



Addressing Supervisory Feedback: An Autoethnographic Account of a Doctoral Candidate in Nepal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jotmc.v9i9.90452>

Abstract

Supervisory feedback serves as a central mechanism for academic growth guiding doctoral students towards producing a dissertation with scholarly standards. However, there is a little focus in Nepali higher education context on how doctoral candidates experience, interpret and transform by engaging with supervisory feedback. This study explores my lived experiences of addressing and engaging with supervisory feedback in the final year of my PhD. It further investigates how this engagement with feedback of supervisor broadened my understanding of the research process and transformed my scholarly identity as a doctoral researcher. The data sources for this autoethnographic study included supervisor's comments and feedback texts supplemented by my memory, and dissertation drafts and revisions. The analysis proceeded chronologically, chapter by chapter. It traced my major responses thematically, generating interpretive categories that illuminated my transformation and scholarly becoming. Through this journey of engaging with supervisory feedback—from restructuring the research problem to refining the findings—I experienced a persistent cycle of rereading, revisiting, reflecting, rewriting, and realizing. Each round of comments required me to revise more precisely, think more deeply and write more responsibly. The feedback process itself became as Adams (2018) stated as 'a flowing conversation' through which doctoral identity is shaped. The process not only refined my dissertation but also transformed me into a more reflective scholar and emerging academic writer.

Keywords: Academic writing, doctoral supervision, autoethnography, doctoral identity

Introduction

Supervisory feedback plays a crucial role in enhancing scholarly engagement of doctoral students, their learning trajectories, and guiding them toward successful completion of the degree. Feedback operates as a dialogic space where ideas are tested, reshaped, and refined through ongoing academic discourse between supervisor and student (Adams, 2018). It sustains motivation,

builds confidence, and supports the development of a researcher's identity as they navigate complex theoretical, methodological, and ethical grounds. Recent studies also emphasize the transformative potential of supervision when feedback is experienced as a collaborative and reflective process (Caldwell et al., 2025).

However, limited research has examined the lived experiences of doctoral candidates as they rigorously address supervisory comments over time in Nepali context. Most existing studies have focused either on the quality and nature of feedback (Neupane Bastola, 2020; Chugh et al., 2022) or on the perceptions and engagement patterns of supervisors and students (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2024; Goundar et al., 2025). How doctoral researchers experience and transform by engaging with supervisory comments and feedback across an extended period remains underexplored. Furthermore, there remains a lack of analytic autoethnographic study capturing each and every steps of addressing supervisor's comments, navigating research process, and construction of scholarly identity during feedback engagement particularly in Nepali contexts, where this dimension of doctoral learning has not been well explored.

This study, therefore, addresses these gaps by presenting an analytic autoethnographic inquiry into my own experience of working with supervisory feedback during the final year of my doctoral research. Over the past year, I have intensively engaged with my supervisor's comments on my full dissertation draft. This study analyzes my lived experiences of addressing those comments, the academic practices and research activities involved during this period, and the transformations that emerged through this iterative process. Specifically, it explores how engaging with supervisory feedback broadened my understanding of the research process and reshaped my scholarly and academic writer identity. Through this reflective and analytic account, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on doctoral learning, feedback engagement, and transformative becoming (Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Bearman et al., 2024), by offering insights into how doctoral supervision can cultivate deeper reflexivity and researcher development within a doctoral program. Therefore, I specifically, address the following single question:

1. In what ways did my lived experiences of addressing supervisory feedback broaden my understanding of the research process and contribute to identity construction as a doctoral researcher and an emerging academic writer?

Supervisory Feedback and Doctoral Students' Experiences

The doctoral journey is an intellectually rigorous process. Students continuously navigate emotional turmoil, intellectual self-doubt, and the need for self-regulation as they engage with supervisory feedback. Chen (2023) highlights how doctoral study indicates both anxiety and enjoyment-fluctuating of emotions, co-occurring, and reciprocal. Similarly, Caldwell et al. (2025) show that doctoral students' emotional balancing act who manage multiple roles, emphasizing that wellbeing and identity construction are integral to their development. Supervisory feedback is not merely a technical exercise to complete but a dialogic process that shapes doctoral learning. Adams (2018) describes feedback as "a kind of flowing conversation," emphasizing its role in fostering scholarly reflection and resilience. However, as Lee (2018) observes, feedback can also generate self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy when interpreted as a judgment of competence. Thus, responding to supervisory feedback becomes both a cognitive and affective efforts, where doctoral

researchers learn to balance critique and confidence. This complex negotiation of meaning, emotion and action transforms feedback into a central mechanism through which doctoral students cultivate reflexivity, academic maturity, and scholarly agency.

Engaging with supervisory feedback is a relational and identity-forming practice that shapes doctoral students' sense of scholarly self. Ivanič's (1998) framework of writer identity describes the discoursal construction of authorship, allowing students to negotiate their academic voice in textual form amidst of institutional expectations. Empirical studies show that this negotiation involves both compliance and self-assertion, as doctoral writers rework feedback to align with their scholarly stance (Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Adams, 2018). Through such iterative dialogue, students are "rewritten" across timescales (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010), learning to inhabit the epistemic and rhetorical norms of their disciplines while developing autonomy and authority as emerging scholars. From a sociocultural perspective, Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice indicates engaging with feedback as a participatory process of scholarly becoming as "learning changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, and to make meaning" (p. 226). It specifies that supervisory feedback and interactions serve as sites of apprenticeship where students move from peripheral toward full participation in academic discourse. Feedback fosters "reflexive growth" (Bearman et al., 2024), enabling doctoral researchers to think critically, act ethically, and internalize disciplinary norms. However, this transformation involves negotiation, emotional effort and resistance (Adams, 2018; Goundar et al., 2025). Eventually, sustained engagement with supervisory feedback represents a process of becoming—a gradual transformation through which doctoral students construct scholarly independence, academic authority and belonging within their scholarly and disciplinary communities.

Theoretical Underpinnings

My study primarily draws on Wenger's (1998) concept of identity as becoming and Ivanič's (1998) notion of writer identity construction. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) conceptualization of identity as becoming, I interpret my engagement with supervisory feedback as a process of transforming me as a researcher and my scholarly self. Wenger emphasizes that learning is a process that "changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, and to make meaning" (p. 226). Through such participation, doctoral researchers negotiate new ways of being, aligning with his notion that identity is "not an object, but a constant becoming" (p. 151). At the same time, I draw on Ivanič's (1998) perspective that writing is a site of identity construction, where each text reflects a negotiation between my personal voice and institutional expectations. Ivanič resonates that writer identity is not fixed but negotiated in a particular sociocultural settings through writing practices and feedback processes. She states that "writing involves positioning oneself within the possibilities made available by the discourse" (p. 32). She explains that writers "struggle with the voices of authority" in academia, continually negotiating between conformity and self-expression (pp. 35–37). This tension reflects doctoral students' experiences with supervisory feedback-balancing their emerging scholarly voices against supervisory and institutional expectations. Through this lens, I interpret my engagement with supervisory comments not merely as textual revision but as an act of constructing and reconstructing my 'self as author'.

These both theoretical frameworks helped me to understand how feedback shaped my academic growth, theoretical insight, and sense of identity as an emerging researcher.

Research Context

I enrolled in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at the Faculty of Education in one of the national universities of Nepal in 2021. The doctoral program duration was four to five years. I set my research agenda to explore master's level students' academic writing experiences and their writer identity construction during their master's study. In 2025, when I submitted the very first draft that included all required chapters of the dissertation, I received comprehensive comments and feedback on almost all chapters. Then, I began addressing those comments one by one. The process was highly inspiring and transformative for me as a doctoral researcher. At the end, when I submitted the revised dissertation draft, I reflected on the entire process of addressing comments and feedback that motivated me to conduct an autoethnographic study of this experience—receiving feedback on the full draft, addressing the comments, the procedures I followed, the research activities I engaged in and responding to them. I intended to reflect on how this experience transformed me academically, theoretically and ethically. I became deeply interested in how I gradually evolved into a new person—a transformative scholar—through this journey of working with supervisory feedback. Therefore, I attempted to capture these phenomena in this study.

Autoethnography as the Method

I employed autoethnography as the research method to understand and reflect on my experiences of addressing supervisory feedback and revising the initial draft of my PhD dissertation. Autoethnography, as a qualitative research method, combines ethnographic and autobiographical elements to interpret personal experiences within broader cultural contexts (Chang, 2008). Ellis (2004) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe it as an autobiographical genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural through multiple layers of consciousness. Despite variations in defining autoethnography on the basis of emphasis, scholars generally agree that autoethnography explores how researchers' lived experiences intersect with the cultural and institutional worlds in which they live and act. As Keles (2022) explains, it situates the "self" (auto) within society (ethno), allowing researchers to write (graphy) their own stories to illuminate meaning and connection. Autoethnography shapes dichotomies such as emotion and reason, self and society, and theory and practice (Gannon, 2006), offering creativity, flexibility, and multiple possibilities for meaning-making (Marx et al., 2017). Chang et al. (2013) differentiate between "interpretive narration," which focuses on emotional and experiential depth, and "narrative interpretation," which emphasizes analytical engagement with theory. In this study, I adopted a first-person stance to articulate my story in my own voice. Following Adams et al. (2015), I view this stance as a challenge to the impersonal norms of academic writing and as a means of embracing the decolonizing potential of autoethnography (Bhattacharya, 2018), which amplifies marginalized voices and disrupts silences (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Fall, 2019; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

Therefore, this study adopted analytic autoethnography to explore my lived experiences as a PhD student, particularly my engagement with supervisory feedback during the final year of my doctoral journey. Autoethnography allows the researcher's embodied experiences to become both the source and site of inquiry (Ellis et al., 2011), offering insider perspectives and revealing the meanings of lived experiences (Maslen, 2022). In the study, autoethnography serves as both a method and a voice to critically examine my lived experiences of engaging with supervisory feedback on my dissertation. This methodological choice enables me to explore moments of uncertainty, academic growth, and transformation that emerged throughout the feedback process. By situating my personal reflections within broader academic and cultural contexts, I examine how responding to supervisory feedback became a site of academic, methodological and ethical development. In doing so, I position my experience not merely as a personal account but as an analytical lens through which the dynamics of supervision, scholarly becoming, and doctoral identity can be more deeply understood.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were drawn from multiple sources that captured my process of responding to supervisory feedback. First, my supervisor's written comments on each dissertation chapter, provided in the track changed word document and summarized in emails, served as the main source of data. Second, my memory-based notes provided complementary data, enabling me to reconstruct significant experiences and emotional responses through critical reflection. Third, successive dissertation drafts and revision files functioned as textual data. Together, these feedback texts, reflective records, and developing drafts formed a comprehensive dataset.

Data analysis was recursive and interpretive, guided by the interrelated processes of interpretation and narration (Chang et al., 2013). Initially, I chronologically organized feedback interactions from Chapter One through Chapter Nine to trace how my responses evolved over time. This was followed by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model adapted within an analytic autoethnographic frame. I employed analytic reflexivity (Anderson, 2006) to link my experiences with broader theoretical perspectives, including Ivanič's (1998) writer identity model and Wenger's (1998) learning as becoming (scholarly becoming), to interpret how engagement with feedback fostered academic growth. Finally, findings were presented as layered narratives that connected personal transformation with the cultural dimensions of doctoral supervision (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This dual process-chronological and thematic interpretation-enabled a deeper understanding of how iterative engagement with feedback cultivated both academic development and scholarly becoming.

Results and Discussion

Receiving comprehensive comments and feedback on almost all chapters of my dissertation, my supervisor instructed me to address the comments chronologically - starting from Chapter One and submitting each revised chapter one by one. Initially, I assumed I could address all the feedback within a week. However, as I began working on them, a series of academic practices and research processes gradually unfolded. It eventually took me several months to revise the entire draft and shape it into the expected scholarly form.

In this section, I present the findings and analysis chronologically, tracing my key responses and revisions chapter by chapter. The discussion sheds light on how engaging with supervisory feedback facilitated my learning of the research process, my transformation, and my scholarly becoming as an academic writer and doctoral researcher. Each theme corresponds to a chapter of my dissertation and is organized according to the focus of my supervisor's feedback.

Restructuring the Research Problem

I understand problematising a research topic is a crucial step in any qualitative study. When I first received my supervisor's feedback on Chapter One, I was advised to condense and restructure the problem statement more effectively. He commented as follows:

Your problem statement section is too long. You can write three to four paragraphs in this section; a) give the context that students have to write in university (academic writing requirement of master's level students); b) show the gap in research in this area; and c) mention how you address this gap from your research.

As I had originally written the problem statement in four lengthy pages, his suggestion made me clear about how to structure it. First, I reviewed the curriculum and writing requirements of master's-level students in Nepali universities to contextualize what they are expected to write during their master's study. These insights guided me to situate my own research problem within academic conventions and supervisory practices. Second, I revisited, reread and reviewed prior studies on academic writing experiences and writer-identity construction to identify existing gaps. I found that this recursive process brought greater clarity and conciseness to problematising the topic. In this connection, Neupane Bastola (2022) points out that mismatched perceptions between supervisors and students often result in weak articulation of research problems. This realization encouraged me to explore my own difficulty in framing a researchable problem.

Third, I clarified how my study intended to address these identified gaps. In this process, I came to understand what Zhang and Hyland (2022) described as the "mediated positioning" of student writers who negotiate both the authority and content of feedback while constructing disciplinary competence (p. 171). Restructuring the problem statement became a reflexive exercise in critical reading and conceptual rethinking. It helped me to recognize what truly constituted the problem of my study and to go through the process of an effective engagement with supervisory feedback enhancing analytical awareness and enabling to articulate my research focus with greater clarity.

Thematic Categorization and Critical Empirical Review

In Chapter two, another important feedback was to reorganize the literature review into clearly defined thematic categories so that readers could easily identify what had been reviewed. My supervisor suggested that "Perhaps you can categorise this section (empirical review) into a few themes such as 'Resources,' 'Feedback Mechanism,' etc. This way, readers will see what you have actually reviewed in this section." Following his guidance, I reread the literature thoroughly and organized it into two broad themes and subthemes, including *writing challenges, feedback practices, academic socialization, and identity construction*. I understood that how thematic categorisation into subthemes helps readability on the part of readers. On the other hand, I realised

that, as Neupane Bastola and Hu (2021) observed, effective thesis supervision involves identifying alignment and dissonance between supervisors' and students' expectations.

Another important comment from my supervisor was focused on my reviewing strategy. I had mainly summarized existing literature rather than critiquing it. My supervisor commented: "Some discussions such as, Vygotsky and Wenger are repeated many times without new elements added. Further, the discussion of literature pointing out contradictions and limitations is inadequate." This feedback prompted me to re-read and condense earlier sections, analyze studies more critically, and examine methodological and theoretical orientations. I realised the process of addressing feedback as a site of researcher's reflexivity, where students move beyond mere summarising toward analytical engagement and self-positioning.

Drawing on Wenger's (1998) concept of participation and reification, I began to see literature reviewing itself as an act of participation in a community of scholarly practice—an entry into dialogue with prior researchers. By refining the review to highlight gaps and contradictions, I practiced what Neupane Bastola and Hu (2024) call developing critical academic literacy through engagement with supervision. Eventually, I learned that reviewing literature is not simply about compiling studies but about positioning myself within ongoing academic conversations. In this sense, my position shifted from passive receiver to active participant in disciplinary discourse—a crucial moment of development as a developing scholar (Zhang & Hyland, 2022).

Transparency and Rigor in Narrative Inquiry

Feedback on my methodology chapter (Chapter 3) emphasized transparency and rigor in describing the research process. My supervisor commented that "Mention how many times you interviewed each participant? What did you change or add in each round of interview? What was the focus of those series? How did you know there was enough data?" These questions guided me to reconsider whether my data were sufficient. To respond, I listened to all the interview recordings again, reread the transcripts, and reexamined the thesis chapters containing participants' narratives. I realized that two participants' accounts were incomplete, particularly regarding their writing challenges. Therefore, I arranged a subsequent round of interviews and sent follow-up emails to clarify the confusing and missing aspects. Finally, I elaborated on my interview process, specifying that each participant was interviewed multiple times. I added a brief explanation of how I determined data sufficiency and saturation.

This iterative process resembled what Neupane Bastola and Hu (2025) term narrative negotiation, where researcher and participant co-construct meaning through reflection and dialogue. Documenting each stage of revision helped me practice analytic transparency and recursive engagement with data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, my methodological revision illustrated the temporal and evolving nature of feedback in supervision. Each iterative process deepened my reflexivity and strengthened my understanding of methodological justification. By the end of this phase, I learned to articulate my research decisions explicitly and realized that engaging with feedback fosters methodological learning in narrative inquiry research design.

Refining Narratives and Creating Transition between Chapters

Refining participants' narratives in Chapter four required me to provide a brief profile of each research participant to contextualize their stories. My supervisor advised: "Provide a brief profile of each participant before you get into their experience. This will set the scene for the chapter and help readers see who the participants are before they read their writing experiences." This comment was eye-opening because it revealed how short participants' profiles enhance readers' understanding. By listening to the audio recordings, reviewing field notes, and rereading personal information of my participants, I developed concise biographical sketches capturing each participant's academic background, writing experience, and the context. Ensuring consistency among participants' stories, I aligned their narratives with five key thematic areas. This process reflected the *reflexive return to the data* (Banerjee, 2022) in autoethnography, as I learned to treat narrative representation as both analytic and relational.

Creating transitions between chapters also proved crucial for maintaining structural coherence of thesis writing. My supervisor commented:

Your brief observations on the overall summary of the participants' stories would give a better transition for the next chapter (Analysis and Discussion). You can indicate what you found in these stories that you would like to describe and discuss in the next chapter.

Revisiting each narrative of my participants, I synthesized participants' shared experiences and added an analytical paragraph that bridged their stories with the next discussion based chapter. This step made me realize how coherence and contextual grounding strengthen writing credibility, as Caldwell et al., (2025) argued that structured reflection enhances doctoral wellbeing and academic clarity.

Framing Data-Driven Subthemes and Strengthening Discussion

Feedback on the discussion chapters (Chapters five and six) focused on creating subthemes grounded in the data themselves. My supervisor advised: "The themes are well generated, but the sub-themes could be created from the data themselves. Participants' words would give authenticity to the topic and present their voices more vividly." To respond this comment, I first revisited the data, highlighted participants' original expressions and constructed subthemes directly from their language used during interview. This process of responding to the supervisory feedback reinforced the ethos of narrative inquiry, emphasizing lived experience and the balance between participant voice and researcher's interpretation. Therefore, I experienced the process of responding feedback as a meaningful engagement fostering collaboration rather than compliance (Chugh et al., 2022).

Avoiding redundancy of data presented in several chapters was another crucial part of my supervisory feedback. I carefully examined overlaps between narratives and discussion chapters and reduced repetitions of the data. The process echoed with Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as the *iterative rhythm of qualitative analysis* (p. 86). Later, my supervisor suggested: "Connect the data discussion with the theories and literature you reviewed. And citation is very limited in analysis and discussion chapters." Revisiting and reconnecting with the literature and integrating theoretical insights more rigorously, enhanced my discoursal identity as an academic writer. It reminded me that writing itself is an act of identity construction through positioning oneself among

discourses (Ivanič, 1998). Addressing this feedback particularly helped me recognize the transformation on my theoretical awareness and evolving scholarly voice in the dissertation.

Theoretical Insights on the Study

Writer identity construction among master's students was one of the central focuses of my research, informed by Ivanič's (1998) writer identity framework. In chapter 7, a textual analysis section of my dissertation, my supervisor commented: "Discuss critically how identity construction progresses during the writing journey of your participants, and comment on how the Ivanič model (1998) interacts with your analysis." As I had discussed each participant's identity-forming trajectory in four layers drawn from Ivanič's model, I realized I had not sufficiently demonstrated how identity evolved through the writing processes. Revisiting my analysis, I developed a separate section showing how Ivanič's model's four dimensions—autobiographical, discursal, authorial, and sociocultural—operated in participants' data, the narratives on writing experiences. Through synthesizing the analysis and reflection, I learned that this particular feedback extended to deepen theoretical and analytical understanding. Burgess and Ivanič (2010) noted that academic writers are "written by" institutional discourses even if they assert their identities. This insight helped me view participants' identity trajectories as an act of negotiation within academic structures.

Refining Findings and Policy Linkages

The final but significant feedback from my supervisor on the last chapter focused on clarifying the findings and linking them to policy implications. He first commented: "Provide thematic headings for the findings. You can generate the themes from your discussion chapter." To refine and make the findings section more succinct, I created two broad subheadings that reflected the main findings of my study based on the previous discussion. I realized that developing clear subthemes help readers easily identify and grasp the key findings of the study.

Second, since I had earlier provided only policy implications without reviewing related institutional policies, the suggestion was both helpful and eye-opening. My supervisor advised: "Have you also reviewed and analysed the policies of the universities on academic writing? You need to connect those policies with participants' experiences." This suggestion made me go through university guidelines and curricula on academic writing. I further integrated them into the discussion of the study showing how institutional guidelines enabled or constrained students' experiences. This stage brought to end to the long process of revision, leading me to build rapport with the university authorities for existing policies and their implementation. I even interacted with the department heads on the formulation of writing guidelines and their implementation. The revision helps me get insights over the formulation of university policies and implementing academic programs. Reviewing policies through this lens helped me connect individual narratives with broader systemic realities—a realization that significantly contributed to my scholarly becoming.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the process of addressing supervisory feedback, I experienced it more than a requirement to complete, rather it was a deeply transformative experience that redefined me as a researcher and writer. Through every round of revision, I learned that feedback is not simply a pedagogical and instructional tool but a dialogic space where identity, power, and learning intersect (Adams, 2018; Bearman et al., 2024) shaping my confidence and academic voice. Initially, I perceived feedback as a regular part of doctoral education to improve the dissertation in expected form. Over time, however, I began to view it as a collaborative and reflective conversation with my supervisor, authors of previous literature, research participants, and even with university authorities. The process of revision challenged me to think critically, refine my arguments, and clarify my theoretical, methodological and analytical positions. This realization enabled me to engage with feedback as a process of “becoming a certain kind of person” (Wenger, 1998; p. 215). On the other hand, supervisory feedback becomes part of the discursal negotiation through which I learned to align my autobiographical and discursal selves as an academic writer. Ivanić (1998) aptly notes, “Every act of writing involves a negotiation between the self that the writer wants to project and the socially available positions within discourse” (p. 47). This implies that doctoral feedback mediates the movement from novice to expert, during which I bring forth my autobiographical self and sociocultural self; representing my lived experience of receiving feedback and revising the dissertation, and reflecting how institutional feedback practices and the doctoral culture in Nepal shape my academic writer identity and scholarly becoming. Furthermore, the act of rewriting became a form of identity work (Burgess & Ivanić, 2010), where my evolving authorial voice reflected a balance between personal authority and disciplinary convention. In this way, my dissertation became a scholarly work reflecting my transformation and recording my effort from dependence toward autonomy as a doctoral researcher.

Through this experience, I have come to conclude that effective supervision is relational and co-constructed rather than hierarchical. My supervisor’s feedback, affirming or challenging, encouraged me to participate in a community of practice where knowledge is collectively negotiated and shared. Feedback thus operates as a bridge between the personal and the institutional, linking my individual struggles and insights to the broader academic culture of doctoral education in Nepal and beyond. Most importantly, this autoethnographic journey reaffirmed my belief that doctoral research is a process of becoming. Autoethnography enabled me to narrate this becoming with honesty and analytical depth (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Chang, 2008). Therefore, through this journey of engaging with supervisory feedback, I experienced a sustained cycle of rereading, revisiting, reflecting, rewriting, and realizing. This journey embodied that identity being both a trajectory and a negotiation of self—is a continual process through which we form, transform, and re-form ourselves in relation to our communities (Wenger, 1998). This process of scholarly becoming has been partial, situated, and open-ended, shaped by my increasing participation within an academic community (pp. 149–151), and it marked my transition from a novice researcher to an emerging academic.

AI Use Disclosure: During the preparation of this manuscript, I used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for improving language and readability under my direct supervision. I take full responsibility for the final content of this article.

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