institutional requirements.

##### 4.3.1.1 Orientation and purpose of the coursework

Amir's expectations of learning were enhanced when he was given an orientation on the scope and learning requirements of the PhD program, which in his view *"went very well and left a positive and good impression"*.

The programme required that Amir studied four to five compulsory and foundational disciplinary courses including *“educational philosophy, educational assessment”* and *“introduction to research”*. He believed that the purpose of these courses was to clarify research concepts and observed that *“you have some advancement so that you can also improve your in-depth concepts as well as knowledge of surface level”*. On the other hand, he was a bit anxious about the number of courses and the scope of the learning. He thought there should have been only a few courses solely related to research methods. He commented: *“I felt that the number of courses was too much, and the assignments /projects given by teachers are as well. I thought I wouldn’t be able to cope well with this all”*. He explained that fewer courses would have allowed him to focus and concentrate only on practicing research-based assignments, saying, *“I wanted more quality rather than quantity [number of courses]”*.

#### **4.3.1.2 An active intention and support to develop his academic skills**

Amir was excited by the supportive learning environment he shared with his teachers and classmates who had diverse academic backgrounds and areas of specialisation. He commented that there was a *“facilitative, peaceful, conducive learning environment”* in the classroom.

Amir appreciated that his teachers engaged him in activities that were important for helping him improve his research, writing and interpersonal skills such as *“communication and presentations skills, coordination, understanding, and research skills”*. He explained that his teachers advised him that *“these skills are those you will need [for being a researcher]. You would need to have the ability to conduct research on any topic and later on present it to a relevant audience”*. From this, we can see that his teachers were preparing him for the independent and critical research project phase and the academic career ahead.

His teachers engaged him in learning activities that were aimed at developing his initiative and ability to seek out and critically engage with a range of resources to develop his knowledge. Amir explained, *“They [teachers] gave us outlines and said, you are free to read books, journals, articles, and digital resources”*. Amir reported that he used to seek out multiple and additional resources so he could broaden his conceptual understanding to a doctoral level. He viewed this as a response to his teachers’ advice that *“at this [PhD] level*

*wider knowledge is required*". He regularly visited the library to read books and research articles with the belief that *"if someone is keen to study, he can get benefits from it"*. This statement indicates that he recognised the value of effort for learning and reading and saw this as contributing to his expectation of progress in the academic community.

He explained that, although he already knew some classmates and teachers, he began the courses with an intention to collaborate with students who came from other institutions and so had different learning experiences to share with him. Overall, he considered he had a collaborative and learning oriented relationship with his classmates. He actively gathered his class peers in a group who had a good understanding of each other and made them work together. He commented, *"I liked to form groups and work in groups"*. He used to practise his course presentations with his classmates to improve his interpersonal skills, and they helped each other through a series of question-and-answer sessions. He stated:

*I am telling you that the communication and relationship that developed was so strong that we all attended the presentations of others for their support. This is our learning and the feedback we got was beneficial to all of us. We used to discuss the problems in each other's presentations.*

He believed that this group learning activity with peers had supported him in developing his collaboration skills, communication, and confidence to present ideas and accept feedback. He explained that he never hesitated to interact with peers and share his learning opportunities.

#### **4.3.1.3 Developing reading habits, writing skills, and digital skills**

Amir considered that reading not only enhanced his understanding of research methods, but it also helped him develop his academic writing skills. He believed these skills were interdependent, and both were essential to being a successful doctoral student: *"Research and academic writing, I think both are necessary. If one is missing, you cannot present ideas well"*. He believed major progress had occurred in his academic writing when he was studying a course in it. He learned how to choose appropriate words, about sentence structure and how to write for different readers. He commented: *"I observed major improvements in my second semester regarding academic writing"*. He continued, *"after that course my skills got refined about what academic language is"*. He also developed his understanding of the formatting requirement for research work, *"especially in APA, I got to know, no matter what*

*kind of study you are conducting, you should consider certain things that are considered internationally”.*

Amir was proactive in learning about the application of the different software used for data analysis, explaining, *“NVivo and SPSS workshops were there, and we got to learn”*. Another area he identified as a focus for his learning was how to communicate with people at foreign universities. He believed that researchers needed to develop this expertise because it had become a digital world. Therefore, he took the initiative to learn about and develop digital mobility and digital software through which he could communicate with people virtually in other universities. He said, *“I learned how my digital mobility can be improved while living in one place or in one country and how you communicate with people from other universities”*.

Amir believed the courses of quantitative research, qualitative research, and academic writing had developed his confidence, thinking perspectives [critical and analytical], competence in research, and academic writing skills. He commented, *“I felt a change and improvement in my academic skills and research skills.”*

#### **4.3.1.4 Choosing a new area of specialisation, and the value of revising concepts**

As the first semester progressed, Amir had an interest in *“Education Psychology”* as his area of specialisation but the department did not offer this course because they did not have a sufficient number of students in that area. He explained that he became quite desperate about choosing an area of specialisation but that he eventually decided on *“Educational leadership and management”*. He selected this because it was an area within which he could improve his understanding of the application of management theories in the education sector and said, *“I thought my knowledge will expand in this area”*. Moreover, he anticipated he would have a wide scope of options for research in this area. He enjoyed studying the courses the department offered in his area of specialisation and was involved in different learning activities as he explained: *“We had to complete projects and come up with a wonderful presentation with full freedom and flexibility of time”*. He asserted that the learning activities in the specialist courses helped him to develop the skills needed to access and use relevant content to complete a research-based project, and said, *“I got an opportunity to improve my skills regarding different sources and research from different directions”*.

Amir considered the comprehensive examination as an opportunity to revise and clarify his research concepts. He liked the extensive writing and application-based questions in the exam, which covered the concepts in the courses he studied. He commented, *"I think this is a good thing they give good time that you gear up again and get the opportunity to revise your understanding and concepts about compulsory courses"*. He reported *"all my concepts got revised and cleared"*.

#### **4.3.1.5 Concluding comments**

Amir identified that he had experienced an intellectual and attitudinal change in his confidence and temperament over the course of his learning in this stage. He had come to recognise the importance and role of patience and became more open to accepting feedback, stating: *"I can take questions without showing any kind of facial disagreement and emotion"*. Besides, Amir considered he had enhanced his ability to listen to other people. He had also identified and been able to focus on his area of interest (education management). Overall, Amir's comments suggest he had recognised his collaboration with teachers and fellows, and research skills development as a part of his learning and an important preparation for the next stage of his doctoral journey.

#### **4.3.2 Role identity as an emerging researcher**

The main task in this phase was for Amir to develop and present a research proposal and assume a role identity as an emerging researcher. He was required to apply his understanding of research to a practical research proposal. He continued his reading and learning but his focus was to develop a significant research proposal in his area of interest, which was educational management. He aimed to build a strong learning relationship with his supervisor and peers.

##### **4.3.2.1 Ambitious for research and following international standards**

At this stage, Amir appreciated that he had the freedom to focus on his research; he was enthusiastic about starting to develop his research proposal. He explained that he was glad to be relieved of the pressure of course work and anticipated the *"real joy"* of doing research. He stated:

*My focus was purely on research because we were free from the burden [courses]. Like the initial stage has passed and we were free that we were not bound to submit any assigned tasks, attend any class, meet any deadline, exam etc. I was free from all this, and I felt relieved at that time. I thought real joy begins now that you can do research freely.*

He was confident that he could make some independent decisions about his research topic and methods. He set about planning his research with a sense of freedom: *"I have got more freedom now that I can make decisions freely, when to study, when to do research"*. He was ambitious to develop an innovative research design and proactive in trying to prepare himself for being a researcher. He started reading relevant literature without waiting for the results of the comprehensive examination. He explained, *"I studied only for the sake of understanding at that time"*. He was identifying a research area and focusing on quality. To understand what was involved in meeting international standards in research Amir *"downloaded some international theses"*. He wanted to understand the core elements of quality research work in Education, therefore, *"I read them [theses] focusing on quality, introduction writing, and methodology in the field of education"*. He acknowledged that this reading broadened his research outlook, explaining *"I read that, and I got a new level of understanding from the beginning"*.

Amir recognised the importance and ownership of research topic selection because once a topic is chosen *"it becomes your identity, and you have to live with it in the time left to you. Even after the PhD. It becomes part of your personality, you become an expert in it"*. While reading literature in his area of interest to find a significant research idea he focused on criteria such as *"how much is it worthwhile? How much is context based, its justification, rationale, argument development and its expected outcomes?"*. After substantial reading, he developed an interest in *"the professional teachers who were doing research work out of the country and how much they are professionally contributing after coming back"*. It appears that he extended his interest from the earlier stage, when he aspired to learn from teachers who had international exposure. He now planned to contextualise this research idea and said, *"I should conduct a study on our university teachers. I decided that I would study teachers' practices when they return to their home country"*. He believed that this was a significant and emerging area of research because *"there was limited research related to my topic in*

*Pakistan*". He aimed to consider multiple aspects to add rigour to his research: *"I wanted to explore their [foreign qualified teachers] contribution in research, teaching quality, teaching practices and research practices"*.

#### **4.3.2.2 Supervisory and peer support in proposal development**

Amir's supervisor encouraged him to develop an innovative research idea and supported him in developing a research proposal on one. His supervisor gave him freedom to find an area of his own choice and told him: *I will not bound you; you are free. Go and study and share an idea about what you would like to research on*". Amir was happy that his supervisor did not pressure him for a specific area/topic. Rather, the supervisor boosted his confidence to work and share a topic of his own interest.

Although Amir was confident about his knowledge and research skills based on his learning experiences in the earlier stage, saying *"the courses we studied increased our understanding and they were enough to develop some research skills in me"*, he still needed guidance and direction from his supervisor to enhance his research competency. He recounted *"research skills and understanding were there but definitely application of those skills required support"*. His supervisor supported him through providing continuous feedback on his proposal writing, *"where changes were required"*. For example, Amir wanted to choose a quantitative research approach because he had a background and confidence in it, but after discussions and meetings with his supervisor, he recognised there was also a qualitative aspect to his research area and therefore, as he explained, *"it became mixed kind of research as some contribution could be explored quantitatively, and how they wanted to practice could be explored qualitatively"*. He also thought that a mixed methods approach would be unique and generate multiple perspectives for addressing his research questions.

Amir firmly believed that the relationship with his supervisor was of utmost importance in developing his attitude as a researcher because *"supervisor can completely change the attitude of students by continuous engagement and communication"*. He always felt a positive change in his thinking which broadened his research perspectives after receiving feedback from his supervisor, saying, *"If I took some work [writing] to him, he checked the work and gave me a new direction to think"*. Sometimes, Amir thought that his supervisor suggested irrelevant revisions or changes which were not very important, but subsequently he realized

the positive impact those revisions had on the quality and clarity of his writing. He explained that *“this thing changed my temperament, my attitude and patience level”*, then he thought *“there is no end line of quality”*. At times, Amir would feel desperate about persisting with his writing and meeting the high expectations of his supervisor and said, *“I felt that I did not meet the expectations of my supervisor as he gave a tough time and made his standard high”*. However, at these junctures, the supervisor guided and advised him to keep his motivation high and reminded him that *“research is a slow and steady process, it will happen with the passage of time”*.

In addition to working closely with his supervisor, collaboration with peers also remained important in the research proposal stage. Amir continued to collaborate with his fellows and to extend his social networks in the research environment. He explained that *“when we interact in a group, we get to know the latest events of Education happening in our surrounding. You can say that we work as a networking team”*. Amir and his fellows liked to attend learning events to observe how academic researchers present their research and engage an audience. He recounted how *“different foreign experts related to the field and other experienced people presented and shared their research experiences, and we learned a lot in such settings”*. Besides, the group of class fellows collaborated and supported each other in other ways such as *“we even made proposal presentations and presented them one by one to the simulated audience of class fellows. We asked serious questions from each other”*. This practice improved his confidence in presenting and defending his research idea through the rehearsal in answering the questions which might be asked by the panel members. As a result, the peer group continuously supported him, and in the process, he refined his interpersonal skills like communication, sharing ideas, listening to others, collaboration and working with others.

#### **4.3.2.3 Confidence in presenting innovative research idea**

Before the proposal presentation, Amir took the initiative to contact an American professor in his research area and requested feedback on his research proposal. The teacher appreciated his effort and research idea and suggested that *“take local counterparts [teachers who qualified from local universities] so it would be easy to make a comparison”*. Amir agreed with his suggestions and made the changes in his research proposal accordingly before presenting it.

Amir was satisfied he had developed a good research proposal in an emerging area of research. He believed he had scoped and analysed enough literature to justify his research problem. He thought that his research idea was significant, especially for local academic practices, and he would be able to impress the panel members. He commented:

*I was largely confident and satisfied that I had an ideal proposal, and I cited the literature well. The work was purely my own and it was unique and limited to my context. I did not borrow it from anywhere.*

He presented and defended his research proposal at the department and then at university level to a positive response: *“all of them [panel members] appreciated that this topic is very good and interesting”*. Even in the Advanced Board, the panel members admired his effort and *“all deans were sure that the research had never been conducted before in any of their departments. My work was of a completely innovative nature”*. Therefore, he received assurance that his topic was an emerging and creative area of research. He gained recognition for his research idea and its significance.

#### **4.3.2.4 Concluding comments**

Over the course of this stage Amir considered that he became more focused on one area of research which meant he could plan more systematically and said, *“I started to concentrate, I became more controlled”*. He could identify a change in his knowledge application, research attitude and confidence as if he was ready to receive support, accept feedback, become patient and focused, think logically and from multiple perspectives. His comments indicated that he had considered research components such as extensive reading of literature, knowledge of international standards of quality for research, and the significance of research problems. As an emerging researcher, he had also gained insight into the need to contextualise ideas, add practical rationale, develop logical arguments, consider possible outcomes of research, and present the research idea.

#### **4.3.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

Amir’s focus remained on his learning and crucial research activities to complete his thesis, but he also actively engaged in other academic activities to extend his responsibilities to academic tasks, understand academic culture, and evaluate his confidence and independence

to perform an emerging academic role in the academic community. His expectations and experiences in this stage shifted his role identity towards that of an emerging academic. At the time of the interview, Amir had been at this stage for more than 2 years.

#### **4.3.3.1 Initiative to approach international experts**

After completing the research proposal, instrument development was an interesting learning experience for Amir to extend his study scope and attain validation of his research instruments from renowned scholars in his area of research. Initially, he tried to gain expert opinion from the local teachers in his university but *“they said they will return in a month and delayed. They said we were busy”*. Without being disheartened and hesitant, he initiated efforts to find international experts in his area of research through the websites of highly ranked universities around the world. He aspired to have their feedback on his research instruments, and said, *“I wrote them an email and told them some background and the place where I am doing PhD. I told them the purpose of my study and asked them for a review”*. Surprisingly, he received a very good response and *“almost 5-6 responded to me and asked me to send the research instruments”*. Therefore, they all provided him with detailed feedback on his research instruments and marked the areas where improvement could be required. For example, an expert suggested to him to consider *“what kind of wording is suitable, what are the grammatical mistakes in it”*. He incorporated the changes based on the *“suggestions given by foreign experts”* and again sent his refined instruments to an expert to *“further guide me on what to add more to it”*. In response, the expert further guided him to *“add some questions to build rapport that might be relevant to background”*. He was excited about learning to develop standardised instruments and the validation process clarified his thinking about the type and order of questions being asked in his research instruments. He told me he experienced a substantial amount of learning during this process and decided to document all his experiences of instrumentation and interactions with foreign experts, and therefore wrote a research paper on it.

He was keen to engage in data collection and extend his interaction with participants because *“we get the opportunity to meet the research participants that was also the source of motivation”*, but he could not meet the participants properly due to Covid.19. He already had interest and experience in contacting people online, so he decided to collect digital data, and

said *“I emailed the people [participants] but got no response. I was disheartened by it”*. Nevertheless, he remained positive and assumed that university teachers did not have their updated contact details which might explain the absence of response. At the time of the interview, he was still struggling to manage his data collection through different options such as online contact or to approach someone to arrange for paid data collection in remote areas.

#### **4.3.3.2 Reading literature and refining academic writing**

Amir believed in continuing his reading habits to improve his writing skills because he realised the importance of academic writing in a PhD thesis or research papers. He explained: *“I improve my academic writing and research by reading different good articles on my topic”*. He was keen to read good research articles in his area of research and identify the features of good academic writing in the articles so he could apply those elements in his own research write up. He explained that:

*I tried to follow the style of the others, how they had written in that research paper and what style they adopted. I specifically noticed how they communicate and convey their ideas to the readers or their community.*

He aimed for clarity and language that was accessible to readers. He firmly believed that *“the more you read good writers, the more skill [writing] will be improved”*.

#### **4.3.3.3 Supervisory support in the academic activities**

Amir had a strong bond and supportive relationship with his supervisor at this stage. He had regular meetings with his supervisor to discuss his progress in research. Amir told me that his supervisor had high expectations that he would put maximum effort into the quality of his work and complete the research in time and remarked that *“my supervisor is pretty demanding and has high expectations”*. Sometimes, Amir said that he would feel anxious about completing the assigned research tasks. Consequently, he preferred to see his supervisor for a detailed discussion on the problems, which assisted him to manage those research challenges effectively. He commented:

*If I felt that it [assigned task] was difficult for me to meet the expectations of my supervisor but when I talked to him then he convinced me. If I tell him that the task assigned to me requires more effort, the task requires more detail*

*than he gives me more opportunities and convinces me in this regard.*

Apart from research activities, his supervisor engaged him in a number of professional and academic activities and as he commented *“he prepared us professionally, our supervisor used to engage us in professional activities”*. Amir was engaged in teaching and assisting his supervisor to manage an MPhil course *“assessment and evaluation practices”*. Then his supervisor also let him teach Master level classes in case he was absent. Amir believed that he learned to develop and deliver course content effectively, engage students in classroom activities in those teaching experiences, and *“how to deliver lectures and how to engage students in the classroom”*. He enhanced his confidence about communicating with students and managing other tasks associated with teaching. He explained that *“I did record keeping for a complete course, conducted their exams, and even taught classes in case of absence of my supervisor”*. He was satisfied and assertive that he could teach and manage a course at higher education level and said *“that was a positive change. That boosted up my confidence level to teach as well”*.

Amir explained that his supervisor also invited him to be part of a team which managed a research journal. He used to review research articles and provide reports to his supervisor which enhanced his understanding of writing articles with different research methods. Furthermore, his supervisor asked him to review the research theses of his students because Amir had the ability and knowledge to evaluate research works and guide them to improve their research work. He believed that this activity helped him to clarify his own research understanding and ability to give feedback on research writing.

The supervisor provided him with another opportunity to analyse quantitative data for a research project, and Amir explained that *“he [supervisor] gave me access to a university database to do analysis on SPSS. He asked me to do analysis by using different statistical techniques”*. Amir was confident in his data analysis skills, but he had to gain some help from his brother who was a software engineer. However, he learned more about managing the large-scale quantitative data of a research project and explained that *“we made graphs after analysing, and I learned about this activity”*.

Amir also told me about a research project experience he was involved in for a private firm which *“gave their services to institutes and assisted them in data collection”*. There he learned to conduct focus group interviews and manage the participants as a moderator in the interviews and Amir elaborated that *“I learnt what should be the seating plan, when I should ask questions and when I should not, how to handle participants”*. Besides, he had interest in analysis skills, so they also offered him the opportunity for qualitative data analysis and he *“also analysed interviews by using thematic analysis”*. Collectively, these experiences enabled him to refine his skills of data collection, conducting interviews, and analysing interviews which would all be helpful for his own research study.

By engaging in all academic activities, he identified himself as more confident about his progression towards the academic profession. He noted, *“that [teacher assistant] was a positive change that boosted my confidence level”*. He explicitly identified aspects like managing research journals, reviewing research papers and theses, doing analysis, and teaching classes, as a part of his scholarly identity development.

#### **4.3.3.4 Continued Interaction with peer and faculty members**

Amir became more open to and proactive about interacting and bonding with peers. He said, *“I used to discuss with them and try to get their opinion on how to meet the deadlines and issues relevant to the research process”*. He would feel good to share his research problems and ask for their opinions on them. Moreover, he used to attend different academic and research events with his peers which helped him to share his learning thoughts with others and evaluate his own research capability, as he explained:

*On the mega level in which you can say that different foreign experts related to the field and other experienced people present and share their experiences/research and we learned a lot in such settings. After that, we discussed all the experiences that we had in a group and what we have learned from this. We also discussed the areas with one another identified in the setting. This also helps us in our self-evaluation.*

He enjoyed attending the research seminars and PhD defense of other students in order *“to interact with faculty members and other peers”*. While attending the defense of other students, he could learn and compare his own research work, and he could interact with

teachers who supervised them. He used to ask questions to clarify and improve his own research work, in settings where “*they [teachers] encourage students to ask questions there*”. He intended to never miss out on academic and research gatherings “*I tried my best to fully participate in the workshops and conferences*”. Amir was keen to attend research conferences and seminars because he sought any opportunity to enhance his competence in research work. For example, he said, “*Recently, I attended a workshop in a virtual university about the issues in the learning process*”. He also recognised that there was an opportunity to attend international research conferences, because they had been organised online due to Covid-19.

#### **4.3.3.5 Part of the wider academic community**

From his narratives, it is evident that Amir had good social and interpersonal skills, as he continually experienced positive interactions with his supervisor, faculty members, peers, and experts in his area, and built academic relationships which assisted him to integrate in the academic community. He claimed:

*I strongly felt that I'm part of that academic community not only with the faculty members but also with the group of colleagues, and supervisees etc.”.*

He believed that he was quite confident and independent to perform the role of a researcher and teacher in the academic community because both roles were interrelated with each other. Further, he had high expectations about being a part of the academic community and believed he would gain social and financial benefits due to this degree. He also identified the attraction of social rewards such as gaining respect and prestige in the community.

*I think the employability of the candidate increases from this and you get the opportunity to be placed in a better position in a university or in any good institution. There is also a social reward that you are serving and that is very much self-satisfying. You can also get respect in the family from this.*

#### **4.3.4 Summary**

Amir started his PhD with strong motivation and expectations about improving his academic and research knowledge and developing his interpersonal skills. He wanted to learn from teachers with overseas qualifications who had international exposure. His experience of

attending a formal institutional orientation assisted him understand the cognitive and attitudinal expectations of a PhD. In the coursework stage, he was a bit concerned about the number of courses he had to study because he wanted to focus on research courses to refine his research concepts and skills. He valued the interaction with teachers who supported him to participate in the learning activities and enhance his research, digital mobility or software and interpersonal skills as this met his learning expectations. His teachers advised him to enhance his reading habits and have an in-depth understanding of the concept. He focused on learning about and refining his writing ability because he believed research and writing were interdependent and both essential for research work. Amir considered he had a collaborative and learning oriented interaction with his class fellows. He initiated the establishment of a peer study group who worked together and shared their learning. He practised his course presentations with his peers to help each other, a practice which also enhanced his interpersonal skills. The experience of shared and collaborative learning supported his imaginative view of being a learner. In addition, he felt a positive attitudinal change in his growing recognition of the importance of patience and being open to feedback. These changes enhanced his self-evaluation of his role as a learner.

During the next stage, Amir's expectations shifted toward application of research knowledge in the development of a research proposal. In this next phase, he started to see himself as an emerging researcher. He felt relaxed that he could now focus on his area of research and make independent decisions about his research methods. He believed that a research area would become his identity and part of personality in the academic community. However, he read international literature which made him recognize the importance of key components of quality research work. As he had already been attracted to international exposure or research standards, reading literature supported him to plan to work on an emerging area to explore the contribution of foreign qualified teachers in Pakistani universities.

Amir's narrative at this stage identified the importance of his relationship with his supervisor, peer collaboration and consulting experts in the field. Amir believed that a supervisor could change his research attitude through continuous engagement and communication. He valued the interaction with his supervisor who supported him to choose an area of his own interest. His supervisor suggested exploring both quantitative and qualitative aspects of his research

problem. The feedback from his supervisor impacted on his research perspectives, thoughts, and patience level because sometimes he got exhausted from doing revisions, but subsequently recognised their importance for his clarity about and understanding of the research. In this process, his imaginative view of himself as a researcher shifted to incorporate the recognition of the importance of continuous feedback and revisions for presenting research ideas, and there is no end to learning about and producing quality research. In addition to working with his supervisors, Amir continued to collaborate and network with his peers. They collaborated and supported each other through practice of research proposals and asked critical questions in preparation for their oral defense. Amir also sought out experts to validate his research before the defense of his proposal. Once he developed his research proposal, he sent it to an American professor in his field to receive some expert opinion. The expert suggested some changes to do with research participants which enhanced his clarity and satisfaction with his research proposal. He successfully presented and defended his proposal in front of the panel members. They were satisfied with his understanding of the research area and acknowledged that the research idea was emerging and innovative in nature which also provided him with validation of his role identity as an emerging researcher. Moving towards the next milestone, Amir had to conduct research, write a dissertation to produce knowledge and participate in the wider academic activities which shifted his imaginative view to becoming an emerging academic. He could not gain an ideal response from local experts to validate his research instruments, so he approached international experts to share his research ideas and instruments. He was happy to receive a great response and suggestions from the experts which helped him to clarify and gain confidence in his research work. He also wrote a research paper to share his experience of receiving feedback from foreign experts and developing a standardised research instrument which supported his self-perception as an emerging academic. At the time of the interview, he was struggling with the data collection due to Covid-19. He changed the mode of data collection to approach the participants through emails.

Amir continued to receive positive feedback and support from his supervisor which helped him to meet his expectations of research. His supervisor provided him with the opportunity to participate in wider academic activities. Amir taught and managed his supervisor's Master degree class which substantially enhanced his ability to manage classroom activities and

confidence in content delivery and communicating with students. His teaching experience was consistent with his imaginative view of himself as an emerging academic. His participation in reviewing articles and evaluating the research of students enhanced his clarity and confidence in his own research. He was also involved in doing quantitative data analysis for a research project with his supervisor. He used advanced statistical tests and graphical representation of data which enhanced his confidence to manage large scale data. In another opportunity from a private firm, he undertook qualitative data collection from different cities and then did thematic analysis. This experience refined his capacity to manage qualitative research independently. Amir also interacted with his peers in attending academic events and sharing and providing support to each other. He was happy that many universities had started to organise online conferences or seminars which were free and easy for him to participate in.

### Case-3

#### 4.4 Introducing Maani

At the time of the interviews, Maani was planning a compulsory research seminar after completing her research. Her main goal in doing a PhD was to refine her research skills so she could ensure her career and professional development, she explained *“if my research becomes good then my career would be very good”*.

Maani had two concerns before starting her PhD, one was her own ability, because she was nervous about meeting the expectations of a PhD degree, saying, *“I was a bit afraid that I did not have the calibre for the PhD”*. Her second concern was financial issues over the course of her study, but her mother and brother encouraged and supported her to fulfill her wish to gain a doctorate. She thanked God who made it possible for her to start a PhD: *“It had been my wish to be recognised as a doctor. It might be God liked my wish or my aspiration to do it”*.

Maani faced several ups and downs at all the stages of her PhD journey. She was self-directed in her learning and wanted to concentrate fully on her development and perform in the advanced academic environment. She always compared her knowledge and performance with other students and had a strong belief in her own abilities to learn and perform independently from the start of her PhD. Although she could not manage to interact with classmates, she acknowledged the support of her teachers, supervisor and senior fellows who made it possible for her to deal with challenges in developing her role identities and surviving in the PhD process.

##### 4.4.1 Role identity as a learner

In the coursework (for one year), Maani studied several research and disciplinary courses to enhance her knowledge, confidence, and research skills. She wanted to achieve her learning goals through self-directed learning. She gained a lot of support from her course teachers.

##### 4.4.1.1 Intention to learn, and emphasis on research courses

Maani started the coursework with high expectations of improving her disciplinary knowledge and research skills. She did not want to miss any opportunities for learning at this stage and believed that even small points of learning would benefit her in some way as she said, *“I believed that any knowledge I gained would be important ahead”*.

She was familiar with the learning environment and teachers' attitudes, explaining, *"the students like us who have already studied here knew the intention and psyche of the teachers"*. She tried hard to be an active and energetic student in classroom learning activities and to make a positive impression on her teachers and peers. She reported that she worked hard in everything associated with her learning:

*I studied in a serious way. I thought I could learn those things [courses] because the teachers were available today but would not be tomorrow. So, I needed to put all my effort into the time that was in my hands. I worked hard and aimed to secure a distinction in the class [gain highest marks in the papers].*

She had not always had good academic scores and learning opportunities in the past and so she wanted to fully concentrate on the courses offered, especially the courses of research. She explained: *"I learned everything with the thought that I did not know anything. The research courses [quantitative and qualitative] were my favourite courses. My major focus always remained on research"*. She considered that if she developed her research skills then she would be able to move on in her PhD. It means she was naive and extrinsically motivated.

Comparatively, she had more interest in learning quantitative research skills than qualitative research. This might be due to her background in economics and her MPhil research work which was quantitative. She improved her data analysis skills through learning to use analysis software: *"I learned SPSS because, as you know, statistics was my interest"*. She also had an opportunity to clarify her understanding of and confusion about research sampling. Additionally, she highlighted that she had learned the purpose of and how to do a systematic literature review, *"I learned how we trace literature and how to make a tree for illustrating a literature review"*. She explained she had considered the literature tree method would be important in the next stage of her journey.

#### **4.4.1.2 Contrasting interactions: acknowledging teachers vs avoiding peers**

Maani valued the support of her teachers, commenting that whenever she felt down and needed help in the coursework *"the teachers supported me a lot and they were very good with me"*. She mentioned one of her teachers who encouraged her a lot and said, *"I developed my interest in Philosophy due to the teacher"*. She had found this teacher very inspirational and focused on the positive attitudinal change among his students. She recounted his words,

*“if you are learning something then it should reflect in your personality. Whatever you behave in the class, you should be the same everywhere. And you have to develop this behaviour by yourself”*. The assignments set by the teacher helped her to realise the importance of research philosophies and understand the nature of research paradigms: *“It [philosophies] is a base in research that is scientific such as ontology, axiology, and epistemology.*

Another teacher assigned her a project aiming to increase her understanding of the research process and writing research papers. She explained, *“he [the teacher] assigned us to conduct research on a small-scale so that we could have a base for applying the process of conducting a quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods research approach in the future”*. This activity provided her with an opportunity to practise choosing research topics, research methods and designs.

Maani was excited when teachers appreciated and acknowledged her effort saying, *“teachers appreciated me because they knew I studied a lot”*. Teacher compliments encouraged her to keep learning. She cited her teachers’ comments as including *“she [Maani] was a good student and there is always a need for good students”*. Another teacher would say, *“This girl likes to study”*. Therefore, she would feel satisfied and competitive that she was learning to meet the learning expectations of her teachers.

On the other hand, Maani stated she could not manage a good relationship with her fellows because they did not cooperate or demonstrate much interest in learning activities. She explained, *“half of them [fellows] were jobholders. Their goal was only to take a degree rather than learning”*. Her summary of her fellow students highlights her reasons for finding them to be less supportive and helpful. She explained:

*The peers were less supportive, among them 50% were new students [new to the university] who didn't have good research skills. They were busy with their job routines so due to this I had a lack of interaction with them. They used to come late to the University and leave early. I did not think that they knew much so I did not get help from them.*

Nonetheless, she explained that she tried to interact with classmates, but they had differences of opinion with her during the classroom learning activities. For instance, she told me *“If there would be a test and I reminded the teacher then my fellows became angry at me and asked why did i remind the teacher about the class test?”*. She explained that because of

interactions like this she did not make much effort to collaborate with her classmates. Besides, she remained upset as she assumed her fellows did not like her because she was comparatively a better student than others. *“They had a misunderstanding with me, and they even started saying things like she knows something, so she is arrogant. This was sad for me”*.

While relationships with peer students were not good, Maani established a learning network with senior fellows. She explained that *“I got a lot of opportunities to learn from my seniors in the department and they were very helpful for me in this regard”*. She gave preference to her senior fellows because she thought they could guide her more productively than her classmates. She used to discuss her assignments and academic matters with seniors in the library noting that *“we have a separate library here, that is a reference library where M Phil and PhD students can sit and to discuss things regarding their studies.”*

#### **4.4.1.3 Putting extra effort into reading and writing**

Reading was very important to Maani as a self-directed learner explaining that *“I thought my reading would help me at the end of coursework”*. She had to complete several reading-based assignments independently. Such assignments enhanced her interest in reading, writing, and engaging in self-learning. She commented that *“reading and self-study became my habit and some of my motivation”*.

Maani was self-reflective and had evaluated her writing skills which she assessed were not ideal for research work. She said, *“my English writing is not so good. Good writing is essential for a good researcher”*. She valued the course on academic writing because *“it was relevant to research”*. She viewed these courses as interdependent and important for research. She realised that if she aspired to be a researcher then good writing would be an essential requirement, recognising that *“people [supervisors and evaluators] may not compromise on my research skills, so I have tried to learn”*. She focused on improving her writing skills by learning the different elements required for good academic writing, explaining, for example, *“I learned how to start and finish a thesis chapter”*. She developed her understanding on formatting and referencing [APA skills] and had some practise of writing research articles through classroom projects, noting that *“I learned how to write an article”*.

#### **4.4.1.4 Considering background subject for area of specialisation**

Maani deliberately selected “*Educational Administration*” for her area of specialisation because she had a strong interest in the course, “*Economics of Education*”. It was a background subject to her area, she said “*I love that subject because I had been studying that subject since my first year [11th grade]. I thought I should have continued that*”. She was committed to study and put extra effort into the assignments for this course because she wanted to continue her learning in this area sharing that she “*had so much interest in that as I compiled a book on it and gave it to the teacher for the other students*”. She also thought she would try to find a research topic in this area in the future.

#### **4.4.1.5 Concluding comments**

Maani felt a positive change in her confidence and learning attitude after the coursework. She said, “*ethics and morals, my attitude changed a lot due to these things*”. She reflected that she had a positive attitude and commitment to the learning activities. She was already a self-directed learner, and the coursework developed her study and reading habits where “*readings and self-study became my habit*”. She also improved her interpersonal skills where she said, “*I learned how our behaviour should be with others*”. She commented: “*Interest in research had started to develop so I picked everything of research. I had self-motivation*”. She believed she enhanced her knowledge, learned research skills, clarified concepts, and improved understanding to perform in the academic culture. She explained:

*I learned a lot. I learned to do research. I learned before [MPhil] but not the way I learned after. I did in-depth studies. I cleared the things which were not understandable during the MPhil.*

#### **4.4.2 Role identity as an emerging researcher**

While moving towards the next milestone which was a research proposal, Maani had to shift her self-perception to that of an emerging researcher in the academic community. Maani had to develop a research proposal and apply her theoretical research understanding to a practical research idea. Throughout this stage she considered that she made an independent and responsible effort to develop and present a research proposal in her area of interest which was Economics of Education.

#### **4.4.2.1 Motivation and a multidisciplinary area for research**

Maani was motivated and felt free to focus on her research after completing the courses. She said, *“You try to explore things because you are mentally free at that time and your main focus is on conducting research”*. She was excited to make decisions about choosing her research area and appropriate research methods. Her main emphasis was to ensure the quality [significant topic, appropriate research methods] of her research proposal.

As mentioned in the earlier stage, Maani was a self-directed learner, so she was quite confident in this phase, *saying, “I wanted to explore things by myself”*. She had a strong belief in her own ability to find an emerging topic for her research proposal. She said that she *“did not need a lot of support because If i have to do then I will do, no problem.”* However, she continued her readings in her area of interest, *saying, “I am good at reading, I read a lot of books”*. Based on her background research experience and interest in Economics, she aimed to select a multidisciplinary area of research where she could merge both disciplines (Education and Economics). While reading the literature, Maani focused on some models and theories of Economics which could apply in an education system to measure the costs and benefits. She explained that her intention was *“to compare technical education with general education. I wanted to conduct research in which I could explore Cost Benefit Analysis of Education”*. Moreover, she assumed that technical education [Skill knowledge] had not been given much importance in Pakistan compared to developed countries where people have technical skills. Moreover, most people prefer to get a general education. She commented that *“people have a lot of intentions to get general education, but they do not have much intention towards technical education”*. She observed the situation of technical education in Pakistan and aimed to highlight the awareness of people about technical education with respect to its cost and benefits. She believed she was going to research an emerging and demanding area across the world because technical education (skills or training for different trades such as electrical technology, civil technology, computer science etc.) might help to prepare a technically skilled workforce which was needed in all countries. She explained:

*My basic aim was to do the cost and benefit of technical education, which would be beneficial for the people. It is in demand internationally but here [Pakistan] we don't have a skilled workforce. I wanted to explore what could be the benefits of it.*

#### **4.4.2.2 Seeking support of people in her area of research**

Although Maani believed that she possessed research skills due to her coursework and MPhil experience, she needed to think about broader academic practices and develop an extensive research proposal at PhD level independently, and she explained, *“I had basic skills but did not have skills to develop a good and advanced research proposal”*.

She selected her research supervisor based on her area of interest (Educational Economics), research experience, and good departmental environment [to avoid departmental issues and politics]. She further pointed out *“my criteria were on time, supportive and there should not be a communication gap. I needed guidance and advice on every step”*. However, she was satisfied with her supervisor who supported her during the crucial phase of proposal development, noting that *“he [supervisor] helped me in developing my synopsis”*. Her supervisor also provided her with research assistance especially with the emotional support to maintain her resilience when she had to revise her research proposal, explaining that *“he did not let me go down and helped me in developing the second synopsis in a short time of between 2 to 3 months. He helped me so I would not go into depression”*.

Conversely, she did not seek help from her classmates. She thought her class fellows could not help her with her research proposal because they did not have the same caliber of knowledge as herself. Instead, she preferred to interact with teachers and senior fellows in her area of research who had more research experience which could help her to understand her chosen area of research. She acknowledged, *“some of the seniors were happy to cooperate with me, they provided me motivation and helped me in understanding things”*. In addition, she gained the support of a teacher in her area of research because she was very concerned to select appropriate research methods (mixed methods design) in her research proposal and said: *“I took mostly guidance from one of my teachers of quantitative research”*. Maani became more proactive about accessing people who were working in her area of research and could provide the help she needed to succeed.

Although she believed that she had developed a good proposal and received feedback from others (supervisor and teacher), she was not very confident in the selection of the appropriate research topic. She was uneasy about justifying her topic (of Economics) within the domain

of Education, but she continued working on this topic because her supervisor had recommended this topic for the research proposal.

#### **4.4.2.3 Revising the research proposal**

Once Maani had developed her research proposal, she was required to present and defend it in front of a panel of experts. Unfortunately, her research proposal was not approved in the first attempt because the panel members argued that *“the topic was not related to the education field. This comes under the domain of Economics”*. She tried her best to convince the panel members, but they did not agree with her arguments. She was not very happy when she was asked to revise her research proposal and make a clear connection between the topic and the discipline of education. She needed to read literature to provide a strong link between Economics models and their implications for technical education. She reflected on her hard work during all this time *“while spending days and nights on that [proposal]”* and was depressed that she had not selected a topic which could be defensible easily. This suggests that there may have been some self-doubt and anxiety, in spite of her apparent confidence.

Maani was afraid and nervous about her second attempt to present her research proposal due to the first experience, but she successfully convinced the panel experts with her arguments for linking two different disciplines and said, *“the teachers who rejected my proposal in the first attempt, they appreciated me a lot because of this good work”*. This time, the panel experts appreciated that she was applying a model in her research that made her research innovative and distinctive from other traditional research *“they [panel members] said apply the whole model”*, which was of cost benefit analysis. She was reluctant to apply the whole model because she thought it could be extensive and difficult for her, but she had to agree with the feedback of the panel experts and get approval of her research proposal. She explained that *“it happened that they made my research extended and lengthy by adding some new things. I already wasted a whole year and did not want to repeat that. So, I agreed upon the decision”*.

#### **4.4.2.4 Concluding comments**

At this time of her PhD journey, Maani faced various research and emotional challenges, starting from selecting a research problem to revising her research proposal. Despite these setbacks, she persisted, gained confidence, and focused on self-directed learning in her area

of research and design. She gradually developed her understanding in her area of research, tracing and reading literature on it, finding a research gap, signifying an emerging and multidisciplinary area of research, choosing appropriate research methods, and defending her research proposal. Therefore, her comments have identified the research aspects she was involved in as a part of her role identity as an emerging researcher which provided the basis for an advanced role identity ahead.

#### **4.4.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

Maani was at the stage of dissertation (for around 3 years) when I interviewed her. She had become more confident, responsible, and independent in engaging with research activities based on the proposal she developed in the earlier stage. She also actively started to engage in other academic activities (assisting and teaching graduate students, writing research papers, managing research journals) to enhance her confidence and understanding to enable her to perform in the wider academic community.

##### **4.4.3.1 Seeking support in research activities**

In the next phase, Maani had to develop research instruments and she was expecting standardised instruments for the quality of her research. She said, *“I thought my research would be fine if my instruments were good. If I get some problem in the instruments, then I would face a major objection to my thesis”*. It was difficult for her because she could not find much literature in her area of research, and she was looking for someone who could help her in the development of research instruments. She commented that *“instrument development was a difficult phase for me because no evaluation research or other kinds of research had been conducted on this topic”*.

She contacted one of her teachers who referred her to an expert who had done research in the same area [technical education]. Maani thought she was quite fortunate to have access to the expert who supported her in all this critical phase, saying, *“I got a helping hand that proved very beneficial for me [expert]”*. The expert guided her and provided relevant content in her research area which was helpful for developing the research instruments and said, *“he gave me his questionnaire and interview protocol with his consent”*. She told me she had to prepare six different research instruments in which two were adopted, three were adapted and one was developed, explaining that *“two instruments were developed in our own context,*

he [expert] helped me in adapting his three instruments and developing the last one". Moreover, she knew that understanding questions was an important aspect for standardized research instruments, so she translated her research instruments into Urdu language as well to make it easy for the participants. She explained: *"I tried to make the participants capable of understanding [the instruments] clearly during the data collection process"*. She tried to follow ethical aspects involved in her research noting, *"I got consent for interviews as well as for data collection [questionnaires]"*. The research instrumentation phase was challenging for Maani, but she ended up learning a great deal about the instrument development process and enhanced her confidence in the research area. She was relaxed and satisfied after developing the research instruments and commented that, *"I thought half of my research had been done"*.

Data collection from a diverse group of the participants was also a challenge for Maani who said: *"I took interviews of the experts as well as from the teachers and students at colleges. I had to take data from the engineer of atomic energy, WAPDA, Civil engineering"*. She was alone and had to visit several places to access the participants. She said data collection was a long and demanding process in which she lacked motivation, but self-belief helped her to persist in self-directed learning in her research and gained confidence to perform research activities. Preferably, she did not want to take help from others, but she acknowledged one of her friends in the hostel *"who [friend] helped me a lot in data collection"* when she needed to go out of the city.

She was confident about working on data analysis independently because she had an interest and background in quantitative data analysis. As she said, *"I had expertise in data analysis, so I did not get help from anyone, especially in quantitative analysis"*. Although, she thought that she did not need any help for data analysis, she had to take some guidance from a teacher and senior fellows during her data analysis, explaining, *"when I had difficulty in SPSS, I went to my teacher"*, and for the qualitative analysis, *"the [seniors] taught me about applying NVivo"*. Qualitative research analysis was a new experience for her, and she enhanced her confidence and skills in using the software for analysis. She always believed in her own ability to do independent work and assumed that student peers were not capable enough to support her. She explained:

*My first preference is to interact with my teachers because I feel that my fellows and my seniors did not know much more than my teachers. I don't think they know much about that, so I don't discuss it. I feel that even if they have knowledge, they will not be able to convey all the knowledge to you due to lack of time or any other reason.*

At the time of the interview, she had completed the first draft of her thesis and said, *"I have done it after spending days and nights but let's see what happens next in the seminar"*. She already said she was concerned about her language, so she had to get her thesis proofread, by an English language expert before submitting to the supervisor and noted that *"he [supervisor] does not have to put much effort into checking my thesis"*. She said she had worked hard and faced loneliness and tiredness in this stage, explaining that *"I got tired of doing that, you can say my all energy went to that"*. Currently, she was waiting to share her research findings through a seminar and receive feedback from experts. She believed that she had conducted good research and said, *"I am confident with the results that they are right"*.

#### **4.4.3.2 Supervisory support in the academic activities**

Most importantly, her supervisor engaged Maani in other academic activities which was very helpful for her understanding of the broader expectations of academic roles and responsibilities. She stated, *"I assisted him [supervisor] in his office work. I assisted the MPhil students in their research work, I managed a journal. Sometimes I take his lectures"*. Maani enhanced her knowledge and confidence by participating in such activities.

Maani gained an opportunity to teach as a visiting faculty member which enhanced her confidence to teach at university level and said *"I taught SPSS and computer science. My confidence level built due to that"*. She could feel a positive change in her attitude and tried to behave like a teacher. She reflected that *"You can say before we think like a student and then we bring change in ourselves, and we think we are teachers and have to behave like them"*. She was satisfied that the teaching experience provided her with a lot of confidence and an opportunity to clarify the concepts which she did not focus on in earlier stages. She always remained proactive towards her students and prepared carefully for her teaching. She commented that:

*I did learn in my student phase, and I did learn in my teaching phase. I had many things that were not clear, I cleared at the time of teaching and discussing with the*

*students and enhanced my knowledge. Because at that time I thought students might ask me questions. I had to explore something by myself. You can say you improve your theoretical knowledge.*

Maani's supervisor was like a mentor who used to advise her to participate in academic events inside and outside the institution such as by advising her to *"take part in the research conferences"*. She told me she had an opportunity to understand different research areas which people were working on, and she gained further clarification in some tricky research concepts while participating in the conferences. She commented: *"I could not properly understand some sampling techniques, and we could not ask the teachers, but I got clarity in those events"*. She would ask questions during those sessions in the conferences and interact with the other people working in the academic community.

Her supervisor offered her an opportunity to manage a research journal which helped her to contact foreign researchers with respect to their papers". She reflected on the different aspects of research [research areas, writing style, different research methods] which she was not much aware of, noting that *"it is itself a research activity. I got a lot of command on research due to that"*. In the course of this experience, she enjoyed connecting with international researchers.

She also acknowledged the support of her supervisor in writing research papers and getting those papers published in research journals. She realised that she would have to write research papers to get recognition in the academic community. She said her supervisor advised her to *"write articles and wherever you need support from me, I will be there always, and he surely does so"*. She had written some research papers *"got two or three articles published in a research journal in the department"* and she was trying to identify different aspects of her research she could convert into research papers. She mainly focused on avoiding plagiarism when she had to extract articles from her research thesis. It was a learning experience for her to write and present the research content in different contexts.

She believed that these academic activities had a significant contribution in her professional development and said, *"my confidence builds as well as my knowledge enhances due to those activities [academic]"*. Her supervisor always appreciated and acknowledged her efforts to refine academic and scholarly abilities. She stated that:

*He [the supervisor] thinks that she [Maani] is a good student and she will do well so he trusts me in every regard and gives me any task and says you have to do it. He said that she works and knows how to do work. He used to praise me in front of other teachers.*

#### **4.4.3.3 Part of the academic community**

Maani was enthusiastic and satisfied that she was performing in an academic environment where all other people were also involved in different academic and scholarly activities. Regular interaction and involvement in academic activities developed her sense of herself as part of the academic community and contributing something to it. She believed that she was gaining more confidence to keep learning and performing such activities independently. She explained:

*I consider myself a part of an academic community. What I'm doing and interacting with my peers, my supervisor with my fellows, and all the people around me in the Institute and I'm learning I love them.*

*You get motivated to interact with more people such as your seniors, your peers, your administration, your supervisor etc. You become more social when you are a researcher and you become a social activist and you play or participate in many more activities.*

Maani was playing multiple roles at the moments which she could switch based on the situation or academic activity. *"I'm also playing my role as a teacher and as a teacher I play the role of a mentor"*. She believed that she had learned a lot while meeting the expectations to perform these roles and continue her learning. Maani perceived that she had gained significant skills and confidence in aspects like practical research, teaching and guiding students, writing research papers, editing research journals and participation in research conferences. Her growing confidence suggests her moving into the identity role of an emerging academic.

#### **4.4.4 Summary**

Maani wanted to improve her understanding of research methods and preparation for her professional career through the PhD. She was expecting to enhance her research skills and ability to write and emphasised her area of specialisation (economics of education) during the coursework. She was motivated to actively engage in the learning activities and create a good impression among teachers and peers that she was a good learner. Maani believed the

teachers had a lot of experience and were capable of helping her to meet her own learning expectations, especially learning research methods. She recounted that the interaction with the course teachers was valuable and supportive in learning research skills, developing reading habits, and refining writing skills. Her teachers used to encourage her to keep learning and develop a positive attitude. The teachers appreciated her in the class, saying that she was a good student and hard worker, which validated her in her role identity as a learner. Maani also valued the interaction with seniors because she thought they could better explain and support her expectations of learning in the courses. On the other hand, she did not interact with her classmates. She considered that she had higher learning expectations than her peers because they appeared to be uninterested in the learning activities. Moreover, she assumed that they did not have the knowledge and ability needed to help her. However, the lack of interaction with her peers may have contributed to her depression and feelings of isolation during the coursework. Despite setbacks, her persistence and self-directed learning sustained her progress.

In the next phase, Maani had to develop a research proposal based on her learning in the courses which shifted her self-image from that of a learner to an emerging researcher. She was expecting to develop a research proposal on an area which would have international significance and value and combine both Education and Economics disciplines. Maani thought that she had acquired sufficient knowledge of research, but she needed more support to develop a research proposal at PhD level. She selected her supervisor based on her area of interest so she could share and receive better guidance to meet her expectations of research. She started working on a research topic which was recommended by her supervisor, but she was not fully confident with the topic because she had discussed the idea with some seniors who suggested that it would be difficult to defend. The regular interaction with the supervisor supported her to share and understand the required expectations of a research proposal. Her supervisor also referred her to another teacher expert in her research methods (quantitative), so she gained more clarity and understanding in her research area. Interaction with the seniors was also helpful for knowing about the standard criteria and problems she might face in developing a research proposal. These interactions provided her with opportunities to refine her research ideas and methods. The most constructive and critical interaction was with the panel members when she had to present and defend her research problem, but she

could not convince the panel to accept the topic/area which derived from both disciplines. She received their critical feedback and suggestions to improve, and revisited literature to gain in-depth understanding and clarity in her area of research. She also had to make strong arguments and link her area with the Education discipline and her proposal was finally approved by the panel members. It was the moment when she had to shift her conception of herself to consider the importance of critical feedback from others and acquire greater clarity in her understanding of the research area. This understanding also validated her role identity as an emerging researcher.

As she worked towards the next institutional milestone, Maani engaged in practical research activities and produced knowledge through writing a dissertation which moved her self-conception further towards that of an emerging academic. She wanted to gain more confidence to perform research activities independently and to participate in wider academic activities. Correspondingly, she extended her interactions with the wider academic community to gain support and understand the expectations and experiences associated with her role identity. She was unable to find the literature in her area of research, so she approached an expert in her research area who provided resources to her for instrument development and support to access the research participants for her data collection. Although she was confident with her data analysis skills, she needed some more guidance from a teacher for the quantitative part and seniors for the qualitative part. She had good sharing, support, and discussion on her research through these interactions. At the time of the interview, she had prepared the first draft of her research write up, and she was waiting for a research seminar so she could gain feedback from others and refine her research accordingly.

The most valuable experience for her was working as an assistant to her supervisor which enhanced her confidence and understanding of herself as an emerging academic. The experience of teaching enhanced her theoretical knowledge and confidence to teach graduate students. She used to prepare herself for teaching before taking classes so she could be confident about sharing and answering the students' questions to meet their expectations. She considered this experience brought a positive change in herself as she progressed from the role of student to that of a teacher. In addition, participation in the research conferences and seminars provided another opportunity to clarify her concepts, share research and

understand the wider expectations of being an emerging academic. She had the full support of her supervisor to find different aspects from her research area and write articles, which was an aspect of her role identity as an emerging academic. Her supervisor appreciated her commitment to the academic tasks, which made her more confident and satisfied in performing the academic activities. She considered herself as a part of the academic community where she was learning and interacting with teachers, peers, and supervisors.

## Case-4

### 4.5 Introducing Waqas

When I interviewed Waqas he had completed a seminar and was ready to submit his thesis. Waqas explained that when he applied for a PhD, he had been in a school administrative role in the Ministry of Education. Completing an MPhil in Education had been the motivation for Waqas to continue to study for a PhD in the same institution. He had an interest in research and teaching and wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of concepts he had not been able to cover fully in his MPhil. He commented that *“if a person does an MPhil, he/she has to make some more effort to learn more and overcome the deficiencies and concepts that have been left”*. He desired to *“have a chance to write something relevant to my field [Education]”* and contribute to teaching and learning through his research. He had continued in his administrative role but was studying full time. He also hoped to secure a career in a higher education institution. He was inspired by the great scholars and philosophers who had contributed new knowledge to education and society at large.

Although Waqas was mindful of the long journey of the PhD and the challenges he might face, he had begun his doctoral journey determined to manage the responsibilities of his job, his family, and the study. He explained:

*It is a long journey where you have to deal with three things at a time of this stage of life: family matters, household matters, and education. Although it is tough, as it decreased my passion, I took it up and started [PhD] with full zeal.*

#### 4.5.1 Role identity as a learner

During the coursework part of his PhD, Waqas desired to enhance his understanding of research concepts and academic practices. He experienced a formal and classroom learning environment in which he had a lot of support from his teachers and fellows.

##### 4.5.1.1 Value of learning in the courses

In the first semester, Waqas hoped to enhance his in-depth understanding and clarity of research concepts. He studied four courses related to research and the discipline of Education. He explained that studying the course on qualitative research had helped him to understand how to use different methods such as conducting research interviews. The course

on curriculum development guided him to understand the curriculum process and challenges of curriculum design and development. He liked this course because he aspired to be involved in curriculum development in future. He explained, *“if I ever get an opportunity to serve in the curriculum wing [department] then I can at least talk about it”*. The course on *“teacher education”* enlightened him about the history of teacher education and different models that are employed for it. He also learned about the teacher characteristics for implementing the different models of teacher education. Finally, the course on *“Philosophy of Education”* helped him to recognise how different philosophies influence education systems.

#### **4.5.1.2 Acknowledging the support of others in gaining academic skills**

Waqas was excited to observe the classroom environment which was *“friendly, disciplined and formal”*. The support of the teachers played a prominent part in his learning endeavors. He said the course teachers were *“seniors and competent”* and provided him with substantial guidance and support in his learning. They encouraged him to keep participating in learning activities and instilled a desire to acquire knowledge and keep learning. His teachers engaged him in a range of classroom learning activities and assignments which improved his research skills, writing skills, communication skills, and personal competencies.

Waqas told me there were three kinds of assignments in his courses. The first kind of assignments were based on literature which helped him to understand the importance and use of a literature review in research work. Another type of assignment was based on research in which his teachers assigned him different articles to review and then practice writing research papers. The third type of assignments were presentations through which he thought his teachers tried to improve his interpersonal skills, his *“communication and personality development”*. He also linked these assignments to the development of his English language skills through reading, writing, and speaking in the different courses because *“I had a little or very less understanding of reading and writing till my MPhil”*. In his view, all these assignments helped him to enhance his knowledge, understanding and confidence in writing and to perform learning activities.

Waqas explained that he had been quite nervous at the start of the coursework, but he gained some courage when he observed his other classmates noting *“some students in the department were more confused compared to me in regard to understanding the things”*.

Besides, sometimes he underestimated his abilities to perform the learning activities compared to other classmates when he felt that *“It [assignment and activities] was not difficult for a good student but difficult for one who was average [like him].* He appreciated the supportive and collaborative relationship with his classmates regarding his learning and classroom performance, asserting that *“a major part of it [my learning] is due to my fellows”.* Waqas believed that the regular sharing and academic discussions with his classmates were significant in his clarification of concepts. He acknowledged that he interacted with peers *“for the sake of clarification of things related to research and other course content”.* He elaborated that his interaction with his fellows was constructive and learning-oriented because they [fellows] had diverse skills and expertise which helped him to enhance his understanding of research concepts and other assignments. He stated:

*We students had diversified areas of education in our group, like some were good in educational psychology, some were good in research, and others were good in analysis skills, so I learned all the things from my fellows.*

Over time he had become more comfortable about asking his peers for help with the learning and writing activities [assignments] because *“I was hesitant to ask my teachers because they were senior. I got to spend much more time with my class fellows compared to the faculty members”.*

Waqas also explained that he interacted with a number of educational experts and researchers at different academic events. His main emphasis in attending these events was on learning and clarifying what was required for practical research work. He explained:

*As I had no experience before, I learnt from the experiences of people, how people present and on what aspects we should focus on while doing research write ups. I saw things practically about what we need while doing research at different stages from first step to end.*

#### **4.5.1.3 Assuming responsibility for improving reading and writing skills**

Waqas considered that he was comparatively more serious and responsible in the second semester because he had realised the importance of academic writing and the value of specialisation for his next research phase. He noted that, *“I gained maturity [responsibility] in my thinking in the second semester because we were moving towards research work. We were*

*just taking the coursework more lightly in the first semester*". He started to focus on his reading habits and academic writing skills. He explained he used to visit the departmental libraries to look for readings which contributed to his engagement in learning activities and developed his reading habits and writing skills. He appreciated that *"there was a good library and Internet facilities for scholars. Updated books were also present in the libraries"*. The course on academic writing helped him to understand the importance of writing for research work such as, *"writing style, arguments, everything from introduction to recommendation and conclusion in research work"*. He also learned the purpose and requirements of writing research papers.

During the second semester, Waqas focused on his area of specialisation which was educational management. As noted in section 4.5, he was already involved in an administrative job at school level, and he wanted to enhance his understanding of diverse management models and theories. He especially emphasised understanding quality management aspects in the education sector and *"how we can apply the principles of quality management in education"*.

#### **4.5.1.4 Concluding comments**

This stage was very important for Waqas; enhanced his capability and confidence to perform learning activities with the support of his fellows and teachers. He learned and clarified many research concepts and topics in the field of Education. He improved his reading habits and academic writing skills. He also enhanced his interpersonal skills such as communication and collaboration through classroom presentations, and discussions with teachers and fellows.

#### **4.5.2 Role identity as an emerging researcher**

The research proposal development stage was crucial for Waqas because he had to work hard and independently to develop a proposal in his specialist area which was educational management. This involved a role shift for him towards being a researcher and performing with people in the same area of interest. He continued his learning, especially in his area of specialisation, but his main objective was to apply the research concepts he learned recently to the development of a quality research proposal. He had to work on topic selection and refinement in his area of research, choose appropriate research methods, gain support of others, and present his research proposal.

#### **4.5.2.1 Focusing on school management practices for research topic**

Waqas had experience of and motivation for research due to his MPhil, but he viewed this as being at a *“basic level”*. He was mindful of the high expectations and requirements of a research proposal at PhD level. He wanted to find an area of research which would meet the quality and standards of a doctoral research project. He said that *“I had to conduct a study of international level because the evaluation is to be done from foreign evaluators”*.

Waqas already had experience of and an interest in school management but to prepare his proposal he read literature on school management practices from different countries. He identified and contextualised several ideas which could be significant areas for his PhD research by linking them with the education in Pakistan, noting that *“I linked that [research ideas] with our education set up”*. Based on his job experience and reading literature on school education, Waqas assumed there were two major contextual aspects that needed to be considered in his research: (i) the school management/organisation structure *“which takes decisions and planning to organise practices related to HRM [school teachers],* and (ii) the knowledge and experience of the teachers. Correspondingly, he decided to research these aspects at high school level in Pakistan. He said, *“organisational justice [management practices] and workplace spirituality [teacher’s competence and wellbeing] of teachers were the best suitable variables to measure all these aspects”*. Moreover, he thought these constructs (organisational justice and workplace spirituality) were important to research for the development of school education. However, he focused learning only on his specific area of research and the variables. Moreover, the job experience helped him to conceptualize the connection between his research theories and school practices. He explained that *“I looked into the things in literature and later on in the field that how it is in real life. This gave me an idea about teachers’ spirituality, and I became clearer through personal experience”*.

#### **4.5.2.2 Grappling with research methods and writing**

Waqas explained that he was not very confident about the application of some of the research methods which were important for developing a PhD research proposal when he began the process. He stated that he needed more clarity about what might be a useful theoretical and conceptual frameworks for his study. He recognised that he needed to think about *“the way we can relate our research with the theory or how theories are based on the research problem”*. As part of developing his understanding he noted he had to identify *“what is your*

*research paradigm and how you see the world of knowledge*". This helped him to decide methods for his research proposal. Based on his reading and discussions with his supervisor, he decided on a *"sequential explanatory mixed method design"*. He thought this approach could cover all aspects of his research problem mentioned earlier. Waqas reported that selecting a research design was definitely a challenging task but that he gradually clarified his understanding with readings, and at the end of the process he felt confident in his designs.

Academic writing and English language skills also posed a challenge. They were aspects in which he needed to put a lot of effort. Waqas explained that sometimes he had a conceptual understanding of the research problem but not the language competence to bring that understanding into his writing. He explained that *"Things and ideas were in my mind, but I find it difficult to write due to language"*. He stated he had done a lot of reading and writing practice to ensure his research proposal was at an acceptable standard.

Reflecting on this part of his doctoral education journey, Waqas recognized that he had needed to apply the research skills he was acquiring in his role as an emerging researcher, but at the same time he was still exploring and learning ideas as a way to clarify ideas and become more confident. His commentary suggested he was aware of and acted on the need to be more independent at this stage.

#### **4.5.2.3 Continuous support from his supervisor**

Waqas chose his research supervisor based on his area of specialisation (educational management), the experience of the supervisor in terms of *"how many candidates he had supervised before"*, and his expectation that he and the supervisor would understand each other in research work, *"who can have some mental understanding"*. He chose to conduct his PhD research with his previous MPhil supervisor because he had the same area of interest, he had good research experience, and Waqas was comfortable with him because they knew each other. He explained:

I chose Professor X as my supervisor because his area of specialization was also educational administration. Another reason was that I had done my MPhil thesis with him so we both had a better understanding of each other, so I continued my work with him.

Waqas gained the sustained support of his supervisor in the development of his research proposal because the supervisor had rich experience in his area of research. Waqas appreciated the feedback that his supervisor provided because he had a good understanding with him and could share the problems that he faced in the research proposal. He said that *“I discussed my progress with my supervisor, and you can say it was at both ends like mutual sharing”*. Waqas was feeling quite comfortable learning and working with his supervisor saying that, *“If you have a positive or learning relationship with your supervisor then things [research] become very much clearer and you get feedback in a good way.*

#### **4.5.2.4 Presentation and revision of his research proposal**

Waqas had mixed feelings when presenting his research proposal to a panel of experts, feeling both nervous and confident that at least they would provide him constructive feedback on his research proposal. He explained that *“I was more nervous but a bit confident too that I got an opportunity to share [research proposal] with the senior experts. if the ideas and variables would be researchable then I’ll get suggestions to make it more effective and get guidance on it”*. He believed that he would convince the experts through his arguments, but he did not receive his desired feedback from the expert panel. He explained, *“they [experts] suggested revisions. I had to revise according to the suggestions given by them”*. He was unhappy due to the aspect of teachers’ politics and conflicts with each other because he said the teachers who were against my supervisor tried to create problems in accepting his research proposal. He explained that *“the teachers from other groups tried to not accept my proposal, and I had to improve as per their directions, and it made my work delayed”*. Despite all of this, he read more literature and revised his research proposal by incorporating all the suggestions. In the next attempt he was more confident about presenting and defending his research proposal and received approval for it.

#### **4.5.2.5 Concluding comments**

This stage was quite challenging for Waqas because he had to apply his conceptual research knowledge to a practical research proposal. He had problems with some aspects of the research proposal such as understanding the theoretical and conceptual framework, choosing appropriate research methods (research design and participants) and revising his research proposal. In response, he continued his learning with a positive attitude and enhanced his

competence and confidence as an emerging researcher. His peers, supervisor and the panel of experts played an important part in supporting him during his research proposal stage.

#### **4.5.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

To recap, at the time of the interviews Waqas was ready to submit his thesis. This stage had taken around 3 years to complete his research thesis. During this time, he remained focused on his learning, and he had also actively engaged in other scholarly activities to expand his academic experience. As mentioned earlier, he was already working in the school department which increased his responsibilities for academic and research tasks, understanding of academic culture at higher education level, and confidence to perform in the academic community. This stage includes his engagement in research activities, gaining support from others, opportunities to perform wider academic activities, development of academic writing, and gaining social and academic recognition.

##### ***4.5.3.1 Engagement in research activities and continuing his learning***

Once his research proposal had been approved, Waqas started working on his research instruments. Extensive reading of literature helped him to understand the specific indicators he needed to cover in the research variables [organisational justice and workplace spirituality] relevant to his research. He gained online access to some standardised research instruments in his area of research and received permission from the authors. He then contextualised and validated them via a pilot study. He explained, *“I wanted to modify [the instruments] according to our context. ... “I checked their psychometric properties. I did a factor analysis after doing the pilot study. It was a learning experience”*. As the quote illustrates, Waqas viewed the design and pilot process as a learning experience, one that enhanced his competence and confidence to develop research instruments. Reflecting on the process he asserted, *“Now, I can develop an instrument”*.

The next phase, data collection, was a critical and tough phase for Waqas. His job in school management helped him to access his research participants [teachers] through referrals at his workplace. As he explained, *“My job was relevant to my research work because AEOs (managers who inspect schools quality indicators) directly deal with teachers and their issues in the school education department”*. However, data collection was comparatively easy for him because he had contacts with school teachers due to his job. He approached school

teachers through two means for quantitative data *“I sent [questionnaire] in soft, and to some participants I sent in printed form”*. Then he approached some school teachers for qualitative data because he was conducting mixed methods research. *“I took interviews with teachers”*.

Waqas told me he was satisfied with his learning about data analysis when he performed *“descriptive and inferential analysis [quantitative] through SPSS, and thematic analysis for his qualitative data. I learnt side by side while doing things [research activities]”*. He explained that he had found it challenging to manage his mixed methods design and merge his quantitative and qualitative data. He said, *“You have to see first the quantitative aspects of things and then you move to qualitative aspects”*. This comment indicates that he realised that data analysis for a mixed methods design is a rigorous and complex process. He went on to explain that he believed it had been important that he sustained his courage and learning throughout the crucial process of data analysis, and that his motivation had increased as he learned more. He observed that *“My motivation had increased consistently during all this. When you are learning something, I think you become more motivated to learn”*. This learning had contributed to his understanding and confidence in the analysis of diverse research data. He concluded that *“I am now confident after doing my research. I need more learning, but I know how to apply descriptive and inferential stats like mean, mode, relationships, ANOVA etc.”*

Reflecting on his thesis write up and preparation for his research seminar [an institutional requirement to present research to an open audience and gain feedback before thesis submission], he commented that there was more work that could be done on the qualitative section of his research, with this comment attributable to his high expectations. He said *“I still think there is a need to do more work on it [write up and analysis]. I feel that some other things should be added to it more from a qualitative aspect”*. Nevertheless, he conducted a research seminar to share his research findings with experts and students in the department. He said, *“It was successful and most of the audience appreciated it”*. He gained some feedback which enhanced clarity of his research and improved his writeup. He told me that the experts commented, *“Your work is good, but you need to improve your writing further”*. He was never afraid to receive critical feedback on his research because he firmly believed in ongoing learning and was committed to improving his knowledge. He explained *“I feel that there is always room to learn and improve, and it has pushed me towards learning”*. Continuous effort

in the learning process had become an important aspect of his identity as an emerging scholar.

#### **4.5.3.2 Support of supervisor and other students**

Waqas reported he received sustained support from his supervisor, class fellows, and seniors during his thesis writeup. His supervisor used to arrange individual and combined meetings of the department PhD students which helped him to enhance his collaboration skills and understanding of different research perspectives of his peers explaining that *“we shared different ideas with each other, and this gave a chance for learning”*. Whenever Waqas needed some help for his thesis writing, his supervisor provided him with some good theses to study in order to *“see and learn how students had written”*.

Sometimes, Waqas felt he needed more attention or guidance from his supervisor *“they [supervisors] are supervising students in their research, they should have fewer administrative tasks so that they can supervise their students well and with focus”*. He acknowledged the contribution of his supervisor to his research work, saying, *“apparently it is the work done by one person that is the scholar but actually it is the work done by two persons, one is you and the other is your supervisor”*.

Moreover, Waqas established a good network of fellows, so he was able to seek and gain their support regarding research and other academic matters. He pointed out, *“the fellows were also in the same process, and they discuss the things they have also faced so you get an idea about the things”*. As he reported in the previous stages, he always felt comfortable interacting with them and talking with them to enhance his understanding of research. He believed that his collaboration with his class fellows worked in a bidirectional way - he and his fellows benefited. He said:

*Even in the documentation of the thesis, write up, I got help from my research fellows and they guided me in this regard. I also guided many students in this regard, and you can say it is a two way or vice versa process.*

Waqas also acknowledged the support of his senior fellows who had more experience and could guide him on critical aspects of research. He commented that *“Seniors were some steps*

*above me, they were very helpful in doing the things related to studies. They shared the things they had faced and that was very helpful”.*

#### **4.5.3.3 Opportunity to teach in a university**

Waqas was committed to enhancing his understanding and experience of the different roles within the academic profession at the higher education level. He chose to participate in a range of formal and informal academic opportunities. He was quite satisfied and confident with the opportunities he had to gain all-round development for the knowledge and skills required for an academic position. He commented, *“It [the department] supported the fulfillment of my professional needs related to teaching, learning process, knowledge, methodological skills, theoretical skills and practical skills etc.”*

He applied for and gained a teaching and training position [temporary] offered by an - another institution [Open University] which enhanced his competence and confidence to communicate and manage students at the higher education level. He explained that *“We have an Open University AIOU that offers some courses related to teacher education like B. Ed, M. Ed. I conducted workshops there as a resource person”*. Moreover, he also gained an opportunity for research supervision of bachelor level students at that university”. As a result, he experienced a huge improvement in his confidence, interpersonal skills, and ability to perform scholarly activities, as he commented.:

*I got a lot of learning in communication and in my conceptual understanding. I had never done formal teaching before that time. My confidence and learning both improved. It was difficult to talk before but now it is easy to talk in front of people. I got a lot of confidence over there to talk in front of many people. It was a big change in me.*

These comments show his commitment, interest, and satisfaction in performing scholarly activities in the wider academic community.

#### **4.5.3.4 Development in academic writing and attitude**

Waqas reflected on the improvement in his research skills, knowledge, and academic writing abilities. For instance, in terms of research skills he stated, *“now I know things like theoretical framework, conceptual framework, discussion, finding gaps in the literature, methodological*

*issues, contribution in the studies*". He could feel a positive change in his affective domain as well which included, *"personality, vision/outlook, way of thinking"*. Moreover, he considered he had improved his academic writing by writing and reading literature, because *"when you write something you get the opportunity to read the other articles related to your research"*. He also considered feedback from others that had played an important role in developing his writing, saying *"when they [experts] evaluate your academic writing and give comments on it you get the opportunity to improve your writing and it is also improving my writing skills"*. He realized that academic writing is an important aspect of being an academic scholar. *"We get recognition across the world if people have an opportunity to read our work and get convinced that something has been written in a good and structured form, these things get valued"*.

Waqas wrote a research article from his PhD work as part of an institutional requirement that it was *"compulsory to publish an article before thesis submission"*. He also recognised that writing research papers was a significant aspect of the development of his scholarly identity in the academic community. He argued that *"It is also a responsibility of being a scholar. It is also an academic and ethical obligation"*. He asserted that he felt confident and independent in writing research papers, claiming *"I can do many things on my own and I did analysis of my research articles after that. I feel that I can write"*. Furthermore, he used to critically observe his workplace practices and identify the academic problems he could research on, explaining *"I considered some areas needed to work on [writing research papers]"*. Gaining experience in conducting research and thesis writing provided him with motivation and confidence to keep writing research papers.

#### **4.5.3.5 Gaining social and academic recognition**

Waqas indicated there were multiple imperatives and indicators that acted to keep his motivation up for learning and becoming a part of the academic community. A first important imperative was to secure a better position in the academic profession. He had gained considerable competence and confidence to perform research and academic activities which he considered would help him in gaining an academic job saying *"your placement opportunities will be improved in your profession [academic]"* because he had acquired adequate disciplinary knowledge, research skills and confidence to perform in higher education institutions. Another imperative was social status or *"respect, your importance in society, your place"*. The last imperative for him was self-development *"related to personality*

*grooming and improving writing skills*". Being able to address these imperatives was essential to his satisfaction and his feeling he was able to be a productive part of the academic and social community. Waqas was quite confident he could play his part in the academic profession. He expressed a sense of satisfaction in his self-identity as an academic based on people's response to his comments: *"I feel other people give me regards and consider me as a respectful person due to my academic profession. When I say something, people listen very carefully, and consider that I am saying something important and authentic"*. Besides, he could feel progress and his identity development with people in the academic community and more broadly: *"I'm moving forward with my PhD among my friends, my society, and my family"*.

#### **4.5.4 Summary**

Waqas began his study with the aim of enhancing his understanding of the Education discipline and to clarify his understanding of research concepts during the coursework, hence his imaginative view of himself as a learner. He considered he did not have the required writing skills and so he wanted to develop these and his reading habits and skills. He believed that his teachers were highly experienced people and they engaged him in the course assignments that were helpful for his learning of disciplinary knowledge/concepts and development of his research skills, reading habits, and writing skills. He mentioned that developing his interpersonal skills (through presentations) was a good experience for him. He believed that learning never stops, there was always a room for learning through experiences which strengthened his imaginative view of himself as a learner. In addition, Waqas considered that his fellows had diverse expertise which he took advantage of to learn from each of them. He developed a mutual understanding and friendly relations with all his peers which made him more comfortable sharing knowledge and learning issues with them. In addition, he attended the research conference and seminars in the department to learn and observe the way researchers presented their research work. He reported this experience was an inspiration for him for doing research. He described his experience of coursework as wonderful, a process that enhanced his understanding of research and disciplinary concepts.

Moving to the next stage, Waqas shifted his imaginative view of himself to someone who needed to and was able to apply his research knowledge to develop a research proposal in

his area of research, which was educational administration. He was expecting to choose a research topic that would make a significant contribution and be acceptable at an advanced level because his proposal would be evaluated by international experts. He critically observed the professional practice of teachers at his workplace in schools and read literature on school education, which supported him to find a research gap and pose research questions. He had confidence in research knowledge due to his learning experience in coursework, but recognised he needed to extend on this through reading. He focused his reading on gaining more clarity and understanding of research methods such as conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and research paradigms. He also sought support from his supervisor to communicate research ideas in his writing. Waqas had worked with his supervisor in his MPhil, so they knew and understood each other's expectations of research. They also had the same research interests. Waqas was very comfortable about sharing his research issues with his supervisor and considered that he received constructive feedback that helped to align his imaginative view of himself as an emerging researcher with institutional expectations that he develops a good research proposal. He was hopeful that he had developed a proposal which would meet the standard of a PhD level. He was nervous about presenting his research proposal, but he valued the opportunity to share his idea with experts and receive their feedback. Unfortunately, his first proposal did not convince the panel members of the merits of his arguments. They suggested he needed to do more work on the research methods he had chosen. In his interview he speculated that panel members' politics impacted on their assessment of his defense, but he received their suggestions with a positive attitude and clarified his research ideas and methods. His revised proposal met their expectations. The experience of revising the research proposal shifted his thinking to consider the value of constructive feedback on his depth of understanding of research ideas and methods which supported his role validation as an emerging researcher.

Completing his data collection and analysis and writing his dissertation moved Waqas's imaginative view of himself towards that of an emerging academic. He wanted to produce new knowledge through his research and to gain experience in participating in other academic activities. Although data collection was a challenging experience, his contacts helped him to access his research participants. Initially, he was not satisfied with his data analysis, however he was motivated to learn more about this, and he did. Once he had completed his data

analysis, he was more confident in his knowledge of this process, which strengthened his imaginative view of himself as an emerging researcher. Interaction with his supervisor was a valuable opportunity for Waqas to receive feedback and come to understand the standard of expectation for quality research. Group meetings with his supervisor and his supervisor's other students helped him to collaborate and know his fellows' research areas. Moreover, he had good interactions with peers in the same area of research as an opportunity to share and help each other in the research activities. This experience developed a sense of shared purpose to complete the research work.

At the time of the interview, Waqas had just completed his thesis and had disseminated his research findings in a compulsory research seminar. This provided him with an opportunity to receive critical feedback from experts, which he used to bring greater clarity to his research work. Waqas stated that the most valuable and productive experience he had beyond his thesis work was the opportunity to teach the graduate students in a University in Pakistan. He was not very confident about his communication, but the experience of teaching contributed significantly to his confidence to communicate and to teach at the level of higher education. Moreover, he believed that writing research articles was an academic and ethical obligation for PhD students, so he was seeking different dimensions of his research and writing articles on that. He had gained an adequate level of expertise and confidence to perform research and academic activities which he considered would help him to secure an academic job in a higher education institution. He also reflected that people had considered him as a person worthy of respect due to his academic profession.

## Case-5

### 4.6 Introducing Kiran

Kiran was the only participant who was enrolled in the weekend PhD programme, and she was completing her data collection at the time of her interview. She had selected this option because of her teaching job in a school. She had chosen to continue her learning and development beyond her MPhil, saying *“the very first thought that made me do a PhD was that an MPhil would not be enough. I started my MPhil to do my PhD”*. Moreover, she began her study with the aim of contributing to the field of Education and doing something special for society: *“I thought about the effort in a PhD, and I need to bring change in society through education. I wanted to teach students of every level in the future”*. Another reason was the encouragement of her family. She explained that *“my family basically wanted to have a written doctor with my name on it at any cost”*.

Kiran was aware of the procedures and learning culture in the institution. She had studied for her MPhil there and *“So, I knew the process and that it was not complicated to go through the admission process”*. She comfortably cleared the formalities for admission.

#### 4.6.1 Role identity as a learner

The coursework stage was crucial for Kiran. She had high expectations of and motivation to enhance her understanding of research methods and disciplinary knowledge, but she did not find a favorable learning environment in the weekend classes. She was happy with the support of her teacher, but she mainly relied on self-directed learning.

##### 4.6.1.1 Orientation for advanced learning through courses

At the start of the coursework, Kiran was delighted with the way she was warmly welcomed and oriented by the teachers who accepted her as a colleague rather than a student. She said:

*I remember the kind of honor given in the first class, among the four teachers who said, “Now you are our colleagues”. The very first thing they said was that now you would not be treated like other students. You people are our colleagues and can share whatever you want. You can ask for whatever information or knowledge you want*

*to learn. We will make our course outlines accordingly. You have become our colleagues.*

This approach enhanced her motivation and confidence to perform in the advanced learning environment. She reported that she and her classmates realised that *“we were going to get something new. We were PhD scholars at that time”*. She was offered a number of disciplinary courses, psychology, philosophy, teacher education, and research courses, *both qualitative research and quantitative research*. There were two courses in her area of specialization, quality assurance, *and* planning and economics. She had a positive approach to studying these courses and clarifying her understanding of research concepts, saying, *“I felt comfortable to ask the questions about the research concepts that I could not properly cover in my MPhil”*.

#### **4.6.1.2 Learning situation in the weekend classes**

After one week, Kiran had to switch to the weekend sessions because of her job commitments in a nearby school. Unfortunately, she did not find a good learning environment in the weekend classes. She thought this was because most of her classmates were job holders and commented, *“I should say job holder class fellows had a particular negative approach for learning”*. She wanted to keep up her learning, but her fellows were not serious or collaborative which caused her distress. She explained that *“Nobody was interested in completing the tasks [assignments] that were given by the teachers”*. Consequently, her motivation declined as she explained, *“the enthusiasm I had in the first class faded away after a week”*. She explained that she had responded to this situation by adopting a self-directed approach: *“I had to change on my own with the passage of time. I made commitments to myself during the class”*. Kiran believed that her ability to study and read independently, without the support of her classmates, had allowed her to maintain her learning and development. She felt that *“I was back on track, you can say, those things really made changes”*.

Kiran explained that she came to class early in order to support her fellows with learning activities, understanding concepts, and completing course assignments:

*I used to come up early [to class] and teach them or you can say guide them about the assignments that were given to us by the teachers in the class. I used to help them to get prepared for the test. I used to explain certain topics in which they felt difficulty.*

This comment indicates that Kiran believed in collaboration and shared learning. In the following comment she describes the way the class collaborated and the quality of peer relationships that were part of this process: *“It was a positive relation with the peers we shared and prepared well in the group rather than individually”*. Kiran liked to initiate interaction with senior fellows to take guidance and support from them in her learning activities.

#### **4.6.1.3 Teachers’ support and interest in learning activities**

Most of the teachers were familiar to her but *“my experiences were quite changed [from the MPhil]”*. She described the learning activities and assignments that they were assigned as follows:

*We were given the PowerPoint presentations; the chapters were divided, and we had to give a presentation on the book chapters. Other kinds of assignments that were given to us were like our teachers gave us a topic or a research topic to search for and asked us to make a proposal on it. Then we had written assignments, for example paragraph writing and essay writing. We had an academic writing course.*

Such activities assigned by the teachers indicate that they pushed her to enhance her reading and communication skills (assigning books and presentations), research skills (practice of developing a research proposal) and writing skills. She reported that she completed all learning activities and assignments with full commitment and a serious attitude and that she found all the assignments helpful: *“I felt a change because I used to do assignments. I used to do all my assignments and I had never found any assignment useless”*. Kiran believed that these assignments and learning projects helped her to extend her critical thinking abilities, commenting *“that [assignments] boosted up our power thinking level”*. Kiran especially appreciated the research courses and teachers, and *“I felt that I learned qualitative and quantitative research. These two courses made changes in me; the things I learned in these courses I did not learn before in MPhil particularly about research”*.

She reported she had developed a strong interest in qualitative research and commented that *“I got attached to qualitative class. I was more enthusiastic about the assignments of the qualitative research course.... I used to wait for the whole week for that particular class of qualitative”*. Her primary reason for her interest and inspiration was the teaching method

adopted by the teacher saying, *“assessment techniques and his instant feedback strategy that boosts up that whatever you are going to do in the class ultimately will help you learn from your mistakes. That inspired me a lot”*. She used to take every possible opportunity to learn about qualitative research and as a result, she learned about data analysis techniques and the software used for qualitative research *“I learned more about NVivo because that was what I needed”*. The other teacher whom she described taught academic writing. This teacher had supported her to understand the importance of academic writing in research and learn the basic principles and elements of writing. Again, she identified the importance of feedback noting that *“she used to give us feedback and choose to listen to the problems we faced in academic writing”*. Kiran believed that improving her academic writing skills was an ongoing task and effort. Therefore, she covered the aspects [course assignments and writing practices] as a part of her learning and enhanced her competence.

#### **4.6.1.4 Concluding comments**

Kiran’s coursework experience was quite challenging, especially at the start when she moved from regular to weekend classes where she did not consider there was a favorable learning environment. In response, she developed her self-motivation and engaged in self-directed learning activities which had a positive impact on her learning ability and her research knowledge and skills. She started to guide her classmates in their assignments. She appreciated the support of her weekend coursework teachers, especially the teachers of qualitative research and writing who engaged her in productive learning activities and provided prompt feedback. Overall, she considered there had been a major change in her attitude and patience towards communicating with and listening to others. She said, *“I had no patience in me, but I learned to control my temperament”*. She thought she had gained some control in herself while talking with and gaining feedback from others, saying that *“I learned to control my words”*. She could feel herself growing as a self-directed learner and attaining some personal stability.

#### **4.6.2 Role identity as an emerging researcher**

The second stage was an important period of role transition for Kiran because she had to apply her conceptual and theoretical understanding of research into a practical research proposal focused on her area of interest which was Educational Management and quality

assurance. She was required to work independently with only the support of a supervisor and then present her research proposal in front of the expert panel members.

#### **4.6.2.1 The importance of choosing supportive research supervisor**

At the start of this phase, Kiran wanted to work with a supervisor in her area of interest and develop a good research proposal. The selection of an appropriate supervisor was a challenge for her, as she explained, *“I think after deciding to whom you are going to get married, this is the most important decision as far as the PhD is concerned”*, but she desired to work with her MPhil supervisor because she had a good understanding with him *“due to having a high number of students, he was not able to take on new students”*. She researched the profiles and research areas of other available supervisors and concluded: *“I felt that there were two to three teachers with whom I wanted to work, and they would also contribute to and enhance my learning”*. Departmental and teachers’ politics were also a consideration for her. She was mindful that if her supervisor was not able to support her politically, she would not be able to progress through the research phase smoothly. She explained, *“If somebody [supervisor] is not going to support me politically [in the department] how am I going to proceed with things [research]”*. Therefore, she spent much time deciding on a supervisor, commenting that *“this was quite tough to decide on”*. She selected a supervisor because she believed he had the same area of interest [educational administration]. After deciding, she tried her best to develop an understanding with her chosen supervisor but unfortunately, she could not. For her *“the change of supervisor was like coming out of your comfort zone and trying to understand someone you don’t know personally and professionally very well”*.

#### **4.6.2.2 Interest in qualitative research methods but disagreement with supervisor**

Kiran had a strong interest in qualitative research. She listed all the reasons for using this approach: (i) her good prior experience of qualitative research in her *“MPhil thesis”*, (ii) her own thinking style in that *“I look around more being inductive way like what goes on around me, the kind of environment that I feel”*, (iii) and her interest in qualitative methods during the coursework *“I took the qualitative course more seriously”*. She had confidence in her qualitative research skills. She explained that *“I was a bit rigid about my research for being a qualitative researcher”*. However, her supervisor was not happy with her as she reported his thoughts *“qualitative research cannot be defended, understood and taught very well to our*

*students*". Kiran faced a challenging situation from this point because it was difficult for her to convince her supervisor about the value of qualitative research. She commented: *"When my new supervisor realised that he was not able to switch my thoughts from a qualitative researcher to a quantitative researcher he started giving me a tough time"*. This was a setback for her as she experienced a competitive relationship with her supervisor. Nonetheless she continued reading the literature and tried to convince her supervisor with the evidence from this, as she explained, *"I read a lot of literature, presented a strong rationale, and framework to convince him"*. Unfortunately, her supervisor was not persuaded; as a result, after a lot of thinking and discussion with the supervisor she had to switch her research approach from purely qualitative to a mixed-methods approach: *"I talked to him to discuss a lot about this matter and in the end, I agreed to do a mixed method with qual-quant approach"*. Even after this, she reported that her supervisor continued to push her to focus on quantitative aspects more than the qualitative aspects of her research. He asked questions such as, *"why do you choose the major portion of research as qualitative, why can't you go for more quantitative"*. She was shocked by these questions because she thought her research questions could only be answered through adopting qualitative methods. As she explained, *"the topic cannot go with a quantitative approach. How can I proceed with that approach?"*. She stated that during this period she had been desperate to have at least some collaboration and understanding with her supervisor but perceived that *"he has an authoritative kind of relationship with his research students"*.

Another challenge for her was that her supervisor did not give her proper time due to his other responsibilities in the institution. She said that *"my supervisor was always involved in administration tasks, so he did not meet on the time he scheduled"*. She used to have to wait for him and *"sometimes it used to take five hours outside his door and even I used to wait on the stairs"*. This meant she often went home stressed and frustrated, which also disturbed her family life. She explained, *"You are giving all your time, children's time, husband's time, even family time and in spite of this I had to listen today that "I cannot check your work, I am tired, come tomorrow"*. Due to all these challenges, she lost her motivation. She explained: *"I was mentally stressed and tortured that I did not work on my proposal, and I stopped working. I just got stuck at that point where I just needed a push"*.

To deal with this situation she tried to contact other teachers for some guidance. She reported that: *“It was like a strange attitude from them that Who are you? Where do you come from? We don't know you, whom you are working with”*. These responses led to her feeling that she had lost recognition, and her identity had become dependent on and associated with that of her supervisor. She explained, *“My introduction in the department is with whom I'm doing my PhD, my scholar's identity comes second that who am I and what I'm capable of working”*. She stated: *“I started feeling alone in the department; I felt I cannot share anything with anyone”*. Moreover, she used to feel regret about her selection of her supervisor because *“although he had a degree in that particular area of mine, and I chose him based on that he had more interest in other areas rather than the particular area. I did not realize that initially”*.

#### **4.6.2.3 Critical analysis of personal experience as a basis for a research topic**

When Kiran began reading the literature in her area of interest [educational management], she was confident she would find an emerging area for her PhD research. After gaining an understanding of her research areas she examined policy and practices in Education. She identified a research problem she experienced with her son's education. She explained:

*My son is studying medicine and I'm very much concerned about it. I belong to a middle-class family. Now, I'm good but I cannot invest 50 to 60 hundred thousand on my son MBBS. If God forbid my son will not get admission in a government college, then me and my husband will be paying a fee for our whole life if we want him to be a doctor. This basically led me to consider the kind of exploitation by private colleges and the scenario they're creating related to the government.*

She recognised the contextual significance of this problem and identified a rationale for linking this research problem compared to the global context [practices/policies in developed countries]. She explained, *“our government is basically supporting the liberal approach of education [privatisations] which is not favourable in developing countries [like Pakistan] because we have financial issues, so we have to adopt another approach and involve other stakeholders”*. Consequently, she decided to work on the area of *“Sustainability of Quality Assurance and impact of liberal approach [in education]”*, in the belief that her research would contribute to the quality of education in Pakistan. She was conscious of the theoretical

conceptions from multiple disciplines which informed this area, a *“kind of philosophy, sociology or it was a mix of economics, and educational administration.*

#### **4.6.2.4 Self-confidence to develop and present the research proposal**

Kiran was a strong person and she gained inner motivation for self-directed learning and reading literature in her area of research, explaining that *“I consulted different books, different writers, different articles I explored and ultimately I got the answers [help from those resources]”*. She read literature for many months and finally developed a research proposal.

The research proposal stage was a difficult time for her, and she commented that: *“my proposal preparation was the most horrible phase of my life and I'm not forgetting anything about it”*. Nonetheless, she indicated she adopted a positive approach toward learning and the need to be an independent learner, explaining that *“I switched to a self-learning mode more and being a PhD scholar, I don't feel lonely anymore [developed interest in self-learning] in the department. I just consulted books more than consulting other people”*. She had felt a change in her level of independence, focus and was at peace with herself. She said:

*I felt that I can do better with a self-learning model, being an individual learner, being calm [peaceful] and more independent and focused on what's in the proposal that I was preparing.*

After the struggle of the proposal development, Kiran was confident and excited to present her research proposal before the expert panel and noted that *“I am always excited about my presentations, in fact over excited.* She believed she had a good conceptual understanding of her research area, perhaps even more than the panel members. She recalled that *“Nothing made me nervous, I thought nobody [in the panel members] would have much knowledge of the idea of neoliberal approach [privatisation in education]”*. The experts asked critical questions about her research idea and methodology, but she said: *“I presented very well”*. She was challenged with the argument that her topic did not fall under the domain of education but was instead linked with Economics or other disciplines. She provided examples and literature to justify her view. She explained that *“He [an expert] opened the research proposal and read the ideas and was convinced”*. Some panel members advised her *“to rewrite your conceptual framework”*. She was very excited and satisfied with the approval process because she had convinced the panel about the need to adopt qualitative methods

as the major emphasis in her mixed methods research and *“they were of the view that you should do a major qualitative portion, which was my victory”*.

#### **4.6.2.5 Concluding comments**

Kiran was excited to start her research proposal but did not maintain this emotion because she could not convince her supervisor of the value of choosing a qualitative research design. This caused her emotional suffering, and she lost her motivation. However, she tried her best to maintain her effort through self-directed learning and choose appropriate research methods and developed a good research proposal. She had self-belief in her understanding of the research problem, and methods used to explore it based on her analysis of the literature. After many challenges, she succeeded in presenting and defending her research proposal. Overall, she was quite confident about understanding her research area and design, and she was looking forward to conducting research on it.

#### **4.6.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

In this stage, Kiran extended her conceptual understanding and confidence in completing research activities. She actively participated in a range of other academic activities which enhanced her broader academic skills. These included teaching, writing papers, participating in research seminars and conferences in line with performing an emerging academic role in the academic community.

##### **4.6.3.1 Application of qualitative research methods**

Kiran developed two interview protocols, each based on the objectives of her research, and then she gained advice from three experts to validate the interview protocols. One expert was from her department, another one was from the quality assurance department and the third expert was a language expert. She provided her *“conceptual framework, objectives, research questions and topic”* to all three experts and asked them to review these materials. The feedback of the experts helped her to confirm *“whether the interview questions are aligning with research objectives or not”*. Moreover, Kiran explained that she had made a criterion to design the interview protocols. She explained that these criteria included making sure she understood the influence of a specific context, research participants’ meanings, the process by which these meanings and context lead to outcomes, and subjectivity of the researcher. She conducted five mock interviews before conducting the interviews with her

participants to check whether *“the person to whom I am interviewing is getting the question the same way I wrote”*. She told me that the suggestions from the experts and the mock interviews helped deepen her conceptual understanding of her research topic and align her research questions with her interview questions, and also understand the nature of an effective interview.

It was challenging for Kiran to collect data from the participants on administrative positions. She could not access them easily and gain their consent for the research interviews. Moreover, some of the participants in administrative positions did not agree to her recording their interviews. She speculated this might be because *“they were afraid of the political scenario that is going on at their job”*. She was anxious and concerned that if the participants did not agree to let her record their interviews in the form of *“audio, video, pictures”*, then she would be unable to ensure the reliability of the data based only on *“field notes”*. She also tried to access the participants through emails but could not obtain a positive response and explained, *“I think hardly two or three out of 25 replied to me. Nobody replied, nobody even checked that email”*. The good thing was she always believed in her ability to manage her research activities; however, she was trying to get some referrals from participants and to approach them. She was not as happy and satisfied with her data collection experiences as she had expected because she had to seek out the heads of the universities and colleges and request an interview. Although she had conducted some interviews, she stated that *“the research participants appreciated it when I shared my topic with them”*, which was a motivation for her research work.

Kiran was confident about her qualitative data analysis skills and said, *“I’m 100% confident in analysis of data now because I have enhanced my qualitative and analysis skills”*. She believed she had improved her qualitative analysis skills compared to those she employed for her MPhil thesis. She reflected, *“I did major blunders in my initial thesis also when I was a novice but now, I am 100% confident about that analysis techniques”*.

#### **4.6.3.2 Support of supervisor in other academic activities**

Although Kiran's supervisor was not very supportive during her research, he encouraged her to engage in other academic activities: article writing, teaching, guiding research students, research projects and so on.

Her supervisor provided her with opportunities to gain confidence and research capability by *“checking the theses of his students at the masters level and ultimately that helped in my research understanding and built my confidence”*. This practice of reviewing students’ theses helped her to clarify and improve her own research writing, especially in research referencing. She observed that *“my understanding of research references was not very good before but now it is quite good after checking the tasks of the students”*.

She experienced an important and positive change when teaching her supervisor’s classes. She enhanced her practical knowledge and understanding of the teaching profession at that time when she commented that *“I feel like a professional when I teach in the classes”*. Moreover, she said:

*When you get the opportunity to take the class you go to face different individuals and you get there with grip on your content, with some experience and mentally utilize your knowledge to deliver to the students so by doing this, you get to know your capacity and capability. How they think indirectly influences me, but it surely boosts my confidence immediately when I have to enter the class as a teacher, this thing prepares me to conduct any activity in the class. In this way you get an opportunity to grow professionally.*

These comments show that she was ambitious for the teaching profession and believed that teaching itself is a learning activity because she evaluated her own performance, confidence, and ability to convey knowledge.

#### **4.6.3.3 Support of peers and family**

Kiran had a good relationship with her classmates and seniors. She acknowledged the value of guidance from her seniors in relation to her academic work. She commented that *“I love to interact with my seniors in the library, every time there was someone there who could help me out in my research”*. She was also keen to participate in research conferences organised in the department and to discuss her research area with academic experts to clarify her understanding of research concepts. She explained, *“the questions they ask in the conferences make you think about the answers”*.

She reported that her husband provided her the moral support she needed to keep working and said, *“he used to motivate me by giving different examples from my house to the future*

*of my children etc. things like that keep me going to pursue my PhD*". She stated that she always felt comfortable discussing her study matters with him.

#### **4.6.3.4 Seeking recognition through writing and research papers**

At the time of the interviews, Kiran had written four research papers including one from her PhD thesis. She believed that writing research papers was the only opportunity she had to develop her identity and recognition in the academic community, which she expressed as follows:

*The only opportunity I see right now is to do a lot of publications so in this way I can improve my academic identity. I think the publication is the only thing through which I can tell someone that I am something because until then you don't become a PhD, they don't respect the PhD scholar over there and you don't have your academic identity.*

When writing research papers, academic writing was the most important aspect. Kiran stated she thought *"the more you are good in academic writing the more you get the chance to get your article published in high impact factor journals"*. She wanted to learn and incorporate international standards of writing in her own writing, but she told me, *"When I write down something while following international journals, I am asked [by local editors of journals] me to change/write it into a traditional pattern"*. She was focusing on her writing because she was mindful that qualitative research required extensive writing. She saw *"qualitative writing is something of a blend of aesthetic writing and formal writing. I need a lot of vocabulary to be developed"*. However, Kiran had high expectations for her academic writing, and she was aware of the nature of expansive writing in qualitative research and meeting international standards.

#### **4.6.3.5 Gaining independence to perform in the academic community**

At this stage, she also reported she felt more confident in terms of her independence and confidence to perform academic activities, saying *"I have started reading independently. I have learned that after all, it is only you who can move forward with positive thinking"*. She was quite confident that she had the ability to secure an academic job and be recognised as a professional in the academic field.

*I think academic recognition is one of the things that you can get from a PhD and the other thing I think I would be able to get in the lectureship. I think based on my PhD, I would be able to go to a certain place to teach rather than sitting idle at home. The doors will be open for me. I think it is a key [PhD] to placing me in a good Institute.*

#### **4.6.4 Summary**

Kiran entered the doctoral programme anticipating that she would learn during the coursework. Kiran's main goal was to gain advanced learning and research skills. She had high expectations that she would learn and clarify concepts she had not covered in her MPhil. The formal institutional orientation in the first week had a positive influence and motivation on her aspirations for advanced learning. While Kiran originally planned that she would attend courses during the week, after one week she had to move to the weekend classes due to her school job routine. Unfortunately, the situation in the weekend classes was not ideal with respect to her learning expectations. Her learning expectations contrasted with those of her classmates; they did not take much interest in or participate actively in the learning activities meaning she did not have much opportunity for sharing and discussion with her peers. Instead, she focused on reading and learning independently. Kiran decided to complete all the assignments by herself and undertake self-directed learning. This approach made a positive difference to her knowledge and understanding of research methods and her confidence. She considered herself to have a good understanding of concepts and assignments which made her confident to initiate sharing, guiding, and helping other classmates in their assignments. This experience helped her to form a learning group with her fellows indicating she had developed an imaginative view of herself as a learner that included collaboration and shared learning. Her interaction with teachers was valuable and supportive in meeting her expectations of learning and clarifying research methods. She reported she had more interest in the course on qualitative research because the teacher provided her with immediate feedback on the assignments, which she appreciated. She viewed teachers' feedback on written assignments as an opportunity to identify her mistakes and improve her writing skills. Overall, she was satisfied with her efforts to learn and improve her attitude and patience in communicating with and listening to others.

In the next phase, Kiran shifted her imaginative view towards applying her research knowledge to develop a research proposal and extend her participation in the research community. She expected that she would be able to develop a good research proposal based on her personal observation and experience with her son's education. She read a substantial amount of literature and found a significant gap in the area of a neoliberal approach in education and quality assurance. She was confused and deliberated extensively while trying to find a supervisor who could support her research area and expectations. Unfortunately, Kiran was unable to build a good, shared understanding with her supervisor due to a difference of opinions and research expectations. Kiran wanted to adopt a qualitative research design due to her view that this was most appropriate for her research problem and matched her own interests and expertise. However, her supervisor tried to compel her to adopt a quantitative research design. This conflict of opinion caused her considerable depression and unease because she felt stuck at that point and did not want to quit qualitative design. She read literature and showed evidence of qualitative research designs to her supervisor, and finally he agreed on adopting a mixed methods design rather than purely qualitative. She said it was a horrible experience to work without the support of anyone, but she relied on extensive reading of literature which made her calm and able to focus independently on in-depth understanding of her research area and develop a research proposal. Another crucial moment was her effort to present the research proposal independently and convince the panel members about her research idea. She was quite confident that she had read a lot of literature and gained good understanding in her area of research. Correspondingly, she answered the critical questions with logical arguments and references from the literature which persuaded the panel members to approve her research proposal. She was excited that this experience enhanced her understanding and made her more confident to conduct research which was also a validation of her role identity as an emerging researcher.

The next stage of conducting research, writing a dissertation, and participating in wider academic activities shifted Kiran's imaginative view of herself to one of an emerging academic. She already had prior experience of qualitative research, so she was confident about developing the interview protocol and arranged some mock interviews for practice and the validation process. She had a real challenge in data collection because the Covid-19

reduced her access to the participants and also the research participants did not want her to record their interviews due to political reasons which made her frustrated. She managed data collection by using some personal contacts. Kiran was doing her data analysis at the time of her interview, but she was confident that her prior experience and learning in the coursework would help her meet required expectations of a research analysis.

Although Kiran had not received much support from her supervisor in the research activities, he provided her with the opportunity to participate in other academic activities. Participation in wider academic activities supported her imaginative view and expectations of herself as a participant as an academic in the academic community. Reviewing the research of graduate students supported her to critically evaluate students' research and provide feedback which also enhanced her clarity in her own research. The experience of teaching provided her with an opportunity to utilise knowledge in the classroom and assess her own competencies. This experience of teaching supported her to recognise the importance of students' expectations for her as a teacher, and understand the skills and attributes required to manage students of diverse capabilities. She saw herself as a professional academic, while taking classes. In addition, she firmly believed that article publication was the only means to gain recognition or identity in the academic community, so she wrote articles and tried to get them published in good journals. She was aware that writing qualitative articles needs strong writing and abstract thinking. To this end, she continued to read good articles to further improve her confidence as an academic writer. She was hopeful and considered herself to have acquired the knowledge, research skills, and confidence to make herself ready to perform in an academic job in some higher education institution.

## Case-6

### 4.7 Introducing Amina

Amina had been a visiting teacher in the University of Education since 2011 but at the time of the interviews she had started teaching in a college. After completing an MPhil in Education from the University of Education, she desired to continue her advanced learning through PhD study, she explained, *“I had already done an MPhil and that was why I needed an opportunity to enhance my learning and knowledge”*. She preferred to take admission in a renowned institution where she could experience a new learning environment. She was afraid that she would not be able to fulfill the admission criteria because *“I was not like a fresh student in this university, I had done my MPhil from another university”*. She was excited to meet the requirements (entry test and interview) to secure admission. During her studies she had to manage her job responsibilities alongside her PhD studies. She gave priority to her PhD because she was committed to her learning and development. She said: *“I gave priority to my PhD work regardless of being busy with some other responsibilities”*. The following section explains how she managed her development in different stages of the PhD.

#### 4.7.1 Role identity as a learner

This stage (coursework for one year) was important for Amina’s learning of research methods and understanding of institutional culture. She aimed to enhance her disciplinary knowledge and research skills through the activities in the coursework. She had to adjust to the new learning environment and seek the support of her fellows and teachers in the learning activities.

##### 4.7.1.1 The last opportunity for learning

At the start of the coursework, Amina expected to enhance her research understanding and refine her research skills. She expected, *“I would get command on all the things (research methods)”*. It was the start of her PhD journey in the new institution, so she was a bit nervous about understanding the academic culture, and being a student at an advanced level which might take extra effort and commitment. She was very committed, serious, and self-motivated towards learning and wanted to grasp everything that would contribute to her conceptual understanding. She said, *“I had a craze [for learning] as well as internally motivated that if I were doing PhD then I would do it in a better way. I wanted to do my best”*.

She recognised the importance of the coursework as this might be the last chance for her to learn and improve her research skills and said that:

*You see PhD is a terminal level where you get the opportunity to learn things. Nobody teaches you after that. I mean I do not think you can even expect that someone would teach you even after doing your PhD. So, it was the last opportunity for me to get knowledge about research. In short, I wanted to know all about the research practically as well as theoretically.*

Amina studied a number of disciplinary and research courses offered by the institution and she used the word “*productive*” to express her satisfaction about her learning in the courses. She liked the course of Education Philosophy because it was not content-based and she was able to engage in a range of assignments and learning activities [presentations, discussions]. She was also inspired by the teacher’s style of teaching [participatory] and tried to adopt that to engage her own students [college teaching] in learning activities. She explained: “*I implemented the teaching strategies for my students because I felt they were productive*”. Amina was also satisfied with the *Qualitative Research course* because she had already studied this subject and had a good experience with it, as she said, in her MPhil. She was not challenged by the course content because “*I already conducted qualitative research in my MPhil*”. However, she learned aspects of academic values such as how to be “*timely, planned, organized and well-disciplined and, like, how to do work in a good way and present it well*”.

#### **4.7.1.2 Development of reading and writing skills**

Amina was quite confident about completing learning activities like assignments and presentations because “*I was already teaching*”. However, she was satisfied with the opportunity to be a learner and said: “*I was energetic and motivated that I was studying and learning a lot*”. She acknowledged that reading-based assignments contributed to her understanding of the research concepts explaining “*such assignments develop your reading habits and give you different knowledge experiences. You came to know about not only the course books but also other good books while making assignments*”. The course on academic writing was particularly interesting and effective for her from a learning point of view. She considered she improved her writing skills, and explained that:

*I learned many things about technical and academic writing. When you write in a formal way, sometimes you don't care about minor things that need to be considered. So, I learned some practical things in that course. We did an assignment in the course to review the article by considering all the aspects we studied in that course.*

Whenever she felt any difficulty in the written assignments she recounted: *"I could meet them [teachers] often for some feedback and my expectations were fulfilled. Like if I needed any help or guidance, I could get it easily"*.

#### **4.7.1.3 Lost motivation for learning**

Apparently, Amina was active in learning but sometimes she lost her interest in learning due to different factors. For example, she used to work hard to clarify difficult concepts, but she lost her motivation after coming to the class and observing peers who already knew those concepts. She said:

*When I came into class then I thought this was a normal thing. I was spending time on it because other fellows already knew those things. Or that was not a new experience for them to do that. Or maybe they had the resources, so they did not have any problem, but I had to do each, and everything step by step.*

Amina's motivation and confidence in learning also declined during the second semester; she told me that *"Comparatively my learning went down"*. There were two main reasons behind this situation: (i) she liked to do collaborative learning activities but *"the number of students became short"* [in the different areas of specialisation] and (ii) teachers' attitude was not as professional so that *"sometimes classes were not held, or teachers came late and there was not any productive activity"*. She reported her teachers were not regular and serious about engaging their students in learning activities and making sure they progressed. She noted, *"It was not an issue if students did not work or perform in the class. It was just like a formality"*.

Amina was especially concerned and anxious about her experience in the quantitative research course. She had high expectations of learning a lot about quantitative research but unfortunately, she could not develop her interest in and meet her expectations of learning quantitative research methods. She said:

*The experience of quantitative research was bitter and poor in the second semester. Sometimes our classes were not held, sometimes if there was a class it was not up to my expectations. Sometimes it may be due to my negligence that my interest was not developing in that. I was not learning the way I wanted to learn. My interest kept declining. I did not get command of anything. We came to know only things that I already knew in quantitative research, I learned nothing new. I wanted to learn data analysis, especially SPSS and inferential statistics.*

Nonetheless, she had self-belief and recognised *“whatever I learned, I learned by myself. I worked hard. I did all the work myself”*. However, she was still not very confident about her quantitative research skills.

Despite her low motivation in the second semester, she tried to develop her interest in learning about the concepts of quality in educational management in the course entitled *“Total Quality Management in Education”* which was her area of specialization. She enhanced her understanding of administrative approaches used in Education and studied *“ISO standards of quality management. How should we do administration and its different styles? Like we say who is a good educational leader and administrator, and what are the models of quality in administrations”*.

#### **4.7.1.4 Comparison with fellows and prior learning experiences**

Amina used to compare her PhD learning with her prior experiences in the MPhil, and when she did, she felt satisfied with the learning in the PhD. She believed that her course learning supported her to increase her conceptual and theoretical understanding of research compared to her MPhil, saying, *“I did compare what I learned in my MPhil because there some courses and content I also studied in the MPhil, but I did not learn much compared to my learning here in PhD”*.

She had a good understanding and collaborative relationship with her classmates and said, *“They were cooperative. I mean whenever I needed some help and expected some from some fellows, they were cooperative in helping”*. It has been mentioned that she compared herself with her classmates and thought that her peers had a good understanding of the concepts compared to her, especially those who had done their MPhil from the same institution. She

said: *“They had cleared many things [concepts] in their MPhil. They were well learned and acknowledged about all those things, which were challenging for me”*. Consequently, her habit of comparing her situation with other institutions and students made her distressed.

#### **4.7.1.5 Concluding comments**

By studying a range of courses and engaging in different assignments Amina perceived a difference in her knowledge and confidence. She identified a change in how she was now recognised as a learner at the advanced PhD level and gaining progress and said, *“I did feel that I got the tag that I am a PhD scholar”*. She observed that the people of her college workplace started to acknowledge and appreciate her commitment and effort in undertaking a PhD, which was a proud moment for her. At the end of the coursework, she felt confident that she could have the ability to perform the academic activities and manage her research work ahead. She concluded: *“I had such an ability and knew how to perform the things [academic activities]. I knew something [knowledge] and I could better explain that to others”*.

#### **4.7.2 Role identity as an emerging researcher**

This stage involved the period during which Amina had to develop a research proposal on an emerging area of research which was an institutional requirement. She continued her learning in order to gain more confidence in the application and theoretical understanding of the area of research. At the conclusion of this period, she had to gain validation of her research proposal by presenting it to the panel members and receiving feedback on it.

##### **4.7.2.1 Observing own teaching experience for selecting research topic**

Amina was ambitious to start her research work without wasting her precious time. She had some confidence that she possessed the basic research skills needed to develop a research proposal but considered she needed support because *“I had the knowledge of research concepts but had not perfection. I did not have research skills of an expert level”*. She used to visit the main library at the university to read books and get access to recent literature in her area of specialisation. She reported, *“We have access to research papers [in the library] and there was a learning environment to sit around there”*.

Amina was aware of the field of Education because she had already been in the teaching profession for 10 years. She used to observe the academic and management practices during her teaching experience at the university level which made her capable of finding practical research ideas or gaps for her research proposal. She explained, *“I had observed many things in my workplace”*. Her reading of literature and observation of academic practices increased her understanding of possible topics in her research area. She said, *“I did self-study and observed things [academic practices] critically. She told me, “There were some negative things [bad practices] that I have observed as well as those I have faced myself”*. She was confident and satisfied that she had the ability to make critical observations, which could help her in practical research.

Reading literature in the area of academic professionalism helped Amina to understand those ideas in the context of higher education, explaining, *“the topics passed through my eyes [during reading literature] and they got related to my workplace. I thought it happened here”*. She planned to develop a research proposal on *“conflict management strategies of principals and workplace incivility in teachers at college level”*. Reading further literature on this particular area enhanced her conceptual and theoretical understanding of the research variables and ability to contextualise the research idea to formulate the research questions for her research proposal.

#### **4.7.2.2 Support from and understanding with research supervisor**

Amina selected her supervisor based on aspects like *“domain [area of specialization], personality and image in the department, and research experience”*. Her supervisor helped her to identify her research topic and choose appropriate research methods because his area of specialisation was also educational administration. Amina considered that her supervisor was kind and good natured because she could access timely advice and guidance during the crucial process of proposal development and explained that *“if you go to him, he can guide you even without a planned meeting. He will not show attitude and will not demotivate you”*. She told me that her supervisor acknowledged and believed in her skills and believed that she had good communication skills and understanding of her research, and could defend her research in the presentation, *“my supervisor believed in me that I would do this. He said you could speak and would defend it”*. In addition, she was always inspired and encouraged by her supervisor to keep on learning and working hard on the research proposal. Overall, Amina

considered she received good academic support from her supervisor in developing the research proposal.

#### **4.7.2.3 Interest in innovative research methods**

Deciding on an appropriate research design and methods were crucial for Amina because she was interested in adopting an innovative research method, and explained, *“I chose mixed method sequential explanatory design”*. She believed that mixed methods research would bring creativity and could cover all aspects in her area of research. Amina told me she learned a lot during the crucial phase of choosing a research problem, appropriate research methods, and providing the rationale for these choices. She explained, *“I learned in that phase as well as facing challenges in it. What research design do you need to select and how do you select it. You have to give logical reasoning for that”*.

#### **4.7.2.4 Mixed feelings at presenting research proposal**

Once she developed her research proposal, she was ready to present it in front of the panel members, but she was quite worried that teacher politics might become involved in the acceptance of her research proposal because as she said, *“I already observed in this institution some professors [supervisors] had issues with each other. And created problems [during presentation] for their respective research students”*.

She presented her research proposal to the expert panel who asked her critical questions such as *“How was my research different from others at the PhD level?”*. She confidently answered and convinced them about her research idea and methods. Her supervisor also endorsed her arguments for the research design explaining *“this was a new trend in research that was going towards adopting a mixed paradigm”*. Therefore, after many arguments she successfully defended her research proposal, and this was accepted.

After the departmental acceptance, Amina had to present her research proposal to the Advanced Board which was a panel of senior professors from across the faculties in the institution. Amina explained that she was more confident at that point because she had successfully defended her proposal in the department. She felt relaxed as the panel members did not raise many questions about her proposal because they did not know much about her area of research due to having different backgrounds [some from science and some from

other subjects]. She said “*some did not know about statistics, and some knew a lot about it. These things go in your favour. So, you tell them simple things about your research, and you would be cleared /accepted*”. She reported, “*I did it well. It got proposal acceptance over there*”. She was very pleased that she presented and was able to convince the panels of the value of her proposal.

#### **4.7.2.5 Concluding comments**

Amina acknowledged that she improved her knowledge and understanding of research during the process of developing her research proposal. She noted that for this she had to make an independent effort, as others could offer minimal support. She thought this effort contributed to her competence, confidence, and independence in research. She explained that:

*I learned research in the research proposal phase. Research proposal was the learning phase because it was not possible you could ask anyone to do anything for you in that phase, you had to do all that yourself. I wanted to do further research after the research proposal, I had cleared many things around research design and research instrumentation.*

#### **4.7.3 Role identity as an emerging academic**

During this stage, Amina was actively involved in the research activities needed to complete her research thesis and was also developing her interest in and ability to engage in other academic activities at higher education level. She gained experience of teaching and supervising graduate students, participating and presenting in research conferences, and writing and reviewing research articles during this stage.

##### **4.7.3.1 Grappling with mastering research activities**

Amina’s motivation was high after the approval of her research proposal, and she immediately started working on the research instrumentation. While reading literature in her area of research, she had gained access to standardized research instruments which she “*just adapted according to my own context*”. She was aware of the influence of context and adapted the instruments to enhance understanding of the language and clarity of the questions, as she explained: “*For the language of research instruments matters a lot in the*

*way we choose words*". As part of this stage, she followed processes to ensure the *"reliability and validity of the instrument"* through pilot testing and experts' opinion.

For data collection, she had to access teachers from different cities. This was a challenging task because she could not get a good response from prospective participants rather *"there was a negative attitude from my desired sample"*. She identified there were two main problems in her data collection process. One was that it was not convenient for her to go to remote areas alone to recruit and meet participants for data collection because *"being a girl it was difficult to go [out of city] for data collection"*. Another problem was *"due to coronavirus"* which meant she could not collect the data the way she had selected in her proposal. She related that she did not receive a response from the research participants, *"I sent questionnaires through the post as well as did personal texts to the teachers. If you ask them to fill up the questionnaire, then they do not even bother to reply to you"*. She had to change the mode of data collection to online due to covid-19. Moreover, it was challenging to collect both quantitative [questionnaire] and qualitative [interview] data, and that was the reason she could not collect the total number of data which she had indicated in her research proposal, and explained, *"the ratio of data remained 60% out of 100%"*.

Amina had indicated that she did not have good learning experience in the coursework; that might be the reason she was not very confident when she started working on her data analysis. She explained, *"I don't know about its advanced statistics. If I know them then I don't know their interpretations"*. This experience resulted in her feeling stuck in managing the data analysis process. However, she persisted with learning advanced levels of inferential statistics in quantitative research. She found she increased her confidence and interest in statistical tests when she really learned about the tests and used them for her data analysis and commented that *"The names of tests in inferential statistics have been fascinating to me because they are unique"*. She was also struggling with both types of data (quan-qual), and she realized that she needed to have been more careful when selecting the research methods for her research proposal, saying, *"I thought why I selected mixed methods, I could take the easy design for this research"*. To assist her, she planned to take advice from experts on her data analysis to ensure that she had done it correctly.

Although she faced a lot of challenges during these research processes, Amina retained her motivation to learn and to complete work of a high standard during this research phase. She shared that:

*Internal motivation of learning remained with me like whatever I do I learn things. I do not think to find shortcuts to get the work done through others or do work speedily without understanding. I try to learn first and then move ahead by myself. I feel myself like a learner during the research phase.*

#### **4.7.3.2 Support of supervisor and others in academic activities**

As noted above, Amina had a supportive relationship with her supervisor who assisted her in her research through regular feedback. Her supervisor also engaged her in other academic activities. She always felt more motivated when her supervisor asked her about the progress of her research. She explained, *“My supervisor asks for my progress, and I think if someone would ask for my progress, I need to do my work”*.

Her supervisor guided her about the professional requirements of the field of education, she explained that *“he told me about national and international scenarios [academic practices]. He gives examples of his good students who are academically and professionally successful and working in areas related to research”*. Amina was actively involved in other academic activities whenever her supervisor provided her with an opportunity. These included assisting his research students (graduate level), engaging with his classes, and reviewing research articles. She explained that her confidence and research skills were enhanced when she was guiding her supervisor’s research students. As she already had teaching experience, she did not hesitate to engage the graduate students in her supervisor’s classes, saying *“I like to go into the class and conduct some activity or task related to a test”*. She was excited when her supervisor asked her to review research papers *“as an internal reviewer for reviewing the articles of a journal called BER, I reviewed around 10 to 15 articles”*. Her supervisor appreciated her skill in reviewing research articles.

Although she did not have regular support from her peers at this stage, she contacted them whenever she needed to ask something about her research. She noted that: *“I don’t have enough interaction with my fellows now but if I ask them something then they would support me in it”*. She tended to compare her performance with her fellows and analysed her own

skills and progress, saying, *“I just feel everybody is ahead of me and I am behind”*. Usually, she shared her progress and research issues with one of her friends from a previous institution. Amina reported her interaction with her friend was productive because they both learned from and supported each other. As she explained, *“If I ask something from my friend, she tells me because her concepts are good. It increases my learning and knowledge. We both guide and help each other”*. In addition, she intended to maximise her interaction with her teachers as a way of enhancing her understanding of the academic practices in the institution. She confirmed that *“Interaction with the teachers has upgraded my knowledge and confidence”*.

Amina felt that the PhD was a long and crucial process where her motivation fluctuated over time. She believed she kept herself motivated and gained confidence in the academic community through social interactions, saying that *“I went down many times like my motivation went down. Then I try to discuss with someone to reset myself or regain motivation”*. She explained that she needed to visit the department in order to see others and said, *“I would get the motivation through the academic environment and while observing others to do work and think I also need to do”*.

#### **4.7.3.3 Writing articles, participating in seminars and research conferences**

As noted in phase one, Amina improved her writing skills through reading good articles and explained that *“when you read the literature then you get an idea how to use words or how you report the things”*. Reading enhanced her understanding of the selection of appropriate words for research as *“there are many words and other things I learned”*. This meant she was confident to write research articles from her research work. She conceptualised the ideas for research articles from her thesis.

Amina never wanted to miss any opportunity to participate in academic seminars and research conferences. These platforms played an important role in increasing her understanding of the application of research methods and presenting her research in academic venues. She told me about the three research seminars she attended, one was about *“article publication”* by which she learned how impact factor research journals work and the way to get her research publication in those journals. And the other two seminars were *“instrument development”* in which she clarified the crucial process of instrumentation.

Amina was always keen to participate in and present research in the conferences held in the department. She felt happy and proud to receive the appreciation of the audience at the time of presenting her research, she said *“when a presenter is standing in front even though you have done some basic work, you get acknowledgement, and you feel good. There is a good environment [at the conference]. It means you feel something different”*. Besides, she always learned from and was inspired by the researchers who presented different research ideas in the research conferences. She enhanced her thinking on expanding research ideas as she commented:

*You know the different domains of learning. There were many presenters including international speakers, so you came to know different experiences. And sometimes many things click with you and get some idea about your research. Ye get an opportunity to think that you didn't know about these things before.*

She learned the activities involved in organizing the research conference and explained *“you could have some managerial responsibilities through you get some experience”*. She also desired to visit abroad and attend good international conferences in her area of research *“if you should be given the opportunity of international conferences”*.

#### **4.7.3.4 Seeking job opportunities at higher education institutions**

Amina firmly believed that research competency was an important aspect for her professional aspirations to work as a researcher at the higher education level, and said, *“I want to work on a platform where I could engage in research activities, I should have a name in research, and I should know about everything”*. She explained that she was teaching in a college but *“I don't feel any benefit to teach the basic content to the college students and there is not any research activity, I want to get a job at university level”*. She believed a role in a university would provide self-satisfaction in an environment where she could reach her potential and explained that:

*My expectations are to step into a university to start my career. There is also self-satisfaction, like if I have done a PhD then I need an environment where I can excel in my potential.*

She was quite confident and prepared to step into a university to begin her career as “*I have knowledge and skills due to the experience of visiting teaching*”. Likewise, the PhD experience had given her the exposure, competence, and confidence to play the role of an academic at a higher education institution. She said:

*I increased my confidence level. I got the confidence to appear on any formal platform to present myself. There can be an element of luck, but I don't think that I cannot do such a thing and how would I do this. I am confident that I can handle the situation.*

#### **4.7.4 Summary**

Amina started her PhD with high expectations that she would continue her learning and refine her research understanding in a new institution. She considered a PhD to be her last opportunity to learn and improve her understanding and took every chance to participate in the learning activities. The course assignments supported her to develop her reading and writing skills. She focused on and had more interest in her specialist area courses (educational administration) which enhanced her understanding of quality management practices in the education field. When Amina compared her PhD learning with her prior experience in her MPhil, she was satisfied she had increased her conceptual and theoretical understanding, except for the area of quantitative research due to limited support from the teacher. Sometimes comparison with other students made her feel distressed because she realised that students who had completed their MPhil in the institution had had better learning experiences and skills. However, Amina's imaginative view of herself as a learner involved a continuous self-assessment of her knowledge. She gradually developed a sense of herself as an effective learner with the ability to perform academic activities.

In the next stage, Amina's imaginative view of herself and expectations shifted towards application of her knowledge to develop a practical research proposal and participate in the research community. She already had research experience during her MPhil, but she was expecting perfection and expertise in her area of interest through reading literature. She wanted to seek a practical research problem based on her teaching experience and interactions with other colleagues in the college. She critically observed her workplace practices and read to identify a research topic and chose conflict management practices of

principals and workplace incivility of teachers. She also wanted to choose innovative research methods, so she chose mixed methods design which would make her research unique and cover all aspects of her research problem. She had a supportive and experienced supervisor in the same area of research who also had a good reputation in the department. Amina considered that her supervisor was kind and good natured because she could access timely advice and guidance on her research proposal. The supervisor acknowledged her research skills and ability to develop and present a research proposal independently which encouraged her to keep learning. These comments of her supervisor were evidence of the validation of her role identity as an emerging researcher.

Amina was quite confident in her understanding of her research area, but she was a bit afraid of the influence of teachers' politics during her oral defense. She presented her research idea and confidently answered the critical questions of the panel members about her research methods. After the approval from the department, she had to present her proposal at the university level. She was more confident in explaining her research area at that stage, and she provided logical arguments to defend her research idea and methods. The panel members accepted her proposal and she was excited that she had convinced them of the value of her proposal which was also a validation of her role identity as an emerging researcher.

Conducting research, writing a dissertation and participation in wider academic activities shifted Amina's imaginative view of herself to that of an emerging academic. She was expecting to conduct quality research based on her research proposal. She easily gained access to some standardised instruments in her research area, but she had to adapt them according to the research context. She was frustrated to have limited access to her research participants due to Covid-19 and also the problem of going out of the city for data collection. She could only collect 60% of her research data. It was also more difficult to manage both types of data, then she had realised and reflecting back, she felt that she should have been more careful while selecting the research methods in her research proposal. The major challenge was analysis of the quantitative data because she was not an expert in statistical tests. She already mentioned that she did not meet her expectation of learning in the quantitative course, so she had to gain more understanding and skills of using statistical tests for data analysis through her own reading. Amina was trying to manage her data analysis at

the time of her interview, and she thought she would receive an expert opinion once she completed her data analysis.

Amina valued the interaction with her supervisor who supported her in research and participation in other academic activities. She was not hesitant about managing the classes of her supervisor because she already had teaching experience. She also worked as an internal reviewer of a research journal in the department. Her supervisor checked the review reports she made and appreciated her evaluation skills in her review of the papers. The comments from her supervisor validated her role identity as an emerging academic. In addition, Amina was enhancing her writing through reading good articles in her area of research. She had conceptualised the ideas for research articles from her thesis. She actively participated in research seminars and conferences to refine her research skills and present her own research. She felt happy and proud to receive the appreciation of the audience at the time of presenting her research paper which was also a validation of her role identity as an emerging academic. She explained that she was also able to learn from the research ideas of other researchers. She was confident that she had enhanced her knowledge and confidence in research and would find an academic job in a higher education institution. She was teaching in a college, but she wanted to work in an environment where she would perform research activities and gain recognition as a researcher in the academic community.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Cross case examination**

#### **5.1 Overview**

This chapter outlines the themes that were common across the six student case studies based on the students' role identity development. Section 5.2 outlines sub-themes relevant to students' social interactions, specifically, the different kinds of social interactions that provided role support to the students to deal with the various challenges they experienced during their role identity development. These different social interactions provided a supportive network for students as they developed their prominent role identities in their progression from a primary identity as a learner to a primary identity as an emerging academic. The second common theme, in section 5.3, is that of motivation. This is discussed as an intrinsic drive that propels students' effort to persist in activities related to the development of different role identities at each stage of their doctoral programme. The final theme is writing skills (section 5.4). This theme relates to a key means whereby students represent themselves and are evaluated in relation to their peers and their research contributions. This theme offers evidence of students' progression from learners to emerging researchers and then towards emerging academics. While these three themes are discussed separately, they work together to play a crucial part in the development of each role identity.

#### **5.2 Social interaction in the formation of role identity**

The core feature of the development of students' role identities was 'social interaction'. This included interaction with all the agents inside and outside the institution who were involved in supporting students in meeting their personal and institutional expectations of their role identities. Interactions with teachers, peers, supervisors, experts and evaluators, family and friends assisted students to develop a supportive network to deal with challenges they encountered throughout the development of their role identities in the different doctoral stages. Other interactions were with research participants and non-academic staff in the institution. However, students indicated that these people were not central to the development of their role identities. Importantly, students' various social interactions directly or indirectly validated their role identities at different stages of students' studies. The

following section covers the different interactions and their contribution or support to the development of participants' role identities.

### **5.2.1 Interaction with teachers**

Interactions with course teachers made crucial and important contributions to the students' learner role identity in the coursework stage. Course teachers helped the students to understand and meet their institutional and personal learning expectations. During coursework, the students had role expectations about learning and enhancing their research knowledge and skills. Their teachers supported them to understand and conceptualise research methods and other disciplinary topics. Course teachers used to engage them in learning activities which enhanced their interest in learning, research knowledge, understanding of academic culture, interpersonal skills, and confidence to perform in the academic community. For instance, Maani reported that her teachers assigned learning-based projects which enhanced her understanding of research philosophies and approaches (See 4.4.1.2). Waqas and Kiran acknowledged the expected support from their teachers to deal with learning problems (understanding concepts) and enhanced their knowledge and skills through classroom assignments. Waqas enhanced his understanding of research methods through research-based assignments, and his communication and interpersonal skills through presentations of the course assignments (See 4.5.1.2). Even though Amina was not happy with the teacher of quantitative research because the teacher was disorganised (See 4.7.1.3). Overall, she acknowledged that *“Interaction with teachers had enhanced my knowledge and confidence”*.

Interactions with the course teachers helped students to develop their reading habits and improve writing skills to fulfill their learning expectations. Teachers offered reading-based activities and advised students to visit libraries, which enhanced their independence, encouraged them to seek resources and develop reading habits. Teachers also provided constructive feedback on participants' writing which enhanced their application of the principles of academic writing. For example, Amir visited the library in response to the reading assignments from the teachers, noting that *“they [teachers] gave us outlines and said, “You are free to read books, journals, articles, and digital resources”*. Amina appreciated that she developed her reading habits through the assignments offered by her teachers. She did not

limit her reading to course books; rather she extended her interest to reading other books (see 4.7.1.2). All the participants received feedback from their teachers, but two participants reported that their teachers' immediate feedback on written assignments contributed to their writing skills and confidence which also validated their role identity as learners. Kiran mentioned that two of her course teachers used to give her immediate feedback which assisted her to correct her mistakes in writing. Likewise, another teacher carefully listened to the problem she faced in her writing and helped her to improve writing through feedback (See 4.6.1.3). Amina interacted with her teachers in order to obtain guidance and feedback during her learning and written assignments. She commented:

*There was regular interaction with teachers regarding assignments and other learning activities. I could often meet them for some feedback and my expectations were fulfilled. Like if I need any help or guidance, I could take it easily.*

### **5.2.2 Interaction with peers**

Students referred to three types of peer interactions: with their classmates (same class and session), with research area fellows (those who were working in the same area or with the same supervisor) and with senior fellows (who were ahead), who were all supportive in the development of their role identities.

Classmates made a significant contribution to students' learning experiences because they helped each other to meet learning expectations, especially during their coursework. They shared learning activities when teachers assigned group tasks to meet institutional expectations. The participants were comfortable working and performing academic activities with their classmates. Four of them had good learning relationships with their classmates; of these four, two were more social and actively reached out to peers, to sort out relationships, while the other two simply appreciated their interaction with peers. Both male participants, Amir and Waqas, used to initiate interaction with their classmates and worked collaboratively to complete the assignments, sharing, and helping each other. Waqas gave maximum credit for his learning to his classmates who helped him a lot in course assignments. He had a friendly relationship with his class, and they used to have discussions to clarify research concepts (See 4.5.1.2). Munaza and Amina collaborated with their classmates whenever they needed help to understand concepts and complete assignments (See 4.2.1.1, 4.7.1.4). By

contrast, two participants, Maani and Kiran, did not gain learning support from other students because they believed that their peers did not have much interest in learning (due to their job commitments) and could not assist them in their learning. These two participants might have believed that other students would not be able to help them in meeting their high expectations of learning, so preferred to work independently (see 4.4.1.2, 4.6.1.2).

Two participants (Amir and Waqas), who were more social compared to the others, acknowledged the support of their peers during the research process and development of role identity as emerging researchers and emerging academics. Amir bonded well with his classmates and shared his research progress and challenges with them. He used to gather his peers together and to rehearse proposal presentations in order to gain confidence and clarity in concepts before presenting to the panel members. This interaction was very supportive for developing role identity as an emerging researcher (see 4.3.2.2, 4.3.3.4). Likewise, Waqas was eager and comfortable to share his research problems with his classmates and find solutions. He reported that his supportive interaction with classmates was bidirectional, as they could help and support each other as they developed their identity as emerging researchers (see 4.5.3.1).

The second type of peer interaction was with other students who were working in the same research area or with the same supervisors. Three participants, Munaza, Amir, and Maani, had positive feelings and a sense of belonging in the research community because of their regular interactions with peers who were working in the same area of research with the same supervisor. This interaction enhanced their collaboration and capacity to play their role as emerging researchers in the academic community (see 4.3.3.5, 4.4.3.3). Amir and Waqas liked the combined meetings with their peers in the same specialist subject area. These meetings helped to inspire them, learn about other ideas in their research field and broaden their perspectives in the process of becoming emerging researchers (see 4.5.3.2).

Participants also interacted with senior fellows who provided guidance and helped them to interpret the institutional expectations of different role identities. The senior fellows provided them with support to deal with upcoming academic and research challenges because they had gone through similar experiences. Four participants commented on the support of their senior fellows, especially in their research work. For instance, Munaza gained help from her

seniors to understand the requirements of the research proposal and the appropriate format for presenting it (see 4.2.2.3). Although Maani did not have much support from her classmates, she was always keen to interact and learn from her seniors who encouraged and guided her in the learning activities and supported her in the qualitative data analysis process (see 4.4.2.2, 4.4.3.1). Maani and Kiran used to visit the library where they could easily interact with their seniors and share their academic and research problems with them (see 4.6.3.3). Waqas appreciated the support of his senior fellows in his learning and progress. He discussed his research and academic problems, and they provided him with some solutions because they had gone through similar problems (see 4.5.3.2).

### **5.2.3 Interaction with supervisors**

Supervisory interaction was significant for the students in relation to their understanding and meeting the expectations of their role identities as emerging researchers and emerging academics. Supervisors were like a bridge that helped to ensure a smooth transition and align students' personal and institutional expectations of their roles. The following sections describe how supervisors played a crucial role in the development of students' role identities as emerging researchers and emerging academics.

The selection of a supervisor was a crucial decision for the participants during the research proposal stage. Students aimed to select their supervisors based on their chosen area of research, having a good understanding, departmental reputations, or research experience, and gaining immediate support from them. Participants aspired to find a balance in their learning and a good relationship with their supervisors. Five participants were satisfied with their choice of supervisors. For example, Munaza believed that the supervisor from her research area (educational assessment) could better understand and support her in the research (see 4.2.2.3). Likewise, Maani, Waqas and Amina selected their supervisors based on their specialist area, which was Educational Administration, and Waqas already had a good understanding with his supervisor due to prior research experience with him (see 4.5.2.3). Kiran wanted to work with her previous supervisor, but due to his unavailability she had to select another supervisor. Unfortunately, she could not align her research expectations with the views of her supervisor which affected her research performance and smooth transition (see 4.6.2.1).

The students had immense support from their supervisors during the development of their research proposals and in choosing research methods. Four participants gained support from their supervisors in choosing appropriate research topics and research methods to meet the requirements of a research proposal at the PhD level, but two considered they had not gained the support they expected. Among the four participants, Waqas and Amina reported that their supervisors arranged regular meetings for sharing, discussion and feedback which helped them to select appropriate research areas and methods for their proposals (see 4.4.2.2, 4.5.2.3). Maani developed a proposal on a topic which was also the interest and choice of her supervisor, noting that *“he [supervisor] wanted me to work on that. I thought I would definitely try to fulfil his wish to work on that topic”*. By contrast, Amir was given a free hand by his supervisor to read literature and choose a significant research topic. The guidance of his supervisor helped him to adopt a mixed methods research approach which could cover all aspects of his research area (see 4.3.2.2). Kiran had a good interaction with her supervisor in the start of the research proposal phase, but after that, the understanding with him deteriorated because she wanted to conduct qualitative research and her supervisor kept pushing her to undertake quantitative research (see 4.6.2.3).

Supervisors were identified as a source of encouragement whenever participants were worried or struggling with research challenges. For example, when Amir was finding it difficult to conceptualise his research ideas, his supervisor advised him not to worry and keep working on this because research was a slow process. His supervisor assured him that he would be fine after some time (see 4.3.2.2). Likewise, when Maani was emotionally down after failing to defend her research proposal at the first attempt, her supervisor motivated her to keep working. She said:

*He is a very good human being. You can say in the department you can discuss anything with him, and he deals with you politely and becomes supportive, he used to say that you cannot pursue PhD with depression.*

Waqas believed that he had a good understanding with his supervisor because *“he understands the level of students and the problems students might have faced”*. He was always motivated and inspired by his supervisor. Similarly, Amina considered she had a good

relationship with her supervisor because she could easily access and share her problems with him.

Supervisors supported the students to conduct research activities, and provided resources and feedback, and opportunities to practise professional academic roles. Supervisors made a huge contribution in the development of students' role identity as emerging academics. Students valued that their supervisors had high expectations and supported them to conduct research activities that would meet their personal and institutional expectations of their roles. Four participants reported that their supervisors wanted them to demonstrate high quality in their research, so their supervisors provided support to students to meet the research expectations. Munaza's supervisor required her to demonstrate good writing skills in her thesis and complete the research within the timeframe and said, *"work should be 100% in respect to academic writing and in terms of research skills"*. The supervisor visited her classes during the research experiment to make sure that everything was fine, and he also guided her during analysis of the experimental data (see 4.2.3.5). Likewise, Amir's supervisor expected him to perform research activities in an organized way and complete them in time. His supervisor assigned him regular research tasks, reviewed his progress, then provided constructive feedback. Whenever he faced some confusion about aspects of his research, his supervisor assisted him to see a way forward or recognise other perspectives (see 4.3.3.3). Waqas also mentioned that his supervisor expected him to keep working hard and complete his thesis in a timely manner. He was struggling with thesis writing; in response, his supervisor provided him with some good theses to understand the requirements of research and improve his writing skills. He believed his supervisor had made an equal contribution in his research work (see 4.5.3.2). Amina's supervisor was also demanding and expected quality in her research activities (see 4.7.3.2). Only Kiran could not figure out what the expectations of her supervisor were, saying, *"he doesn't talk much, he will not tell you what he is expecting from you"*. Correspondingly, she did not have much idea about his expectations and how to meet them.

Supervisors engaged their students in wider academic activities to develop their professional understanding and skills. The participants reported that their supervisors offered them professional development training and opportunities in the form of teaching and supervising

graduate students, contributing to teams managing research journals and research projects, writing, and presenting research papers. These activities had a positive impact on students' understanding and confidence to perform in the academic community.

The participants were guided and given the opportunity to teach and supervise the students of their supervisors which enhanced their understanding of the expectations associated with teaching and instilled confidence in their ability to manage students at a higher educational level. Three students taught their supervisors' students. Amir's experience and opportunity to teach his supervisor's Masters level students o enhanced his confidence and he learned how to deliver lectures and communicate with students. He enjoyed managing the records and organising examinations for MPhil students in a course (see 4.3.3.3). Maani and Kiran taught the students of their supervisors which enhanced their confidence about their performance as teachers. Maani's experience led to a positive change in her attitude because she had to study a lot before teaching. She said that she advanced her own understanding of theoretical concepts through teaching them (see 4.4.3.2). Kiran, for her part, learned the academic norms and professionalism required for teaching diverse students. This experience provided her with the confidence to manage students, and an opportunity to recognise her own ability to communicate the theoretical knowledge of her field (see 4.5.3.2). Five participants were involved in evaluating and reviewing the research work of graduate students of their supervisors which enhanced their understanding of their own research and developed confidence about supervising research students. Munaza was engaged to assist the Masters and MPhil students in their research writing and data analysis. She guided them to write research papers and participate in research conferences as well (see 4.2.3.5). Amir and Maani reviewed the research work of the graduate students of their supervisors and guided students to improve it. Maani said, *"I assist the MPhil students in their research work"*, which improved her own research skills as well. Likewise, Kiran and Amina evaluated the research theses of the graduate students who were working with their supervisors. Kiran reported, *"I learned from it and got positive experiences from it"*. She was not very confident in research referencing and she enhanced her skills through reviewing students' research work (see 4.6.3.2). In addition, the supervisors of Munaza and Amina advised them about the current trends in the academic field and guided them in obtaining professional academic opportunities. Munaza's supervisor guided her for academic job interviews, and about *"the*

*nature of questions and different aspects for preparations*". Likewise, Amina's supervisor advised and guided her about the requirements and skills needed for national and international jobs in academia. He told stories about his successful students to motivate her (see 4.7.3.2).

Four participants engaged in managing research journals and two participants were part of research projects with their supervisors. Managing research journals helped students to acquire knowledge of the aspects of reviewing research articles and learning global research cultures through their correspondence with foreign researchers. For instance, Munaza learned to provide initial recommendations on the research papers in alignment with the scope of the journal and then communicate the feedback to their authors accordingly. She realised the importance of qualitative research around the world based on the papers and communication with the authors (see 4.2.3.5). Amir believed that this experience increased his research knowledge and understanding of the reviewing process (see 4.3.3.3), and Maani enhanced her understanding of her own research and the skills to review research articles and communicate with foreign researchers (See 4.4.3.2). Amina was excited to have reviewed the research articles offered by her supervisor. She enhanced her confidence when her supervisor appreciated her skills in reviewing research articles and making review reports which validated her identity as an emerging academic (See 4.7.3.2). Being a part of research projects with supervisors was also a learning experience for two students. Munaza worked on two research projects with her supervisor, one of which was offered by the institution and one by the HEC. This opportunity supported her to understand the research culture and conduct large scale research (see 4.2.3.5). Amir was engaged in an assessment project in the university by his supervisor. He gained experience and confidence in analysis of large sets of quantitative data through using different statistical techniques in SPSS (see 4.3.3.3).

#### **5.2.4 Interaction with experts**

Participants had two types of interactions with experts: (i) with panel members which was compulsory and important to fulfill institutional expectations, and (ii) with academic professionals and researchers which was not compulsory but varied across the participants based on their personal role expectations. The following section outlines these interactions with experts and examines the ways in which they contributed to the development of participants' role identities.

The participants' interaction with the panel members was compulsory and important to evaluate their research progress and meet institutional expectations of their role identities as emerging researchers and emerging academics. Four of the participants had a good experience with the panel experts and defended their research proposal successfully. The panel experts guided the students with positive feedback to improve the clarity of their theoretical constructs and research methods. For example, Munaza received feedback which clarified theoretical terms in her research proposal, recounting that "*an examiner pointed out the assessment method I used, which was a teaching strategy rather than an assessment method*". She also had a constructive discussion with the panel members at the university level which helped her to defend the research methods (experimental design) she adopted for her research proposal (See 4.2.2.4). Amir confidently presented his research proposal and received a considerable amount of appreciation from the panel members because he was working on an emerging idea of research. The experts suggested minor changes, but this experience enhanced his understanding and confidence in his research work (See 4.3.2.3). Likewise, Kiran had a positive interaction with the panel experts because she had good conceptual understanding about her research topic and research methods. Panel members had some concerns over her topic which was multidisciplinary, but she successfully convinced the panel experts of its merits. The panel appreciated her effort and the research methods she adopted. They suggested some changes in the conceptual framework and accepted her research idea which enhanced her understanding and confidence to continue her research (see 4.6.2.4). For her part, Amina had mixed feelings of fear and confidence during her presentation in front of the panel members. They asked several critical questions, and she was given an opportunity to explain the significance, research methods and application of her research idea. She was satisfied that she answered all the questions of the panel members, and they accepted her research idea (see 4.7.2.4). By contrast, Maani and Waqas did not have an ideal interaction with the panel experts because they could not convince them of their research ideas and methods in the first attempt. Consequently, both students were depressed but they improved their understanding of their research ideas and revised their proposals based on the recommendations of the panel members. Maani had to clarify her research idea to ensure it fitted in the domain of Education and adopted a model to conduct it (see 4.4.2.3). She was confident in the second attempt and the panel members accepted her proposal. Waqas also had to do a major revision suggested by a panel member and

present the research proposal again. He was quite concerned about teachers' politics among the panel members, but he took it positively and improved his research proposal based on their comments. He presented his proposal a second time and the panel members endorsed it (see 4.5.2.4).

The second type of expert interaction was with academic professionals or researchers in students' specific areas of research. In these instances, professionals supported students to achieve their personal expectations of their role-identities as researchers and scholars. Four participants accessed professionals to gain support for their research work and inspiration for the academic profession. Munaza was having difficulties with analysing experimental data, so she approached a data analysis expert who assisted her. During this interaction, she also learned other software and enhanced her understanding of educational assessment, especially test development (see 4.2.3.2). She was inspired while sharing with teachers because she believed teachers had wide academic experiences and exposure which enhanced her understanding and awareness of the academic profession (see 4.2.3.6). Maani could not find much literature in her area of research, which was technical education, so she approached a professional in the field who supported her with research instruments and data collection. She said, "*he [expert] got me introduced to the TEVTA and helped me in data collection and interviews*". She also asked for the support of a teacher in her area of research when she faced any problem with quantitative research (See 4.4.2.2, 4.4.3.1). Two participants approached the experts in their areas of research for the instrument validation process. Amir could not get this help from local experts, so he tried to access foreign experts and, luckily, he gained very positive feedback from them. This gave him a great opportunity to discuss his research instrument with them and incorporate their suggestions to ensure the quality of his research work. He felt excited that international scholars had approved his work (see 4.3.3.1). Kiran accessed three professional experts who helped her to refine her research instruments (see 4.6.3.1).

### **5.2.6 Interaction with friends and family members**

In addition, participants' informal interaction with friends and family members provided them with significant academic, emotional, and financial support in the development of their role identities. This interaction was based on the individual needs of the participants, or their personal understanding of the expectations associated with their roles.

Three participants gained academic and emotional support from their friends. Munaza could not get access to recent literature in her research area in the institution, so she accessed her friends in foreign universities who helped her by providing research articles. She also had some friends who met her to see how she was doing with the PhD. She used to share her research challenges and gain some emotional support from them (see 4.2.3.2). Similarly, Maani had a good friend in the hostel who helped her to go out of the city with her for data collection and always encouraged her. In relation to this friend, Maani said, *“I can share all my problems, personal and financial, she knows everything about me and my issues”*. Amina used to discuss her research challenges with one of her friends doing a PhD in another university. She believed her friend was good at research concepts so they both shared their research experiences and helped each other which increased their learning and knowledge (see 4.7.3.2).

Participants reported that their family members supported them with their PhD expenses and provided emotional support throughout their journey. Munaza mentioned that there was not a very supportive environment for female students in the country, but her family supported her and provided her with the freedom to continue her PhD, saying that *“My family has been supporting me since the first day of my academic career...they gave me freedom to go into any field or make any decision about my education*. Likewise, Amir and Maani had financial support from their family members to do a PhD and especially their brothers agreed to bear all expenses of their PhD. Maani particularly mentioned her mother who encouraged her throughout the PhD challenges (see 4.4). When Amir had some problems in data analysis for a research project, his brother helped him with the graphs because he was good at computers (see 4.3.3.3). Kiran mentioned her husband, and Amina appreciated her father, as people who encouraged and helped them to deal with research challenges. Kiran’s husband encouraged her during the crucial time of her research work and issues with her supervisor, Amina’s father encouraged her to keep working hard and persevere during the data analysis process. She commented, *“my father played a central role in my motivation. He said to others that i needed more time and space to do my research work easily”*.

### **5.3 Motivation and its contribution to role identity**

Motivation was the second important and personal aspect in participants' developing and shifting role identities. The motivation of the students was an intrinsic quality, which could boost or undermine their confidence and affect their persistence in academic activities and developing their role identities. Participants frequently used the word "motivation" which referred to ideas such as their feelings, interest, goal, happiness, satisfaction, and confidence to perform academic activities. Based on students' expectations of themselves, there was considerable variation in students' motivations to develop a particular role identity. For all students, levels of motivation fluctuated over time within and across the development of the role identities.

#### **5.3.1 Motivation for learning and improving skills**

At the start of the coursework, students felt personally satisfied about getting into an advanced learning environment, an intrinsic interest in learning and improving research skills, and a wish to enhance their understanding of academic culture. There were several instances when students reported an increase or decrease in their motivation during the coursework. Their self-belief and efficacy always helped them regain their motivation to persist with the learning activities which contributed to their role identity as learners.

All six students had a high level of ambition and motivation for learning at the start of the coursework. Two students, Munaza and Amina, were excited and had positive expectations about learning in a new academic environment because they came from another institution. Both students were a bit nervous at the start because they did not know much about the learning culture. Munaza had mixed feelings of nervousness and excitement, but she became confident while engaging in activity-based learning with others (see 4.2.1.1). Amina was anxious about being a new student in the class but her passion for learning gave her confidence, and she considered coursework as the last chance for her to enhance her research skills. She was intrinsically motivated to do her best in the learning activities and believed that she was learning well (see 4.7.1.1). Two students were ambitious and excited to improve their disciplinary knowledge and research skills for their personal development at an advanced level. Although Amir was not happy about studying so many courses, he was an active student in classroom learning and his motivation was intrinsic, linked with the satisfaction of gaining

knowledge and developing himself. He was intrinsically satisfied that he was learning through the teaching and learning process (see 4.3, 4.3.1.1). Waqas was quite nervous at the start because of the prospect of advanced academic learning, but he gained courage while interacting with fellow students to improve his confidence and clarify his research concepts (see 4.5.1.2). By contrast, the two students were excited for their advanced learning and to enhance their research knowledge, but they did not interact well with other students in the learning environment. Maani desired to learn everything with full commitment because she believed her knowledge and research skills would be significant for her career aspirations (see 4.4.1.1). Kiran was happy and enthusiastic about learning because she believed she would learn something new being in the PhD. In their cases, their motivation decreased, and they became depressed because they felt that their classmates were not very interested in learning (see 4.6.1.1, 4.6.1.2). Despite these concerns, both students pushed themselves and regained their motivation for self-directed learning which enabled them to progress in their learning.

Participants also reported that they liked and had more interest in the research courses and their area of specialisation. Four students were ambitious to learn in the research courses. Maani's focus always remained on learning in the research courses because she thought her research skills would help her in the next stages (see 4.4.1.1). Three students expressed their satisfaction with their learning in the qualitative research course. Waqas was excited to learn the application of qualitative research methods such as conducting interviews which he did not know previously (see 4.5.1.1). Kiran was satisfied and became so attached to the qualitative research course that she used to wait eagerly for the class over the entire week (see 4.6.1.3). Amina was also happy with the qualitative research course, because she had already studied and had good experience with it in her MPhil. However, she became frustrated and lost her motivation for studying quantitative research. She wanted to learn and improve her weak area of quantitative research, but she could not meet her role expectation because the teacher was not very regular and did not engage the class in learning activities (see 4.7.1.3). Three students enhanced their motivation and interest in the second semester due to the learning in their specialist area courses, but two students lost their motivation. Munaza was happy in the second semester because she enhanced her interest in the course on large scale assessment. She had never studied this topic before, but the course strengthened her interest in this area of assessment (see 4.2.1.3). Likewise, Maani enhanced

her interest and was actively involved in the assignments of the course *on Economics of Education* because it was her area of specialisation and background subject (see 4.4.1.4). Waqas observed that he became more serious and responsible in the second semester. His interest was in the course content in his area of specialisation [educational administration] and improving his writing skills. By contrast, Amir and Amina were not very happy with their learning in the courses in their area of specialisation in the second semester. Amir was desperate because he wanted to study Educational Psychology as an area of specialisation but it was not offered in the institution. Consequently, he selected the area of educational administration because he thought he could learn about the application of management theories in educational settings (see 4.3.1.4). Amina also lost her motivation for learning in the courses in her area of specialisation because there were a comparatively smaller number of students in the class and teachers were also not very regular or engaging her in productive activities (see 4.7.1.3).

At the end of the coursework, the students were satisfied with the learning in the courses and could feel a positive change in their attitude, motivation, and confidence to perform research activities. Students' motivation as learners persisted through to the next stage of proposal development, but they became focused on their areas of research and the research methods used in the research proposals. The following section explores their motivation for the development of their role identity as emerging researchers.

### **5.3.2 Motivation for research areas and developing research proposal**

The research proposal phase was exciting and challenging for all the participants as their motivation shifted to the practical research associated with applying the research methods that they had learned. The students were motivated to persist with their learning. They focused on reading global literature based on their prior research experience, job experience, background subjects, and area of specialisation to identify significant research problems for their research proposals. Selecting appropriate research topics and research designs and defending their research proposal were critical aspects for the participants which, at different points in time, increased and decreased their motivation to develop their role identity as emerging researchers.

The participants were motivated to start their research work, but some were feeling a bit nervous that they would not be able to meet the standards of quality research proposals at an advanced level and satisfy the institutional expectations. Munaza was excited to explore new things in her area of specialisation which was educational assessment (see 4.2.2.1). Likewise, Amir and Maani were feeling relaxed that they could now give maximum attention to their area of research. Amir was so ambitious that his real joy was starting to do research with a mind that was free from the requirements of courses (see 4.3.2.1). Three of the students were not very confident about developing research proposals at PhD level. Waqas had the knowledge required to develop a research proposal due to the courses and his MPhil experience, but he was anxious about meeting the high international standards of PhD research (see 4.5.2.1). Maani thought she had the skills to develop a research proposal, but it was quite difficult for her to do without support from others (see 4.4.2.2). Amina was nervous about not having the understanding and knowledge to develop a research proposal at an expert level (see 4.7.2.1). However, the students strove to persist with learning in their specialist areas and gaining confidence to develop research proposals.

The students were eager to extend their previous area of research and methods, or critically examine their jobs for possible topics for their research proposals. Munaza was excited about extending her MPhil area of research on feedback methods and conducting a research experiment because of her positive prior research experience (see 4.2.2.1). Maani had a personal interest in Economics, so she planned a multidisciplinary area of research which could cover Education as well as Economics (see 4.4.2.1). Two students were interested in observing their job practices to identify significant research problems. Waqas was working in school management, so he was interested in working on school management practices and teacher experiences. He read widely in the literature which made him confident and capable of contextualising research ideas (see 4.5.2.1). Likewise, Amina had an interest in professionalism practices because she had observed some managerial issues during her teaching experience. Reading the literature motivated her to connect her research ideas with her job practices and develop a research proposal in the area (see 4.7.2.1). Kiran critically observed the education policies and study experience of her son which made her motivated and confident in working in this area (see 4.6.2.3).

Five students (Amir, Maani, Waqas, Kiran and Amina) wanted to select a mixed-methods approach for their research proposals because they believed it would bring novelty and cover all aspects of their research problems. Although Amir was interested in quantitative research because of his interest and expertise, he chose a mixed methods approach after discussing this with his supervisor (see 4.3.2.2). Kiran, for her part, wanted to adopt a qualitative approach due to her confidence and interest, but her supervisor would not agree with her. Due to this disagreement, she lost some motivation, and she finally had to choose a mixed-methods approach because of her supervisor's insistence (see 4.6.2.3).

The participants had mixed feelings of confidence and nervousness on presenting and defending their research proposals in front of the panel members. Munaza had mixed feelings, but she received positive feedback while presenting at the department level which enhanced her motivation and confidence. She again experienced anxiety while presenting at university level because she had to convince the members of other faculties which was challenging for her (see 4.2.2.2). Amir was highly motivated because he believed that he was working on an emerging area of research. He presented confidently and received much appreciation from the panel members which enhanced his self-confidence and motivation about his research (see 4.3.3.3). Kiran and Amina also had mixed feelings during the presentation of their research proposals. Kiran felt confident about her understanding of her research idea, but she was a bit concerned about the research approach because her supervisor was not very supportive. Nevertheless, she presented her proposal with confidence and received positive support from the panel members. She was happy that she was able to convince the panel members of the value of her research approach (see 4.6.2.4). Amina was a bit afraid of teacher politics which might influence the approval of her research proposal. She presented her proposal and the panel members appreciated and approved her research proposal which enhanced her motivation and interest (see 4.7.2.4). Two of the students also had mixed feelings; they were hopeful of getting acceptance of their research proposals, but they were unsuccessful in defending their research proposals which decreased their motivation. Maani tried to defend her research topic which was based on the application of an Economics model in educational settings, but panel members did not agree and asked her to revise it. She became depressed but retained her motivation and revised it (see 4.4.2.3). Similarly, Waqas was trying to be positive that he would be able to defend his

research proposal successfully, but the panel members asked him for major changes. He thought that teacher politics influenced his presentation which decreased his motivation, but he incorporated all the suggested changes, and his proposal was subsequently approved (see 4.5.2.4).

### **5.3.3 Motivation for research and broader academic activities**

The third stage was long and crucial for all the students in which they had to conduct extensive research projects based on their research proposals. Their motivation fluctuated as they tried to enact their plans and gain wider academic experience. Research activities, especially data collection and data analysis were critical and often undermined their motivation because they were afraid of not meeting their personal and institutional expectations. However, engaging in other academic activities boosted their passion and motivation to perform and develop their role identity as emerging academics.

In the third stage, the students were excited to start their practical research activities and interact with their research participants. They actively developed their research instruments and completed their validation process. Munaza was confident to develop instruments (questionnaires, lesson plans) for her research experiment, because she already had prior experience in this area (see 4.2.3.1). Likewise, Waqas, Kiran and Amina were motivated to engage in the experience of instrument development. Waqas learned about psychometric properties and enhanced his understanding of this process (see 4.5.3.1) and Kiran was motivated to conduct mock interviews for instrument development as she already had interest and prior experience in using qualitative methods (see 4.6.3.1). Amir was comfortable during instrument development, but he was worried when he could not access his local experts for their opinion. However, he approached and gained feedback from foreign experts which enhanced his motivation and understanding in his area of research (see 4.3.3.1). Maani was the only participant who was upset about the research instruments because she could not find much literature in her area of research which was technical education. Luckily, she approached an expert in her area who provided her with relevant content and helped her to feel satisfied with the research instrumentation (see 4.4.3.1).

Data collection and data analysis were critical aspects which decreased students' motivation and the passion that they had at the start. Four students could not properly access their

research participants due to the pandemic and their other reasons (not responding, not interested and so forth). Amir tried his best to contact university teachers through phone calls and emails, but he could not gain any response from them. This was disappointing and disheartening for him, and he considered collecting online data or paid data (see 4.3.3.1). Amina became desperate when she could not get a proper response from her research participants. She also regretted choosing a mixed methods approach in her research proposal because she had to collect both quantitative and qualitative data which made her anxious (see 4.7.3.1). Kiran was worried because her research participants [educational administrators] did not allow recording of the interviews for political reasons. However, she was motivated, and she used some referrals to manage and access the participants (see 4.6.3.1). Data collection was critical and tough for Waqas as well, but he had an advantage in accessing the participants (schoolteachers) through using references at his job place which made him feel relaxed (see 4.5.3.1).

Participants had mixed experiences in the data analysis stage. Two participants were quite confident about and satisfied with their data analysis skills. Maani had good quantitative research skills, so she was not worried about quantitative data analysis. She was quite sure that she had applied for valid statistical tests and would receive good feedback from evaluators (see 4.4.3.1). Likewise, Kiran had 100% confidence and believed in her qualitative data analysis due to her interest and previous experience (see 4.6.3.1). Two of the participants lost their motivation during data analysis because they were not very confident in their analysis skills. Munaza was stuck during her analysis of the experimental data; she tried her best on her own, but she could not succeed unaided. She continued reading her prior research and literature to manage her data analysis (see 4.2.3.2). Likewise, data analysis was a critical aspect for Amina because she was worried and less confident about her quantitative data analysis skills. She tried her best to learn the statistical tests she applied for and regained her motivation to some extent (see 4.7.3.1).

Students' motivation was enhanced when they engaged in wider academic activities such as teaching and supervising graduate students, becoming members of teams managing research journals and reviewing papers, writing research papers, and participating in research conferences. Four students were happy and satisfied when they were provided with an

opportunity to teach the graduate students. Amir enhanced his confidence and communication while teaching and managing a class of MPhil students with his supervisor (see 4.3.3.3). Maani felt a positive change during the teaching opportunity because she had to behave like a teacher rather than a student (see 4.4.3.2). Waqas gained confidence and academic wellbeing after teaching and supervising the B.Ed. and M.Ed. students in the Open University. After this experience, he believed he could talk in front of people without hesitation (see 4.5.3.3). Kiran felt professional while teaching, which boosted her confidence and her ability to assess her own knowledge (see 4.6.3.2).

The participants were ambitious and satisfied that they were becoming part of the wider academic community because they were performing different roles and activities with other fellows, teachers, and supervisors. Munaza and Maani were happy and considered themselves as a part of the wider academic community because they were working together with fellows and teachers, and performing multiple academic roles such as students, researchers, and teachers (see 4.2.3.6, 4.4.3.3). Amir and Waqas were satisfied that they had gained social recognition at their job place and in the institution. Waqas could feel that people had started to respect him and hear him when he talked about something (see 4.3.3.5, 4.5.3.5). Kiran saw herself as a confident and independent scholar who was able to perform activities in the wider academic community (see 4.6.3.5).

#### **5.4 Academic writing and its contribution to role identity**

Writing was an important element in each of the different role identities students experienced over the course of their study. Writing was perceived as the criterion for evaluating the role performance of students. During coursework students were learning the basic principles and rules of academic writing through written assignments which were evaluated by themselves and their course teachers. These activities contributed to their role identity as learners and began the development of their identity as writers. In the second stage of their journey, students demonstrated their writing skills through the development and presentation of a research proposal. Their proposal writing was assessed by themselves, their supervisors, and panel members to provide evidence of their progress towards the role identity of an emerging researcher. In the last stage participants were writing theses and

research articles. The examination of their thesis and review of journal articles supported them in their role identity as emerging academics within a wider academic community.

#### **5.4.1 Learning about academic writing**

The coursework stage provided a learning environment through which students could practise and enhance their writing skills. Amir and Maani wanted to improve their writing skills because they firmly believed that writing and research were strongly correlated and essential for success in the PhD. They recognised that if one is missing, then a student cannot convey their ideas well (see 4.3.1.3, 4.4.1.3). As part of this stage, students had to pass a course on academic writing based on the basic principles and rules of academic writing. Five students reported that they learned and improved their writing in this course, including in the development of research ideas and arguments. They reported the improvement in their writing skills in composing a literature review, managing academic vocabulary, and sentence structure, writing styles and formatting (APA), starting and finishing thesis chapters, and practising the review of research papers (see 4.2.1.2, 4.3.1.3, 4.4.1.3, 4.5.1.3 and 4.6.1.3). These students considered they could identify a difference in their ability and confidence to write after the course.

Course assignments helped students to improve their writing in the other courses. These provided them with an opportunity to practise and assess their own ability to write. For instance, Maani was anxious and uncertain about her English writing ability and wanted to put extra effort into writing practice as preparation for the research stage (see 4.4.1.3). Waqas told me he had little confidence in his writing, but course assignments helped him to improve his understanding of writing and he recognised that he needed to become more responsible about his writing (See 4.5.1.2). Kiran learned writing through her mistakes because writing was an ongoing task and effort (See 4.6.1.3). Overall, improving writing through their assignments helped to validate their role identity as learners.

Another way that participants tried to improve their writing was through reading. Amir, Maani and Waqas reported they read extensively which made a difference in their understanding and writing skills. Amir and Waqas used to visit the library to develop their reading habits and improve their writing skills (see 4.3.1.2, 4.5.1.3). Maani and Kiran were self-directed learners

who focused on their readings which improved their understanding of writing as well (see 4.4.1.3, 4.6.1.2). Students could evaluate the improvement in their writing through readings.

Teacher and peer support was also crucial for students to receive feedback on their writing and complete the course assignments. Three students, Munaza, Amir and Waqas, reported that they used to collaborate with their fellows to discuss, take feedback and help each other in the writing assignments (see 4.2.1.1, 4.3.1.2, 4.5.1.2). Course teachers used to assess students' writing and set up written activities for them. Kiran and Amina's teachers assessed their progress and provided constructive and instant feedback on their written assignments. Kiran explained that her teachers listened to the writing problems she faced and identified mistakes which improved her writing skills. She also had practice developing a research proposal assessed by her teacher (see 4.6.1.3, 4.7.1.1). Maani and Waqas reported that their teachers assessed their writing through assigning a classroom level project and then they were asked to practise the research process (such as choosing research topics and research designs) and writing research papers based on that. This experience helped them to enhance their ability and confidence in learning basic expectations of research writing (see 4.4.1.2, 4.5.1.3). The feedback from teachers and peers on written assignments supported students' role identity as learners.

#### **5.4.2 Research proposal writing**

Moving to the next stage, the students had to apply and display their adequate level of academic writing skills in developing research proposals. For this they applied the principles and rules of writing they had learned during practice in the coursework. They all identified, structured, and aligned the various aspects of a research proposal to successfully develop and present a research proposal. The research proposals were assessed by themselves, their supervisors, and a panel of experts as meeting the expectations of a PhD and providing validation of their role identity as emerging researchers.

The students reported that their supervisors played a key role in guiding them in choosing appropriate research methods and crafting a proposal. Maani, Waqas and Amina reported that they had only basic skills for writing research proposals, but their supervisor helped them to assess and decide on a research design that could meet the demands of an advanced level of research proposal writing. For instance, Waqas stated he had ideas in his mind but was not

able initially to express them in writing, but discussion and feedback from his supervisor helped him to write his research proposal (see 4.5.2.2). Amir sometimes felt that the revisions suggested by the supervisor changed his writing perspective and challenged his patience levels, but subsequently he could discern an improvement in his writing due to those revisions (see 4.3.2.2). The regular feedback from supervisors enabled these students to write a research proposal and receive role validation as emerging researchers.

In assessing their own writing skill competency, students were confident that they had acquired an acceptable level of writing in developing their research proposals. The feedback from the panel members confirmed for them that they were able to meet the institutional expectations of their role identity as emerging researchers. Four students successfully defended their research proposals, but they had to make minor changes in their writing suggested by the panel experts. For example, Munaza had to clarify the writing of different terms she used and add relevant literature to support her choice of experimental research design for her research (see 4.2.2.4). Amir had self-belief that he had developed a good research proposal and added enough literature to defend his research problem. The panel members appreciated him because he developed a good proposal on an emerging area of research (See 4.3.2.3). Kiran was confident with her proposal because she had consulted a lot of literature in her area of research. She successfully defended the research topic and research design she used. The panel members advised her to rewrite her conceptual framework (see 4.6.2.4). Although Amina was not very satisfied with her proposal, she received good feedback from the panel members. They appreciated that she was using a mixed methods approach (See 4.7.2.4). Two participants could not defend their research proposal successfully, because they could not meet the writing expectations of the panel members. Maani could not properly justify her research problem which was based on two disciplines (Education and Economics), and Waqas had overlooked major conceptual and theoretical aspects in his research writing. Both participants had to revise their proposals based on the suggestions from the panel experts and present them again to gain approval (see 4.4.2.3, 4.5.2.4). However, the eventual approval of their research proposals provided students with a validation of their role identity as emerging researchers and enabled them to progress towards the next milestone.

### 5.4.3 Dissertation and research paper writing

After proposal writing, students had to write an extensive thesis based on their research work. Moreover, they were writing research papers to produce and share knowledge to the wider academic community and develop their role identity as emerging academics.

The students reported that they continued reading literature to enhance their understanding of scholarly writing by international researchers in their field of research. Five students reported that reading extensive literature in their area of research supported them to write their ideas and meet the expectations of scholarly writing at an advanced level. Munaza believed that reading literature helped her to broaden her understanding of different dimensions (analysis of experimental research), which made her realise that she could do more work on her research writing (see 4.2.3.3). Amir, Waqas and Amina draw on the appropriate use of academic words and writing styles adopted by renowned researchers to inform their own writing practices. This approach helped them to assess their writing capability at an advanced level and then compare their own communication of research ideas and make them accessible for their readers (see 4.3.3.2, 4.5.3.4, 4.7.3.3). Maani had a personal interest in reading literature in her area which helped her to hone her own ability to write her thesis.

The students received regular feedback from their supervisors in the process of writing their research dissertations. Four of the students appreciated the support their supervisors provided in clarifying their thoughts, and Amir preferred to discuss ideas and any problems (See 4.3.3.3). Waqas, who received regular feedback from his supervisor, considered his supervisor made an equal contribution to his dissertation (See 4.5.3.2). The regular feedback from their supervisors supported their research activities and met the expectations of the research.

The students believed they needed to demonstrate writing that met international standards because their writing would be recognised and evaluated by the wider academic community in their research area. Munaza tried her best to follow a logical sequence and structure in her thesis writing because she knew that her research would be read by the global academic community. She presented her writing in an open seminar because she wanted to gain constructive feedback on her writing from a diverse audience (experts in different research

areas, students) and then improve it (see 4.2.3.4). Amir gained expert opinion from international researchers in his area who helped him by giving detailed feedback especially in the instrument development process. He was confident that his research was being evaluated by international experts (see 4.3.3.1). Moreover, two students reported that experts' feedback played an important part in evaluating the quality of their research writing. Maani aimed to present her writing to a wider audience of academic experts who could help her to understand the flaws which remained in her thesis. She knew that she would be judged on her thesis writing (see 4.4.3.1). Waqas mentioned that he received comments from the academic experts which provided an opportunity to understand the required writing skills for his thesis (see 4.5.3.4).

The participants were proactive and keen to write research papers because it would be a means to gain scholarly recognition in the academic community. Two participants believed that writing research papers could ensure their progress and recognition towards being a part of the wider academic community. Amir was writing research papers to progress in the academic community, and he said, *"in today's world you can become part of the academic community by publishing your research papers"*. Kiran was of the view that her academic identity would only be achievable through writing as many papers as possible. She was also aware that qualitative research required a lot of work and she needed to improve her academic vocabulary (see 4.6.3.4). Likewise, Waqas wrote two research papers based on his research which were in the review process. He firmly believed that, as a scholar, it was his academic and ethical responsibility to write research papers and contribute to knowledge. He was satisfied that he had gained the skills (particularly data analysis) and confidence required to write (see 4.5.3.4). Maani and Amina reflected on and were satisfied with their progress and ability to write research papers based on their PhD research (see 4.4.3.2 and 4.7.3.3).

## **5.5 Summary**

Analysis across the case studies illuminated that three common themes, social interactions, motivation, and writing played a pivotal role in supporting students in the development of their role identities as learners, emerging researchers, and emerging academics. During the first stage (coursework), mainly course teachers and classmates provided role support to the students in their learning activities. Students had high learning expectations and motivation at the start of the PhD, but their motivation fluctuated throughout their learning experiences

during the courses. Students learned, practised and enhanced their writing skills through the written assignments which were assessed by themselves and their teachers. The experiences of interactions, variations in motivation, and writing assignments supported students to develop their role identity as learners. In the second stage (research proposal), students extended their interactions to the department level particularly with the people in the same area of research. They had regular meetings with their supervisors, specialist area peers and panel experts who supported students in making research decisions and provided constructive feedback. Students had high motivation to choose emerging research areas and research methods based on their specialist area and past research experience. They had mixed feelings of nervousness and confidence about presenting their proposal. Students had to write a constructive research proposal which was assessed by themselves and their supervisors and panel experts to validate their identity as emerging researchers. These experiences of interaction with the research community, variations in motivation for research, and writing research proposals supported students to develop their role identity as emerging researchers. In the last stage (dissertation writing), students extended their interactions and gained support from the wider academic community which included their supervisors, research area and senior fellows, as well as national and international experts in their areas, family, and friends. The students were motivated during the instrument development phase, but their motivation declined during the data collection and data analysis phases. Participants were highly motivated while performing wider academic activities, especially teaching. Students had to write an extensive thesis and research papers based on their research work which could enhance their recognition in the wider academic community. All the experiences of interaction with the wider community in their area of research, motivation for conducting research and performing academic activities, and writing theses and research papers supported students to develop their role identity as emerging academics.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

#### 6.1 Overview

Over the years, research on the socialisation process and the identity development of doctoral students for academic careers has received limited attention in literature. The existing scholarship does not generally provide a strong theoretical conception of academic identity development over the course of students' doctoral journeys, as researchers have not explored in depth how doctoral students identify and prepare themselves to pursue an academic career. This study aimed to address this gap.

The previous two chapters documented the research findings on students' navigation of their doctoral journey via the multiple role identities that contributed to their academic identity development. This chapter offers interpretive insights and discussion of the findings in relation to previous research on doctoral socialisation and student identity development.

#### 6.2 Introduction

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of doctoral students' learning in the Education Department of one university in Pakistan. To meet this aim, I completed in-depth interviews with six doctoral students at the third stage [writing dissertation] of their candidature, with the goal of tracing the expectations and experiences that influenced their academic identity development and evolving membership of the academic community. The research aimed to answer following the research questions:

1. How do students' expectations and experiences shape their role identity in doctoral education?
2. How do students shifting and multiple role identities during their doctoral education contribute to their academic identity development?

Doctoral socialisation, stage models, and role identity theory guided me in the analysis of students' expectations and experiences through the provision of an integrative-framework (Chapter 2). This allowed me to highlight the identity perspectives of my doctoral student participants. The framework helped me to understand the complex socialisation process of

my sample of doctoral students in the context of one university in a developing country. Each aspect of this framework made a specific contribution to the research inquiry and analysis. The concept of doctoral socialisation helped me to understand the process whereby students gain knowledge, skills, and values to perform a role in the academic community (section 2.3). The stage model approach provided me with the tools needed to analyse and categorise students' experience in a manner consistent with doctoral milestones and the structure of the university they were studying at (section 2.3.1). Role identity theory provided a lens to analyse and understand doctoral students' expectations and experiences through their role identity/ies during each stage of their doctoral studies (section 2.4.1).

Based on the individual student case studies in Chapter 4 and the cross cases examination in Chapter 5, this discussion argues that doctoral students remain in a constant process of negotiating personal, institutional, and professional perspectives and ways of 'being' and 'doing' in their PhD journey. Throughout the doctoral socialisation process, students rely on three key aspects of their role identity development which are social interactions, motivation, and writing. Moreover, students have multiple role identities which shift in prominence during the institutional milestone stages. The following section, 6.3, discusses the key aspects of students' role identities and section 6.4 explains the shifts, multiplicity, and prominent role identities of doctoral students.

### **6.3 Aspects of doctoral students' role identities**

Exploring doctoral students' expectations and experiences in terms of institutional milestone stages, I described the journey of each research participant (Chapter 4). I then looked across each participant's journey and identified the nature of their social interactions, the nature of their motivation, and academic writing as key aspects of their role identity development from my participants' point of view. Social interaction acted as a support, motivation was an internal driver, and writing provided external evidence of shifts and changes in expectations and their performance. Hence, I propose that one way to think about the composition of doctoral students' roles, irrespective of the stage that they are in their journey, is that they are comprised of and enacted through social interactions, motivation, and writing.

### **6.3.1 Social interactions as supportive networks and sources of role validation**

Interactions are a key contributor to the development and validation of a role identity. Social interactions are important because they link with a key concept of role identity theory, that of role support. McCall and Simmons (1978) propose that people provide role support and validation through their responses to a person's performance in a particular role identity. Conventional role expectations are embedded within a specific social structure for identity enactment and presented in the particular forms and norms of socialisation in that context (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Recent research studies on doctoral identity development have described the significant value of the social interactions of students for their integration and identity development in the academic community (see 2.4.1). In my research study, students interacted with their teachers, peers, supervisors, experts, and family members and friends. Individuals from each of these groups provided a supportive network for their learning, encouragement, and understanding the expectations of their role identities. Students gained affirmation and validation for their various roles through these interactions. The interactions with teachers, supervisors and experts carried more weight in their role development than the informal interactions with peers, family, and friends.

According to the literature, course teachers serve as role models, informal advisors, and mentors for PhD students; they help them in their initial integration into a doctoral programme and understanding of the learning expectations (Gardner, 2008; Noonan, 2015). My findings lend support to the argument that course teachers make a significant contribution to the development of students' role identity as learners by providing them support and direction, conveying role expectations, and offering guidance to enhance their disciplinary knowledge and research skills. All six students reported that their teachers motivated them to enhance their interest in learning and encouraged them to find resources to gain in-depth understanding (see 5.2.1). Teacher interaction is crucial during coursework because students need a lot of guidance and support to understand the learning environment of doctoral education. Moreover, teachers assign students learning activities, grade their work and offer feedback that provides validation of their role identity as learners.

The scholarship affirms that peer interaction is an important part of doctoral students' socialisation and an opportunity to engage both intellectually and socially with other

classmates (Gardner, 2008; Lovitts, 2001; Pilbeam et al., 2013). Peers act as a source of intellectual stimulation and social support to develop a collegial environment in the academic community. My findings support the notion that interactions and collaborative learning practices with peers help students to have intellectual exchanges, assess their own skills and position, and develop the knowledge and skills associated with their different role identities. Students in my study discussed ideas and supported each other during the group assignments and academic discussions, the preparation of research proposals, and the research activities (see 5.2.2). For some students, interactions were always very productive. For others, for example Maani and Kiran, peer interactions and role support were deemed less valuable. In such cases, it was believed that peers had limited interest in learning due to their job commitments (see 4.3.1.2, 4.5.1.2). As a result, my research also highlights that students' commitments outside of their study may impact on the extent of this mutual support and role identity.

Social Interaction with senior fellows has not been discussed much in literature but my findings indicate that these seniors have significant influence on doctoral students' progress and understanding of role expectations. For example, Munaza interacted with her seniors to understand the requirements and formatting of her research proposal (see 4.2.2.3), Maani and Kiran gained help from their senior peers in understanding the proposal format and data analysis. Students' experiences of sharing, seeking advice, and collaborative learning with senior fellows supported their role validation as learners.

Other researchers have described the importance of supervisory interactions in the identity development of doctoral students (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Emmioglu et al., 2017; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Jansen, 2019; Inouy & McAlpine, 2017; 2019; Rooij et al., 2021). In my research, supervisors were a central point of interaction, and intellectual support and development during the students' doctoral journey, as they sought to develop their role identity as emerging researchers and academics. Five participants reported satisfactory and supportive interaction with their supervisors in the proposal development. The exception was Kiran, who could not develop a shared understanding with her supervisor about the choice of research methods. She wanted to choose qualitative research design (and had supporting evidence from the literature), but her supervisor kept directing her towards a quantitative design which

caused her distress (see 4.6.2.2). This experience had a long-term impact on her understanding, and she could not gain much support from her supervisor throughout the research activities. Thus, my findings support the view that developing a good understanding with a supervisor is crucial; without this understanding, students can face challenging situations in their research (Hunter & Devine, 2016; Naylor et al., 2018).

Integrating into an academic community is an important aspect of doctoral education and identity formation. Emmioglu et al. (2017), and Jazvac-Martek (2009) have described a number of academic activities which develop students' sense of belonging or feeling that they are part of the academic community. My research findings indicate that supervisors' interaction with their supervisees, in many instances, supported their wider engagement in the departmental and institutional academic community through activities such as teaching, research journal and project team membership, writing and presenting research papers. These activities developed students' sense of being a part of the academic community and validated their role identity as emerging academics. Supervisors encouraged students to participate and perform in academic avenues such as research conferences through which they shared their research with a larger audience (such as in the case of Amina). In this way, supervisors played a facilitative role to enable academic pathways through which students could both develop their skills and exchange and also enact their knowledge.

Seeing oneself as an emerging researcher is an important stage in the doctoral journey. External experts played a role in forging and supporting this identity. In my research findings, students interacted with panel experts and specialists in their specific areas of research. Oral panel experts assessed students' understanding of their research area and guided them to address any deficiencies in their research proposals through verbal comments during the presentation session and written feedback after the meeting. The assessment of research proposals and the critical reflection of panel members provided external validation of students' role identity as emerging researchers. These findings are in line with those of Heron et al. (2023) and Jiang and Ma (2018) who assert that examiners/evaluators have a crucial role in assessing students' abilities to display disciplinary and research knowledge, and the significance and feasibility of their research ideas. The second type of expert interaction was with the people in their specific area of research. Students in my study deliberately

approached experts in their research area to learn the required skills and attributes of being an emerging researcher and emerging academic. For instance, Maani approached an expert in her area of research to gain help with the literature review, instrument development and data collection (see 4.4.3.1), and Munaza learned many new aspects of education assessment when she visited an expert in experimental data analysis (see 4.2.3.2). Amir approached foreign experts to gain expert opinion on his research instruments (see 4.3.3.1). These experts provide immediate research support to students which contributes to their understanding and performance of research activities. Their experiences are consistent with Mantai's (2017) assertion that sharing ideas about research with others provides students with a sense of validation of their identity as researchers.

There is not much mention in the literature which I was able to locate about the importance of the informal support of family and friends for doctoral students as part of their identity development. However, Breitenbach et al. (2019) and Pifer and Baker (2011) reported that family and friends provide encouragement, help students to talk through challenges and offer sustained support. My findings align with these research studies. My participants appreciated the encouragement and emotional support that they had from their family and friends. Friends could also provide research support, as did Munata's friend who accessed recent literature for her and Maani's hostel friend who assisted her in data collection.

From the above discussion it is evident that both formal and informal interactions contribute to doctoral students' role identity support and validation at the different milestone stages of their study. These interactions primarily affirm their sense of progress and support their role identities as learners, emerging researchers, and emerging academics. Through sharing their ideas, raising questions, hearing the ideas of others, students come to understand the expectations of their emergent role identities involved in the different milestone stages. Moreover, students value intellectual exchanges, collaboration and engagement in academic activities and validation of their role identities through these interactions.

### **6.3.2 Motivation as an internal driver for persistence with academic activities**

Motivation is proposed as the second aspect of role identity. This driver emerged as important to students in relation to their expectations and idealised conceptions of themselves. In my research, motivation is recognised as an internal force that can support students' confidence

and persistence to continue, despite any challenges. It was their motivation to successfully complete their doctoral studies that supported students to persist and strive to perform the academic activities that were part of their doctoral journey. Findings indicate students' motivation fluctuated over the course of their PhD journey as they encountered different institutional milestones and the experiences and expectations associated with these stages. Their motivation varied along with the relevant and dominant institutional role expectations and their personal expectations and experiences of these. Based on my findings, I argue that if students' experiences are consistent with or fulfill their expectations and their imaginative view of themselves at the different milestones of their journey, then their role identity is validated. This validation, in turn, supports their motivation to keep continuing their work.

Several studies have identified that motivation for undertaking a PhD varies and can come from an internal desire for intellectual development (Leonard et al., 2005; Lynch et al., 2018; Wellington & Sikes, 2007), an interest in the field and research and a desire to make a contribution (Brailsford, 2010; De Welde & Laursen, 2008; Stubb et al., 2012). External motivation included to enhance career competence and employability prospects (Templeton, 2016; Stubb et al., 2012), and a social prestige to obtain a doctoral degree (Ceglie, 2019; Sverdlik et al., 2018). The students in my research mentioned this range of motivation as contributing to the decision to do a PhD. There was not much difference between my participants' motivations for undertaking a PhD as compared with those cited in other studies. The motivation was similar, even though my research context was in a developing country, as opposed to the studies discussed in the literature. Doctoral students have been found to possess the highest motivation for learning during the coursework stage of their doctoral journey (Sverdlik & Hall, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018). My research findings support the view that doctoral students have a strong motivation and willingness to engage in learning activities to enhance their knowledge, especially during coursework. However, the focus for student motivation varied. Two students reported more interest in learning research methods and improving their writing (see 4.3.1.3, 4.4.1.3), and two were more motivated to learn about their area of specialisation (see 4.2.1.3, 4.4.1.4). One student's (Amina) motivation decreased in the quantitative research course because she could not learn as much as she had expected. She considered her experience as bitter and poor which limited her learning at that point, and she felt she was not validated as a learner (see 4.7.1.3). Her response supports

Holbrook et al 's (2014) finding that a mismatch between students' expectations and their experiences can impede progress and cause distress. My research adds that motivation supports students' confidence to initiate and keep developing a good understanding of key research ideas and practices, and of the academic learning environment.

Pifer and Baker (2016), in their study of stage-based challenges, found that students can feel uneasy with the rapid, ill defined, and sometimes confusing transition to the research proposal phase. However, my research findings were that most students felt quite energetic and were highly motivated to seek out an emerging area of research to focus on in their research proposals. They looked forward to being able to make independent decisions about a topic and research methods because they had limited choice of decisions in the coursework. Kiran was an exception. Her motivation decreased due to not being able to choose a research method based on her interest (see 4.6.2.2). Taken together, this suggests that doctoral students' feelings of being valued, and their motivation are sustained, if they are able to choose a topic and research methods based on their interest.

Although Sverdlik and Hall (2020) claim that students possess strong motivation in the dissertation stage, in my research, students' motivation declined as they progressed to collecting and analysing data and crafting their thesis argument. Four students could not readily access research participants due to the Covid pandemic which decreased their motivation. Two participants lost motivation during data analysis when they realised that their analysis skills were inadequate. It might be due to their new field because Amina reported that she had never undertaken quantitative analysis before, so both students had to persist in their reading and learning about data analysis. Two students were quite confident and motivated because they had expertise in data analysis due to their prior experience (see 4.4.3.1, 4.6.3.1). Ali and Kohun (2007) and Gardner (2009) viewed that later stages of doctoral education involve increased independence, students experience greater isolation and low motivation due to less frequent performance feedback and the solitary nature of data collection, analysis and thesis writing. My research findings suggest that students experience variations in their motivation throughout the research work, but they continue learning research methods, and practice occurs through research activities.

My findings are that students' motivation was enhanced when they engaged in wider academic activities such as teaching and supervising graduate students, being part of managing research journals and reviewing papers, writing research papers, and participating in research conferences. For instance, for four students an opportunity to teach graduate students increased their interest and motivation to manage the classroom, communicate with learners and behave like a professional teacher. Similarly, four students reported that active engagement in editing research journals and reviewing research papers increased their motivation and satisfaction in becoming a part of the wider academic community. These academic experiences of wider engagement provided students with confidence to perform, and an understanding of values and behavioural expectations associated with the academic role. In this way my research findings support those of Emmioglu et al. (2017), Jazvac-Martek (2009), and McAlpine et al. (2009) who also found that doctoral students are motivated to actively engage in wider academic activities and this engagement makes them feel like academics.

The above discussion illustrates that students always have some internal motivation which drives them to meet the expectations of their role identities. Students' motivation fluctuated in focus and positivity throughout their doctoral journey due to variations in their role expectations and hence their experiences in each doctoral stage. Despite the variations and challenges in role expectations, motivation supported students to sustain and persist with learning and engage in the academic activities associated with their role identities.

### **6.3.3 Writing as a marker of progress and role validation**

Writing has emerged as a third key aspect of doctoral student role identities, through its function in providing evidence of student role performance and progress. Writing as a process and a product validates the various role identities that students need to work towards and achieve over different institutional milestones. This is because writing is a key feature of the multiple activities students need to engage in over the course of their doctoral journey and in learning what it means to be a scholar (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). The demands of and challenges to do with different kinds of writing involved in their doctoral journey featured prominently in my interviews with the students in my study. In line with the work of Kamler and Thomson (2014), my findings indicate that writing is identity work: students' views and

perspectives on writing provided evidence of the nature and development of students' role identities. More specifically, students were aware that their role performance was evaluated through their writing.

As students progressed through the different doctoral stages and achieved the required institutional milestones, they made a consistent effort to improve their writing as judged by their self-assessment and feedback from others. The students in my research appreciated that they learned about writing styles, vocabulary, argument writing, and citing and writing about literature through classroom assignments. These experiences supported students to develop in the role identity of learners (see 5.4.1). Students assessed their writing and put extra effort into aspects that they considered needed development. For instance, two students recognised that their mastery of the English language could hinder their writing performance, and therefore put extra effort into practising English writing through classroom assignments (see 4.4.1.3, 4.5.1.3).

Findings indicate students appreciated that both reading and writing are crucial and interdependent in evidencing the development of their role identities within the academic community. This research reports a strong connection between students' reading approaches and their writing skills. Students recounted that reading books and articles supported their learning and their writing of course assignments. Reading relevant literature helped them to justify research gaps and provide arguments during research proposal writing, which in turn validated their role identity as emerging researchers. Reading good articles helped students to understand the criteria to be followed for writing a dissertation and research papers that contributed new knowledge. For example, Amir and Waqas made active use of research papers to inform the writing styles they used to communicate their own ideas (see 4.3.3.2, 4.5.3.4). Although reading during doctoral study has not received as much attention as writing, my research suggests that reading provides significant support to students' writing as they move to become more independent. Additionally, many students consciously used their reading to inform and improve the quality of their writing.

Aitchison et al. (2012) view feedback as the primary means for learning research writing. My findings identify that students appreciate feedback that helps them to meet the required expectations and gain validation of their role identities. Students commented that they

appreciated constructive and timely feedback from teachers on written assignments. They also valued feedback from peers on their written assignments. They described this as helpful in assessing their writing capability and in improving it (see 5.4.1). Both sources of feedback supported students to gain validation of their role identity as learners.

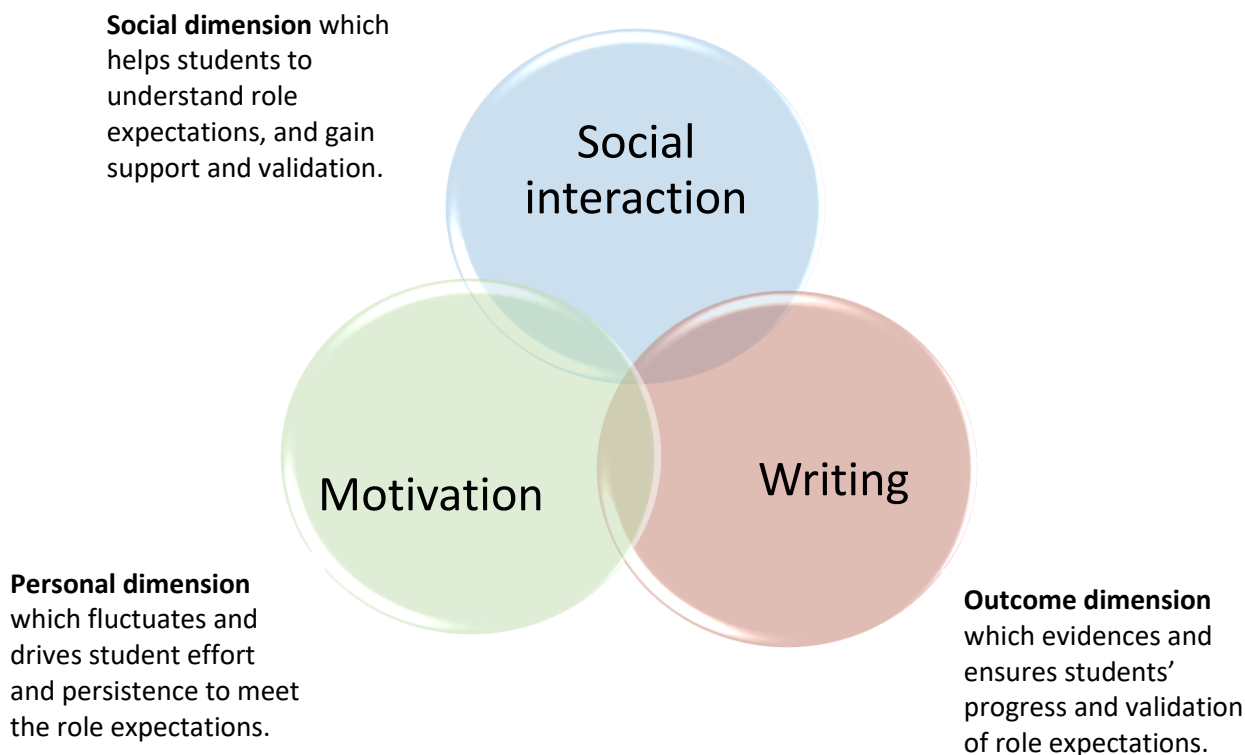
My findings align with Inouy and McAlpine's (2017) assertion that supervisor feedback supports students' critical and analytical thinking as part of making appropriate decisions on their research. For example, Amir realised that the revisions suggested by his supervisor broadened his thinking and writing perspective. He was honest in saying that this feedback challenged his patience levels, but he felt clarity and improvement in his writing due to the suggested revisions (see 4.3.2.2). Waqas stated he had ideas in his mind but was not able to express them in his writing until he had discussed them and gained feedback from his supervisor (see 4.5.2.2). He also perceived that while apparently doctoral research writing appears as though it is done by one person (the student), it is actually done by two people, - a student and the supervisor through regular meetings and discussions. This finding supports Kamler's (2014) argument that student-supervisor interactions/meetings are not merely a conversation, but a way through which students complete their writing and doctorate.

Other sources of feedback can also be valuable for improving writing. In my research, students reported they received important feedback from the panel and other experts that helped them to refine their research proposal and dissertation writing. Panel experts critically assessed student argument writing in the research proposal stage. They provided constructive feedback and/or approval which validated student role identity as emerging researchers. Feedback that they had not met the required expectations or standards of proposal writing challenged students' idealised view of themselves as researchers. When panel members provided detailed critical feedback, students were able to revise their proposals and gain approval in the second attempt (see 4.4.2.3, 4.5.2.4). These findings are in line with Heron et al. (2023) and Mantai (2017) who found that proposal confirmation provides students with an opportunity and platform to assert their knowledge and success in this process and provides validation of them as emerging researchers.

To conclude, my analysis of the views of the doctoral students in my study indicated that social interaction, motivation, and writing were key contributors to their development and

progress towards meeting their expectations and achieving key institutional milestones. In role identity terms, their experiences of social interaction and writing were central to understanding and meeting both the institutional and their own expectations and imaginative view of themselves at the different institutional stages. Social interactions are important to student understanding of the expectations of the different roles involved in progressing through a doctoral study. They are central to the development of student support networks and role validation for the various identities that are prominent at the different stages in doctoral study. Motivation supported student persistence to meet institutional expectations and develop the associated role identities. Despite fluctuation in students' motivation, it helped them to persist in learning and achieve the key institutional milestones.

These three aspects of role identity, and the variation within each aspect, reveal how doctoral students constantly negotiate their transition into different role identities during their doctoral journey. This was evident in the different forms of expectations, participation, identification, and validation the doctoral students displayed across the three aspects as they moved through the prescribed institutional milestones. The variation in the students' roles and the meaning they attached to their experiences are indicative of the shifting between identities that occurs during the doctoral journey. The next section discusses how variations in the expectations and experiences of doctoral students led them to shift their prominent role identities while traversing institutional milestone stages.

**Figure 4***Aspects of role identity development of students*

#### **6.4 Shifts, multiplicity, and prominence of students' role identities**

Role identity theory recognises that individuals take on various positions, functions and responsibilities that are associated with different role identities within a social group. These role identities mutually influence each other and become organised into a more or less systematically interrelated whole (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stets & Burke, 2000). The relative prominence of a particular identity is the result of many factors such as the degree of social support for a role, the degree of personal investment and commitment in a role, and the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards associated with that particular role (Brenner et al., 2014; McCall & Simmons, 1978). My findings demonstrate that students' imaginative view of their role identities varies, and this variation largely links with the doctoral stages or milestones. Students' development towards an academic identity does not happen in what Gardner calls a "drastic transition" (Gardner, 2008), rather it encompasses several experiences and role identities which gradually shift in prominence over time as students' progress and achieve institutional milestones in their doctoral journey.

My research indicates that students develop their academic identity through three stages based on institutional milestones. I use and conceptualise the doctoral stages presented by Pifer and Baker (2016) to align students' prominent role identities with their doctoral milestones. Students developed their prominent role identity as learners during coursework (Stage 1). Their learner role shifts in prominence and the emerging researcher role becomes more prominent in Stage 2 when they are preparing their research proposal. The role identities of learner and emerging researcher decrease in prominence and their focus and commitment shifts to the identity of an emerging academic in Stage 3. In this third stage students are writing their dissertation and engaging in a range of other activities such as teaching, reviewing, and writing research papers, editing research journals. This shift in the three prominent role identities is consistent with students growing knowledge, confidence, and independence to perform the range of activities involved in being an academic. In the following section I will explain this process in more detail.

#### **6.4.1 The knowledge acquisition stage: foregrounding the role of learner**

Knowledge consumption is the first of Pifer and Baker's (2016) stages which involves the coursework experience of doctoral students. I have renamed this stage as the knowledge acquisition stage. Carr-Chellman and Rogers-Shaw (2017) and Noonan (2015) suggest that coursework helps students to participate in meaningful learning experiences which are viewed as an important aspect of their identity development and socialisation during the first years of their doctoral education. In my research, students gained foundational research knowledge and skills while engaging in a range of learning activities during the coursework that was prescribed by the university. This supported their initial socialisation and shaped their role identity as learners in the context of doing a doctorate.

Researchers have described the initial period of doctoral education as anticipatory in nature because students come to understand the requirements of a PhD and adjust to a new and advanced learning environment (Lovitt, 2001; Weidman et al., 2001; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spauldin, 2014). Four students in my study found it comparatively easy to adjust at the advanced level because they had some idea of the learning environment due to their prior experience in the same institution. For two of them (Amir and Kiran), formal institutional orientation also enhanced their self-esteem and understanding of the cognitive, attitudinal,

and behavioural expectations of their role in learning at an advanced level (see 4.3.1.1, 4.6.1.1). Although Kiran had previous experience and an orientation session in the institution, she could not adjust easily due to the unsatisfactory learning environment in the weekend programme. In the cases of Munaza and Amina, they had mixed feelings of confidence and nervousness about their place in the new institution and tried to understand how to adjust in a new academic and learning environment (see 4.2.1.1, 4.7). This finding concurs with Gardner's (2008) point of view that institutional learning environments influence the learning experiences of doctoral students. My research adds that being familiar with the institutional learning environment appears to play a part in students' integration, which could be delayed if they are new to the context.

Formal courses support students' socialisation through which they can learn and improve desired knowledge and research skills (Gardner, 2009; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spauldin, 2014). My research findings support the studies of Baker and Lattuca (2010) and Pifer and Baker (2016) that students gain knowledge and skills through formal courses which provide them with a foundation to participate in the academic community and students cultivate identities as doctoral level learners at this stage. Students in my research expressed more interest in research courses compared to the disciplinary courses, because they recognised them as an opportunity to develop and refine the research skills that would be important for the next stages in their study and in their academic career. The students were committed to learning and improving research skills through active participation in the classroom learning activities (see 4.2.1.2, 4.3.1.3, 4.4.1.1, 4.5.1.2). Interestingly, students in my research explicitly discussed their development of interpersonal skills (collaboration and communication) and understanding of digital resources in addition to other research skills. It means students expect to develop wider academic skills through their course assignments which support their role identity as learners.

Doctoral students need to learn and develop the skills and understanding needed for academic writing because it's important for their identity transition and progress in their PhD (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Students in my research believed that they needed to improve their writing in this stage because research and writing skills are interdependent and essential to progress in the PhD. My findings support Kamler's view that students emphasise learning and developing the principles of writing (e.g. argument development, formatting and

citations) through assignments. Students engaged in writing practice of research proposals and research papers through classroom level projects (see 5.4.1).

Although students had limited interactions in this knowledge acquisition stage, its members had a strong influence on their learning and development. The nature of the supportive network which has been outlined in the literature as influencing their learning and competence was important for participants' persistence in this developmental stage. Support includes formal interactions with and assistance from the course teachers and classmates at the classroom-institutional level. These interactions influenced students' daily learning experiences and supported them in meeting coursework learning outcomes focused on enhancing students' knowledge and understanding of research methods, writing ability, and confidence. Students also had informal interaction with family members outside the institution who provided emotional support to sustain learning at this stage.

#### **6.4.2 The knowledge application stage: foregrounding the role of emerging researcher**

According to Pifer and Biker (2016), the second stage of the doctoral journey is that of "knowledge production". I consider this second stage as involving "knowledge application", because in my study this stage comprises the expectations and requirement of knowledge application to identify and pose a researchable question as well as choose appropriate research methods and develop and defend a research proposal independently. In this stage, students enter a semi-structured and less formal environment, which often poses challenges (Baker & Pifer, 2011; 2016) as students make a crucial transition towards independence (Baker et al., 2013). Although students continue their role identity as learners, this stage acts as a catalyst in stimulating the development of their prominent role identity as emerging researchers. This stage provides them freedom to begin thinking about conducting research of interest to them, to make connections, and to think about positioning themselves within the community of their research area. In this stage, students shift their expectations from a short-term focus to thinking longer term that is from completing assignments to designing and conducting a research project.

This stage was critical for both attitudinal and behavioural shifts in students' expectations while seeking advanced intellectual and practical understanding of research design. Their enthusiasm to research a significant area, take ownership of their research ideas, take

responsibility for research work, be disciplined and organised in their writing, and resilience when receiving feedback from others were among the attitudinal aspects that were part of this stage (see 4.4.2.3, 4.6.2.4). These aspects are closely related to what Vitae (2010) has called the attitudinal development of doctoral researchers which includes research creativity, self-confidence, responsibility, and independence. My findings indicate that behavioural aspects of students included their persistence in reading research-related literature, continuous writing effort following feedback, careful time management for research and meetings, regular discussions with supervisors, and seeking out research-related resources (see 4.5.2.2, 4.7.2.2). Vitae (2010) argues that the behavioural development of researchers refers to recognising research problems, developing theoretical concepts, planning, and conducting research, and communication in both written and oral form. The findings suggest both attitudinal and behavioural factors are important in developing and performing as an emerging researcher in an academic community.

My findings support the views of Olalere et al. (2014) and Luse et al. (2012) that selection of a topic for doctoral dissertation is of immense importance and students consider their areas of interest, previous experiences, and existing beliefs about practical and professional experiences. Students in my research saw the selection of a research topic as very important. For example, Amir believed that the research topic would become his identity and part of his personality in the academic community (see 4.3.2.1). Students were expecting to have a sense of ownership over their research topics. Munaza, for example, planned to expand her MPhil research area in her PhD and to conduct experimental research again (see 4.2.2.1). Waqas and Amina identified research problems through linking their areas of interest with critical observations of situations at their workplaces (see 4.5.2.1, 4.7.2.1). Kiran critically observed the experience of her son's education which made her choose a research topic on education policy. My research adds to the literature on doctoral topic selection. This study found that students' knowledge of their areas of specialisation, previous academic, research and professional experiences, and reading literature have a strong influence on their thinking, contextualising ideas and making decisions around their research areas and topics. All of these aspects contributed to shaping their role identity as emerging researchers.

My research indicates that presenting and defending research proposals is a significant experience for doctoral students when they have to demonstrate knowledge, skills and expertise in their research area and design, and be able to defend their proposal independently. The findings are in line with Heron et al. (2023) and Mantai's (2017) views that proposal presentation and confirmation provide students with an opportunity and the platform to assert their knowledge and thus establish their credibility as researchers. The defense of a research proposal helps students to develop their identity as researchers in their academic community. Four students successfully presented and defended their research proposal through providing strong understanding and arguments, rationale for research design and supporting it with literature in their research areas (see 4.2.2.4, 4.3.2.3, 4.6.2.4, 4.7.2.4), while two students had to revise their research design, add more literature, and link it more emphatically with the Education discipline (See 4.4.2.3, 4.5.2.4). Waqas was annoyed that teachers' politics had impacted on his confirmation process, but he had to accept the decision of the panel and revise his research proposal. My research suggests that proposal defense is a responsible and independent effort of students to demonstrate an adequate level of knowledge and expertise (in oral and written forms) in an area of research which could support the validation of their role identity as emerging researchers.

Baker and Pifer (2011) consider relationships and interactions (e.g., with supervisor, seniors) are the key resources that help students to make a smooth transition into the research phase. My findings demonstrate that students' supportive networks expanded across the institution at this stage through the inclusion and support of people working in their research area and community. As a key interaction, students learned the expectations of and received support for developing research proposals from research supervisors and the panel examiners. This finding supports the assertion of Heron et al. (2023) that supervisor and panel examiners play pivotal roles in assessing students' performance in research proposals and offer external validation of their role as researchers. Besides, students valued the interaction and support of the teachers in the same area, seniors, and oral panel experts. All these interactions supported them in applying knowledge to develop a research proposal.

### **6.4.3 The knowledge production and enactment stage: foregrounding the role of emerging academic**

The last stage Pifer and Baker (2016) presented was that of “knowledge enactment”. For them, this involved students’ experiences of completing a research dissertation and seeking an academic job. I have renamed this stage “knowledge production and enactment” because I wanted to emphasise that, during this stage, students produced new knowledge through their production of a dissertation and writing of research papers. In this stage, they enact their disciplinary and research knowledge through participation in a wider range of academic activities. This stage was less structured and occurred over a longer period compared to the earlier stages. During this stage, students developed considerable confidence and independence in relation to practical research activities such as research instrumentation, data collection and data analysis. They were more likely to engage in intellectual discussions with wider community members, to teach and supervise graduate students, to write and present research papers, and to approach national and international experts to share research interests. Students continued to refine their role identities as learners and emerging researchers, but their focus and commitment lay in an emerging academic role.

Dissertation writing provides an opportunity for doctoral students to engage in independent research, provides them with confidence and mastery in research skills, and completes the process of knowledge contribution in their respective field (Khalid et al., 2023; Pifer & Baker, 2016). My research findings support their view that students develop their confidence and refine their mastery skills during the research activities and writing of a dissertation. Five students reported that their experience of instrument development provided them with confidence, and a good understanding of and clarity in their research area. For instance, Kiran conducted mock interviews to gain more confidence and clarify further the questions and language of the instruments (see 4.6.3.1). In another example, Amir received a critical review from foreign experts on his instruments which made him confident and able to understand international perspectives in his area of research (see 4.3.3.1). Students had positive experience in instrument development but faced challenges in the data collection and data analysis phases. They could not easily access their research participants and gain the expected data due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Students such as Amir and Kiran had to change their data collection strategy to an online mode which was also challenging because their participants

were not responding to them through emails (see 4.3.3.1, 4.6.3.1). This finding supports the studies that show how the pandemic reduced doctoral students' access to their research participants and doctoral students somehow had to manage to collect online data (Khalil & Bronwen, 2021; Pyhältö et al., 2023).

My research shows that limited expertise in data analysis is also a challenge for students. Amina was not an expert in the statistical techniques required for analysing quantitative data (see 4.7.3.1) while Munaza struggled to find resources and support to analyse her experimental data (see 4.2.3.2). Another student found it difficult to merge both quantitative and qualitative data (see 4.5.3.1). This finding supports Kiley and Wisker's (2009) view that doctoral students may feel stuck as they encounter a particular threshold concept such as "analysis and interpretation" which challenges them. Students in my research had to read literature, learn specific tests, and find support from others beyond their supervisor to gain expertise in data analysis and encounter the challenges presented in the mastery of certain threshold concepts. Moreover, the finding of the variation in student experiences of the different elements of research endorses the point made by Jazvac-Martek (2009) that doctoral students' identities frequently oscillate between roles and experiences of dependency and independence and confidence and limited confidence across different research activities. My findings show that students need to and do continue their self-directed learning during this stage and that they have to adapt to the circumstances and context of their research activities.

The literature notes that research seminars provide students with an opportunity to receive constructive advice and varied perspectives of others (Addae & Kwapong, 2023). My research finding extends the recognition that the experience of a research seminar offers students an opportunity to share and disseminate their research findings and receive constructive feedback from the audience to further improve their write up. These experiences in turn contribute to their role identity as emerging academics. For example, Munaza was expecting to gain expert opinion in order to clarify and refine her research, but not many experts attended her seminar. Nonetheless, she considered her seminar a positive moment because she was able to answer the questions posed by students (see 4.2.3.4). Another student,

Waqas, was satisfied with expert opinion and agreed that he needed more work on his writing and qualitative aspects of the research (see 4.5.3.1).

My research shows that students emphasise writing research papers at this stage which enhances students' professional agency, confidence, and satisfaction, as they are able to contribute to their field of research. For instance, Waqas saw writing papers as his academic and ethical obligation (see 4.5.3.4). Students believed that writing research papers was a means to make an academic impression, and develop their academic identity. Kiran thought she could only be recognised through her writing and publication in the scholarly community (see 4.6.3.4). This finding links to that of Emmioglu et al. (2017) and Xua and Grant (2020) that research publications of doctoral students support their academic identity development and recognition in the academic community.

Previous researchers have reported doctoral students' involvement in wider academic activities help develop positive feelings about becoming an academic and part of an academic community (Emmioglu et al., 2017; Jazvac-Martek, 2009; McAlpine et al., 2009). My research findings show that teaching was one of the activities students described as a positive experience, one where they were able to enact and share their knowledge and through which they started to view themselves as teachers within the academic community. All students reported that their teaching experience had been central in enhancing their personal and professional agency, interpersonal skills, communication, and confidence to deal with students, as well as knowledge of classroom management and higher education. The findings support Emmioglu et al. (2017), Halai (2011), and Mantai's (2019) assertion of the importance of teaching as an academic activity that leads to positive feelings of being an academic, and doctoral students coming to consider themselves as a part of the academic community. Likewise, my research findings suggest that university teaching experience supports students to develop their academic identity and increase their employability.

Further, my research findings show that doctoral students experience managing a research journal and participating in research projects as helpful preparation for their academic careers. The findings are in line with the views of Emmioglu et al. (2017) and McAlpine et al. (2009) that students' engagement in reviewing and research projects develops their perception that they are part of the academic community. Four students were a part of teams

managing and editing research journals. Munaza and Maani developed their confidence and understanding of international research culture while corresponding with foreign authors (see 4.2.3.5, 4.4.3.2). Two students reported that the experience of reviewing research articles supported them to understand the areas of research and value of feedback on academic writing. My finding suggests that being a part of editing research journals and reviewing scholarly writing of others helped doctoral students to understand the writing expectations for publications and peer review in the wider academic community and academic career. Moreover, being a part of research projects was valuable experience for two students to understand the requirements of funded research projects, manage large scale research and refine expertise in quantitative data analysis in large research projects (see 4.2.3.5, 4.3.3.3).

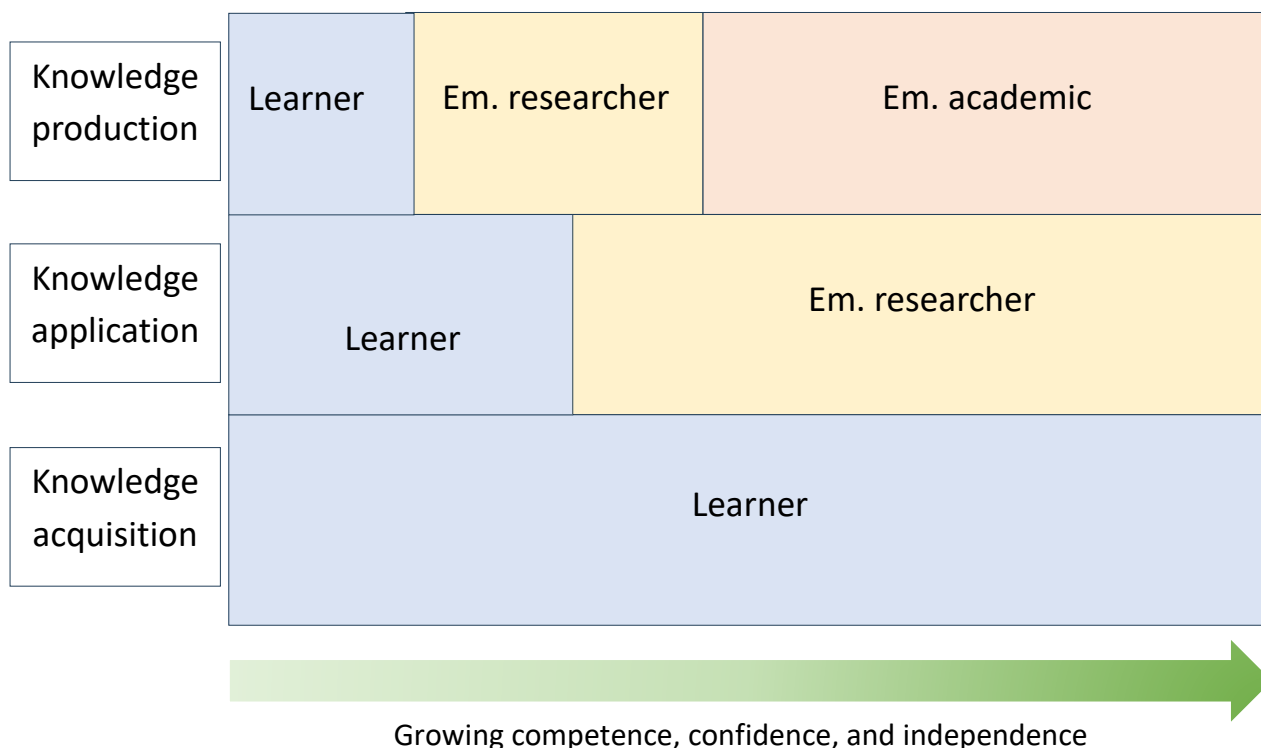
In my research, students seek wider engagement in the academic culture through social and supportive networks, collegial relationships, and collaboration practices at this stage. Students shifted and extended their scholarly and professional interactions to develop a supportive network in the wider academic community at the institution, national and international level. Students continued regular interaction with their supervisors, teachers, and fellows in the same area of research in their institution. Additionally, they reached out to interact with national and international experts in their area of research, and informally interact with family and friends as well. This finding presents a similar view to that of Mantai (2017) that doctoral students involve themselves in a wide range of other academic interactions, including with supervisors, peers, disciplinary colleagues, and broader networks of scholars.

Student participation and interactions in academic activities impacts positively on their perception of feeling supported, socially and professionally connected and hopeful for future academic employment. The research findings indicate that students gain confidence and support if they are well connected with diverse professionals in the academic community. For instance, Weidman et al. (2001) considered “involvement” to be a core element in professional socialisation of students through students interacting with professionals in their academic community. Therefore, this stage provides synergy between learning, research, and

academic activities, which ultimately develop students as emerging academics and they gain informal integration and recognition in the academic community.

**Figure 5**

*Transition and shift in students' role identities*



### 6.5 Doctoral students' socialisation for the academic profession

Doctoral students in Pakistan study under the coursework model (See 1.5), which involves them moving through three institutional milestones: success in coursework and a comprehensive examination, defence of their research proposal, and conducting and writing up their research study. Given this structure, I used Pifer and Baker's (2016) doctoral stage approach to understand how role identities and institutional milestones might come together to explain the process of student socialisation in doctoral education.

In the study I conceptualised the periods during which students work towards the key institutional milestones as stages in their doctoral study. Furthermore, identity is an appropriate and often used framework for exploring doctoral student development. Student identities link with their performance in the academic community, and the requirements and

kinds of identification they receive change over time and from stage to stage. I used role identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) to understand and explain the different identities involved in students' doctoral journeys. From the role identity perspective, my findings indicate that doctoral students develop multiple role identities over time through the process of socialisation. For my participants, the role identities of learner, emerging researcher, and emerging academic were crucial for their preparation for an academic identity. These role identities shifted in prominence consistent with their competence and confidence as they progressed through the required institutional milestone stages of knowledge acquisition, knowledge application, and knowledge production and enactment. This progression involves students discovering and learning what it means to be an academic as they gain experience and independence in the activities that are involved in the academic profession. Students gradually progress from a dependent classroom setting to a more independent stage where they take responsibility for conducting research and performing wider academic activities. Students' learner role is always present, but the prominent role shifts towards being emerging researchers in the second stage and shifts in prominence towards being emerging academics in the third stage.

By elaborating on the different role identities students develop, my research provides a nuanced understanding of Weidman et al. 's (2001) articulation of the socialisation elements involved with the development of doctoral students who aspire to academic careers after their graduation. Weidman and colleagues described these elements as knowledge acquisition, commitment/investment, and involvement. Knowledge acquisition is very similar to my notion of role identity that recognises students are learners for the full period of their doctoral journey. Students' motivation in role identity development in my research associates with the element of "commitment" which is essential for endurance in the learning process and persistence in research activities. The component of "involvement" links to the interactions doctoral students experience, and collaboration with other people to gain support in their role identity development. In my research study, student interactions and collaboration with the members of the academic community expand during the transitional stages of their doctoral journey.

My research finding provides an explanation of Weidman et al. 's (2001) conception of institutional and individual level socialisation. My research offers an understanding that

students in Education experience both types/levels of socialisation during their role identity development in the doctoral journey. At the institutional level, students meet institutional role expectations (e.g., understanding procedures and requirements, acquisition of knowledge, engagement in research activities) by achieving doctoral milestones prescribed by an institution. Students' efforts to achieve their individual role expectations (e.g., collaboration with others, developing their interpersonal skills, engagement in research and wider academic activities) in their doctoral journey supports their individual level socialisation. The institutional level socialisation supports students' academic integration into the requirements of the PhD. Individual level socialisation helps students' development of supportive networks and social integration into the academic community. Both academic and social integration are important and go side by side for the successful socialisation of doctoral students.

My research explains that socialisation of doctoral students occurs at many levels (institutional and personal) through developing multiple role identities in different institutional stages. During the development of role identities, students' interactions provide them with supportive networks, internal motivation offers them persistence, and writing helps them to evaluate and demonstrate progress.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications**

#### **7.1 Overview**

This chapter outlines the contributions of the study. It includes an account of the implications of the research findings for doctoral students, research supervisors, and institutional administrators. Moreover, this chapter acknowledges the research limitations and proposes ideas for future research.

#### **7.2 Research conclusion and contribution**

Given current concerns about successful doctoral socialisation for academic professions in Pakistan and more widely, the aim of this research was to explore how doctoral students' expectations and experiences shape and support their academic identity development. To achieve this aim, I posed the following questions: How do students' expectations and experiences shape their role identity in doctoral education? How do students shifting and multiple role identities during their doctoral education contribute to their academic identity development? I adopted a narrative research design to trace the expectations and experiences of six doctoral students through video conferencing interviews. I used role identity theory to help me understand students' socialisation across their doctoral journey. Based on a thematic analysis, I conceptualised and categorised students' expectations and experiences in the different institutional milestone stages in relation to their role identities in order to provide a nuanced understanding of their socialisation for an academic career.

With respect to the first research question, my findings indicate that students had various expectations for and experiences of learning and research while working towards and achieving the different institutional milestones and these shaped their various role identities. I identified social interaction, motivation, and academic writing as the key aspects involved in students' role identity development from my student participants' point of view.

Social interactions provided students with external role support and validation through reactions to and feedback on students' role performance. Teachers and peers supported students in understanding research concepts and disciplinary knowledge which both

supported and validated students' role identity as learners during the initial course work stage of their study. Supervisors helped students to identify research problems, choose appropriate research methods, and develop research proposals. Panel members evaluated students' research proposals and provided guidance which supported their role identity as emerging researchers. In the next phase, supervisors, teachers, and peers studying in the same specialist area, experts, friends and family members supported students to deal with the challenges of research work. Through these interactions students gained encouragement, engaged in other academic activities, and gained validation in the role of emerging academics. Motivation was the intrinsic factor in students' role identity development which helped them to persist and gain the confidence needed to engage in academic activities. Students' motivation fluctuated in focus and positivity throughout their doctoral journey due to variations in their own and institutional expectations, and hence their experiences in each doctoral stage. For instance, students had high motivation for learning, including a commitment towards research proposals and research activities, and performance of wider academic activities. Their motivation decreased at some points during these activities, but they regained it through persistence and focused on self-directed learning. The writing aspect provided students with evidence for self-assessment and evaluation by others as to their progress towards achieving the different institutional doctoral milestones. Grades and feedback on their written assignments provided evidence of their progress as learners. Writing and defending a research proposal provided them with evidence of their role identity as emerging researchers. The students engaged in writing a research thesis and research papers in the final stage of their doctoral journey and these activities provided evidence of their role identity as emerging academics.

Findings for the second research question, which focused on the shift in student role identities, indicate that doctoral students develop multiple role identities which shift in prominence during the different stages of their doctoral study. They develop and gain validation of their prominent role identity as learners in stage 1, the knowledge acquisition stage. Students continue their learner role identity in stage 2, the knowledge application stage, but the nature of their role and commitment to it changes. Importantly, prominence shifts towards the development of role identity as emerging researchers. Following this, students continue their role identities as learners and emerging researchers in stage 3, the

knowledge production and enactment stage, but prominence shifts towards the development of role identity as emerging academics. Students' multiple and prominent role identities are consistent with their growing knowledge, research skills, confidence, and independence in evolving an academic identity.

Based on these findings, this research contributes to an appreciation of the journey and experiences of doctoral students in a number of ways. The study extends research on the understanding of student socialisation as a complex and multifaceted process in doctoral education through the use of role identity theory. The research identifies social interactions, motivation and writing as key aspects of students' role identities and identity validation in their academic community. It highlights the way students' expectations and experiences shift and shape their prominent role identities in the key institutional milestone stages of doctoral education.

### **7.3 Limitations of the study**

One limitation of the study is that only six doctoral students were able to be interviewed. Interviews with their teachers, supervisors and peers were not conducted as had been planned due to challenges in recruiting participants in Pakistan and my not being able to travel there from New Zealand because of Covid travel restrictions. More student interviews and interviews with those also involved in students' doctoral education may have resulted in a more comprehensive picture of students' socialisation experiences and academic identity development. While it is also not possible to generalise the findings due to the small number of interviews, I consider that by recognising and highlighting the variability in students' experiences I have been able to demonstrate the uniqueness of doctoral student academic identity development.

Due to Covid 19, data was collected through online video interviews. If I had been able to travel to Pakistan, I would have been able to conduct face to face interviews and use other qualitative instruments such as observation or focus group. I had to conduct the interviews late at night due to the different time zones of Pakistan and New Zealand. Participants agreed to give the interviews in the evening in Pakistan after completing their professional and domestic responsibilities. However, the challenge of timing for them at the end of their work

day when I was asking and encouraging them to reflect on their personal and subjective experiences could be seen as a limitation.

My position as an insider within the research as a doctoral student could also be seen as a limitation. My personal beliefs and experiences could be seen to influence my interpretation and representation of students' narratives. On the other hand, insider status could be seen as providing me with insights and greater sensitivity to their experiences. To address this matter, I used reflexive practices throughout the study. These reflective practices included documenting my own experiences and member checking of the research participants.

## **7.4 Implications of the study**

The research provides implications and a guiding framework for doctoral students, course teachers and research supervisors, and university administrators to understand what is involved in doctoral student socialisation and academic identity development.

### **7.4.1 For doctoral students**

The following implications for doctoral students can be distilled from my findings:

1. It is necessary for students to internalise and recognise their role expectations, which are important to achieve institutional milestones.
2. It is important that students recognise that the nature of a doctoral programme is fundamentally different from their other learning experiences. They need to understand that they have to assume more responsibility for independent and self-directed learning and success, and their role identity development.
3. Students need to focus on developing a good understanding of the institutional resources available to them, and to proactively position themselves to maximise their learning and role development.
4. Students are recommended to extend their interactions and develop a supportive network that can help them in learning and understanding the expectations of the different role identities that are part of a doctoral journey.
5. Students are advised to carefully assess their areas of limited understanding and seek support from their teachers, supervisors and peers who have a good understanding of these concepts.

6. Students should be aware that they might experience ongoing fluctuation in their motivation, so they need to be persistent and keep learning in the development of their role identities.
7. Students need to realise the importance and transitional nature of their reading and writing while achieving the different institutional milestones. They should employ a sustained effort to develop their writing skills which is evidence of their progress and role identity development.
8. Students are recommended to reflect on their prior research and job experiences as part of identifying a research area and choosing research methods. Students are likely to have more interest and ownership of a research area or topic of their own choice.
9. Students should consider interaction with their supervisor as an important aspect for their smooth transition in the research phase. Students should choose a supervisor based on their sharing of the same area of research, and someone who has a good understanding of and will be a support in department matters or procedures.
10. My research suggests that students should invite their family and friends to understand the value of their support in learning and research activities during a doctoral degree, and the commitment needed to complete it. Students need to recognise that studying for a PhD can be a stressful experience for which students benefit from emotional support from close friends and family members.
11. Students need to actively participate in wider academic activities such as teaching, editing research journals, and reviewing articles, writing and presenting research papers which enhance their motivation and support their development of knowledge, interpersonal skills, and confidence to perform in the academic community.

#### **7.4.2 For course teachers and research supervisors**

The following implications can be helpful for teachers in the coursework and supervisors during the research proposal and dissertation writing stage.

1. Teachers are advised to offer a collaborative and collegial environment that provides opportunities for students to develop their interest and commitment to successfully complete learning activities.

2. Teachers need to make a significant contribution to students' role identity development through providing them support in conveying and fulfilling expectations of learning.
3. Teachers can provide initial socialisation, and support to doctoral students in understanding the learning environment. Moreover, teachers should encourage students to engage in self-directed and independent learning to gain in-depth understanding of disciplinary and research concepts.
4. Teachers need to provide regular feedback on student performance and assess writing which provides students validation of their role identity as learners.
5. Supervisors should offer guided freedom to students in their choice of research area and support them to identify a topic and methods that interest them. Giving students this leeway in their choices enables them to have ownership of their research.
6. Supervisors are recommended to explicitly convey their expectations related to research quality and timelines to their students.
7. Supervisors should assess areas where a student needs more guidance and support to develop their research skills. They need to recognise the transitional nature of student roles to extend their knowledge, confidence, and independence to perform and continue their learning.
8. Supervisors should ensure that they offer support to their students to extend interactions within the academic community that foster intellectual exchange and an opportunity to talk about their research.
9. Supervisors should encourage and provide students with maximum opportunities for general academic skill development and professional development such as teaching, writing research papers, participating in research conferences, supporting the editing of research journals and research projects which could help their academic identity development.

#### **7.4.3 For institutions**

1. Institutions need to establish and ensure that structured timelines are adhered to especially during the research proposal and writing dissertation stages.

2. Institutions should consider providing more opportunities for students to engage in intellectual exchange and extend their networks to the broader academic community by organising research workshops, symposiums, seminars, and conferences.
3. Institutions can support networking by promoting shared working spaces, social or cultural events, and online platforms. These support student voice, well-being and peer interaction that is a key to identity development.
4. Institutions can better ensure staff are aware of student research experiences and their concerns.
5. Institutions should have a goal of preparing their doctoral students for wider job opportunities and encourage their participation in institutional academic activities.
6. Institutions can arrange professional development training for PhD supervisors, so they enhance their capacity and skills to supervise PhD students.

### **7.5 Recommendations for future research**

My research found that social interactions, motivation and writing skills have a substantial influence on students' socialisation as part of their academic identity development. Further research could investigate each of these aspects separately and from various theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, there would be value in researchers tracing the perspectives of supervisors, course teachers, peers, institutional heads, and family members who are directly or indirectly involved in the successful socialisation and academic identity development of doctoral students.

Research supervisors play an important role in students' research and professional development. Further research is required to gain a more nuanced understanding of the specific professional activities involved in this process beyond the requirements of research tasks. In addition, it would be useful and ideal to explore the socialisation process of doctoral students in other disciplines along with their identity development for their desired professions. Researchers could also focus on student preparation for professions outside the academy, including transferable skills necessary for those professions.

## 7.6 Personal reflection

It has been an interesting and important phase of my life to conduct this research project. I contemplated this area of research after observing the situation of doctoral education in Pakistan. Coming to recognise the variations in doctoral students' expectations and experiences, and the way these shifts over time has broadened my own views on what it is to be an academic and what is involved in moving from a learner to an emerging academic identity.

I continue to reflect on how far I have traveled in my thinking about research and the way I have developed skills and navigated the challenges of the PhD socialisation process. My research writing has been a recursive, and reiterative activity because I needed to go back-and-forth throughout the process. Exploring the academic identity journeys of my doctoral participants has enriched my own evolution in the doctoral process and my capacity to reflect on and enhance my engagement with it.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Interview protocol

#### Interview Protocol for Academic Identity Development of students

##### Introduction

I am Atif Khalil doing PhD (education) at University of Waikato, New Zealand in the area of “development of doctoral students”. This interview has been developed for doctoral students who are studying doctoral education at Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Pakistan. I aim to explore the experiences and roles doctoral students have opportunities to take on in order to understand their academic identity development. I would like to use video recording and note taking during the online Zoom interview. I would like to invite you to be part of my study.

I assure you that your identity and responses will be kept confidential. The collected data will be used for my doctoral thesis and may be used in the publication of academic papers for journals and conferences. I will be careful about what information I include on you in anything I write to ensure that your anonymity is maintained.

Your involvement and cooperation in being involved in my study will be highly appreciated.

##### Personal / Preliminary Information

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Area of specialization: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Interview Procedure

I will contact each selected participant via telephone or email to ask his or her willingness to take part in a video-conferencing interview. Moreover, I will send a number of emails to each of the selected participants prior to the video interview in order to develop some understanding of and trust between the interviewee and myself. The participant and I will decide together the date and time of the video interview, so it is at a time convenient for both of us.

## **First Interview**

### **Phase 1: Initiation**

Firstly, I will gain the oral consent of the participant and define the procedure of the interviews. After that, I will introduce the objective of my research to the participants.

### **Phase 2: Main Narration**

1. Please tell me about your experiences throughout your doctoral studies. You can start from the first day you planned to secure admission in PhD.

### **Probing questions**

#### *Coursework*

- Why did you decide to do a doctoral degree? What were your aims and thoughts while taking admission in PhD?
- How did you experience different courses you studied? How did these courses change your thinking and attitude?
- How did you observe the classroom environment? Did anything change your thoughts about how to best/more efficiently go about learning ideas as part of doctoral study?
- How did you find the relationship between you and peers for learning?
- What were the different activities and assignments, which you considered helpful you learn and that have been useful to you over time?
- What was your thinking while moving from first semester to second semester? What difference in learning context did you find there?
- How did you experience examinations during coursework, and you considered helpful in learning?
- How did you get to learn about academic values and practices?
- Did you attend any workshops or seminars during coursework? How was that experience useful in learning?
- What change did you feel in yourself while going through two semesters of coursework?
- How did the comprehensive examination help in your advanced thinking?

#### *Research Proposal*

- On what criteria/idea did you select your supervisor? How did you feel supervisor could bring change in your attitude for research work?
- What was your feelings about applying research skills in developing a research proposal and what changes did you feel while doing this?
- What was important in selecting a research problem and how did you think that topic would contribute to new knowledge?

- How excited/nervous were you during presenting research proposal? What new things did you learn after this experience?
- What difference did you find between the coursework phase and research proposal phase? Did you find any change in yourself?

#### *Dissertation writing*

- How developing/adopting research instrument was a learning experience for you?
- What were the learning aspects during the data collection process? What ethical concerns did you learn and manage?
- How confident you are in analysis of data and how this skill can be helpful in doing more research work ahead?
- Did you write any research papers if yes then what struggles did the experiences?
- How often do you attend research conferences and what did you learn from these conferences and workshops?
- How do you count the experience of visiting teaching in building your confidence and enhancing knowledge? Did this experience bring any change in your attitude?
- Have you been a part of any research committee or forum? If yes what was helpful in learning aspect?
- Have you been part of any research project? If yes, what was your contribution and learning?
- Did your supervisor get you involved in any academic activities? If yes what were those activities and you got them helpful in getting more confidence and learning?
- How often do you think about securing a job and feel like a professional?
- Have you ever applied for any job along with doctoral education? If yes, then what was the nature of the job? How much you were confident in securing that job?

## Second Interview

After one week of the first interview, I will conduct a second interview of each participant. Firstly, I would provide the participants with a summary of their previous interview for review and then I would ask them some specific questions.

### Phase 3: Questioning phase

1. What do you think about the following situational factors that affect your expectations and experiences during doctoral education?

Prompts:

➤ **Family Background**

- How did you get support from your family for doing your PhD?

➤ **Department structure**

- What did you observe and think when you came to the department for the first time?
- How has the department been supporting you in your doctoral education?
- How do you feel confident and satisfied to take admission in this institution?
- How is this department going to prepare you for your professional aspirations?

➤ **Interaction with faculty member and peers**

- How often do you meet with your peers and other faculty members? What do you learn in interacting with them?
- Do you discuss your progress and issues with the people within and outside of the department?
- How do you think that interaction with other people may improve your understanding of knowledge and professional preparation?

➤ **Supervision**

- How important is to have a good understanding and positive relationship with your supervisor?
- How do you actively meet the expectations of your supervisors?
- Does your supervisor keep you involved in some academic activities other than thesis work?
- Does your supervisor guide and support you for your professional career?

➤ **Motivation**

- How do you get motivation to complete a doctoral degree?
- How do you retain your motivation level in a long journey of doctoral education up to many years?
- What kind of rewards and benefits do you think are associated with your doctoral education?
- How does this degree would lead you towards achieving your professional aspirations?

➤ **Academic writing**

- How academic writing is different from usual writing?
  - Why is academic writing important in thesis writing and how do you improve it?
  - How does academic writing support a professional career in academics?
2. In your view, what are the different roles you have had during your time as a PhD? How do you differentiate the roles of a student, a researcher, and a teacher? How do you maintain balance in these roles? Have you experienced there being any intersections between them? If you have experienced this, has this been helpful/unhelpful? Why/ why not?
3. Do you want to pursue an academic career? if Yes
- 3.1 What kind of roles and activities do you think faculty members engage in as part of being an academic?
- 3.3 How comfortable / confident are you in being able to perform these roles? What experiences have you had that you consider have best prepared you for these different roles?
- 3.2 Do you feel like you belong to the academic community at the moment? Why /why not?
4. What challenges and opportunities do you have in developing your academic identity development?

Prompts: Lack of disciplinary and research knowledge, narrow scope of training, lack of professional development opportunities, emotional pressure, and depression, securing an academic job, opportunities in academic field etc.

**Phase 4: Small talk**

Is there anything that we have not talked about, and you think is interesting and relevant to my study?

Concluding remarks and some informal talks with respondents. Paying regards for participating in the research process.

## Appendix B – Research Ethics

*Te Kura Toi Tangata*  
**Division of Education**  
 The University of Waikato  
 Private Bag 3105  
 Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

DivEd Ethics Committee  
 fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz  
 07 8384500 ext. 7870  
 www.waikato.ac.nz/education



18/11/2019

Dear Muhammad Atif Khalil

### **Division of Education Ethics Application Approved FEDU083/19**

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled “Exploring Academic Identity Development: Transition from Doctoral Student to an Academic Scholar” was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee on November 18th, 2019.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

Co-chair

Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee

## Appendix C – Consent letter for the participants

### Invitation letter to recruit participants

Dear doctoral student,

I, Atif Khalil am doing PhD in Education in the area of academic identity development of doctoral students. The study aims to identify the nature of experiences that are supportive and unsupportive of doctoral students as part of their quest to develop an academic identity in the discipline of Education. In my study, I am defining academic identity as how doctoral students position themselves and possess the skills and attributes essential to become an independent academic in the field of Education.

For my study, I am planning to interview six doctoral students who are writing their dissertation and get a chance to serve as visiting faculty at the Institute of Education and Research. Moreover, I intend to have interviews of two students who have completed their doctoral education and serving as academics in any university in Pakistan. I want to capture students' narratives of the experiences and roles they have had during their doctoral education. I want to understand students' point of view about the nature of academic identity development over the course of their journey of doctoral education. This letter is to invite you to be a participant in my study.

Each participant will be interviewed online at two different times. In the first interview, I would like you to tell me the whole story about your experiences from the very first day of you being in the doctoral education. This interview would last up to 60 minutes. Whereas, in subsequent interview, I aim to ask you some particular questions related to multiple roles and contextual factors that might influence your experiences in doctoral education. This interview would last up to around 60 to 90 minutes.

Ethical principles will be followed during my research activities. I will try my best to keep your identity and information confidential, but anonymity is not guaranteed. You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage up until you have approved the copy of your interview summaries. I will email you the summaries of your interviews and you will have one week to review the summaries. You can add and or delete any idea at this time.

I will share the interview summaries with my supervisors in order to take help me in analysis of the data. By using your data, I will try to develop an understanding of doctoral students' academic identity development. The collected data will be used for my doctoral dissertation and may be used in the publication of academic papers for journals and conferences. Raw data will be safely stored for up to 5 years then I will remove all data both in hard and soft form.

If you have any queries about the study, please approach me - Atif Khalil (Phone: 0064212139241; Email: [atifkhalil18@gmail.com](mailto:atifkhalil18@gmail.com)) in the first instance. If you still have questions, please approach my chief supervisor - Professor Bronwen Cowie ([bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz)).

**Informed consent**

I have read the information provided and agree to become a participant in this research. I understand that this will involve me by sharing my experiences of being a doctoral student and my views on the idea of academic identity in the field of education. The collected data will be used for doctoral dissertation and may be used in the publication of academic papers for journals and conferences. I have the right to not answer any of the questions and can withdraw from the study anytime until I review the summary of my interview. Moreover, I understand that my online interview will be recorded, and every effort will be made to protect my identity, but anonymity is not guaranteed.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

## Appendix D – Consent letter for the research site

Dean, Faculty of Education,  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

I am writing to you as Dean of the Faculty of Education to inform you and seek your support for a doctoral research project at the [REDACTED]

The purpose of my research is to explore the academic identity development of doctoral students. I aim to understand the experiences of doctoral students in different stages of their doctoral education when they engage in different academic roles and activities. Findings of this research will be useful for university teachers and supervisors as they prepare their students for academic professions. Moreover, doctoral students will gain insight into the need for the different activities and roles essential for securing job opportunities in higher education institutions.

I am planning to capture stories of a total of eight students about the experiences they have had during their doctoral education. I want to understand the students' point of view about the nature of academic identity development over the course of their journey of doctoral education at different stages.

Ethical principles will be followed during my research activities. There is no risk involved to participants and the institution in undertaking this research. Selected participants will fully volunteer to be a part of this research and they will have a right to withdraw from the study at any stage up until they have approved a copy of their interview summary. Information provided by the participants will not be revealed to anyone and I will ensure that no information is shared through which participants' identity or that of the Institute and University could be traced but anonymity is not fully guaranteed. The collected data will be used for my doctoral dissertation and may be used in the publication of academic papers for journals and conferences.

I request your support of the research to enable me to engage with the participants in the IER. Kindly provide me with the list of doctoral students currently enrolled in your institution. I would be happy to provide you with additional information or to provide clarification.

If you have any queries about the study please approach me - Atif Khalil (Phone: 0064212139241; Email: [atifkhalil18@gmail.com](mailto:atifkhalil18@gmail.com)) in the first instance. If you still have questions, please approach my chief supervisor - Professor Bronwen Cowie ([bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz)).

### Informed consent

I have read the information provided and agree to provide the access and list of the doctoral students. I understand that doctoral students will be involved in this research to share their experiences regarding academic identity development of doctoral students in the field of education. The collected data will be used for a doctoral dissertation and may be used in the publication of academic papers for journals and conferences. Moreover, I understand that identity of the participants and the university will be confidential, but anonymity is not fully guaranteed.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: