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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tell us how it is: Unravelling the dynamics of academic voice and silence

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Abstract
Employee voice and silence research shows workers' ability to express dissatisfaction is impeded by a range of factors. This paper focuses on two: the power asymmetry inherent in the employment relationship, and work context. It examines early career academics (ECAs) – mainly doctoral students, associate lecturers, and assistant professors – many of whom are immersed in atypical, employment or employment-like relationships that are frequently experienced as disempowering. A scoping review provides a frame for understanding ECA voice and silence. It finds there is little on ECAs in the employee voice and silence literature. However, broader concepts of voice and silence are discussed in higher education research on doctoral students and other types of ECAs. Complex work arrangements, difficult supervisory relationships, and hierarchical norms stifle ECA voice. Supervision conceptualised as co-created 'critical friendship' facilitates voice. Studies that expand knowledge of ECA voice and silence are recommended, especially as concerns about ECA wellbeing grow.

Keywords: employee voice; employee silence; early career academics; doctoral students; supervision

Introduction

Academics are increasingly voicing dissatisfaction with their working conditions in the public domain (e.g., Sawrikar, 2022; Schneiders, 2023) including in their research (e.g., Christian, Larkins & Doran, 2022) and some have unionised and are striking (UCU, 2023). New professionals are especially vulnerable to silence and silencing (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Donovan, O'Sullivan, Doyle, & Garvey, 2016). In academia, new professionals – described here as early career academics (ECAs) – are sessional, casual, or tenure-track academics within their first 5 years of service and/or higher degree by research (HDR) students undertaking Master or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees (Sanders et al., 2022) in universities under employment-like conditions (Hughes & Tight, 2013). The rise in dissatisfaction (Bajaj, Sugimura, & Rahman, 2023) expressed by ECAs suggests their concerns are not being heard in the workplace or they are unwilling or unable to raise them and are left with no alternative but to take 'actions and protests … to mobilise public opinion' (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30). ECAs also express that they struggle with their mental health (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018). Given new professionals are vulnerable to silence and silencing and employee voice and wellbeing are linked (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2021), this further suggests silence could be a norm in the ECA population.

To discover if this was the case, this research aimed to understand what is known about ECA voice and silence in the literature on this theme. It commenced by examining the literature in the management discipline, where research on voice and silence originated with Hirschman (1970) and Morrison and Milliken (2000) respectively. Here, 'voice' is employee voice and has been defined as 'all of the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say about, and influence, their work and the functioning of their organisation' (Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020, p. 1). Employee silence refers to situations in which employees individually or collectively 'withhold ideas, information about problems, or opinions on work-related issues' of interest to them or their organisation (Morrison, 2023, p. 81).

The research specifically aimed to add to knowledge of the effects of different work contexts on voice and silence. Studies on this topic are rare: few examine the impact of contextual forces other than leader behaviour on voice and silence (Morrison, 2023). This research sought to understand how ECAs' employment conditions impact the ways in which they voice or are silent. Relatedly, it also aimed to understand the nature of the employment relationship that underpins their employment conditions, and thus also contributes to ECA voice and silence.

To investigate these topics, the scoping review method (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) was selected. Scoping reviews are useful for conducting reviews across diverse literature (Peters et al., 2015), capturing what is known about a particular area and identifying key concepts (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) as well as knowledge gaps (Tricco et al., 2016). They also bring a narrative dimension to the review process (Dijkers, 2015), a feature would allow the story of ECA voice and silence (as it is currently understood) to be told.

The scoping review revealed there was very little research on ECAs in the extant voice and silence literature – only two articles were located. This confirmed Morrison's (2023) assessment of the paucity of management research that examines the role of specific work contexts on voice and silence. As a result, and as will be outlined in the methods section, the review search terms were both broadened (to include other disciplines in which ECAs' expression at work, working conditions and employment relationships were discussed); and narrowed (to focus on silence rather than voice to account for the likelihood that, as new professionals, ECAs would be inclined to suppress their views). This search proved fruitful. Although not couched in terms of management definitions of voice and silence, numerous studies in the higher education (HE) discipline yielded insights into how ECAs experience silence, and how suppression of their voices might be overcome.

Literature review

Speaking 'up' and silence at work

It has been noted that 'allowing workers to speak out can bring relevant issues to light and thus contribute to problem-solving, organisational growth and performance improvement' (Mori, Cavaliere, Sassetti, & Caputo, 2022, p. 1) as well as address concerns related to their wellbeing (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2021). Yet employees find it difficult to do so, a phenomenon that has received a great deal of attention in management research on employee silence since Morrison and Milliken (2000). An explanation for this reluctance to voice can be found in Hirschman's (1970) seminal definition of consumer voice, from which the employee voice concept was derived (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). It positions voice as speaking *up* rather than speaking 'out' (Mori et al., 2022). That is, if an individual or group wishes to change an 'objectionable state of affairs', an appeal to a 'higher authority' (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30) – an individual or body with the power to bring about the desired change – is required. In the workplace, although the employment relationship is a cooperative and mutually beneficial 'team form of production' it is 'co-ordinated by a top-down authority structure' (Kaufman, 2020, p. 20). This means power in the employer–employee relationship is asymmetrical, and that the employment relationship is a site of tension in which voice is not guaranteed. This is because those with the power to affect change are the superordinates to whom employees report: the supervisors, line managers, and senior managers who represent one-half of the employee-employer (employment) relationship.

This suggests employees will choose silence if they fear their livelihoods are at stake (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2021).

In the case of new professionals in elite professions such as academia and medicine, this fear is heightened via subtle messages imparted during the professionalisation process (Cruess, Cruess, Boudreau, Snell, & Steinert, 2015). These communicate their place in the hierarchy and let them know their reputation, workplace relationships and career prospects could be damaged if they challenge the status quo (Lister & Spaeth, 2024). In environments in which competition for social and other forms of capital is rife (Kalfa, Wilkinson, & Gollan, 2018), new professionals quickly learn what can and cannot be voiced. For example, new accounting professionals were able to voice only on topics that suited or did not threaten the agenda of their superordinates (Donovan et al., 2016).

Motives for silence

Management scholars have identified numerous types of silence (see Prouska & Psychogios, 2018 for an overview), many of which are informed by employees' motives for silence (Brinsfield, 2013). Several silence constructs considered relevant to the aims of this research were identified. *Defensive silence*, motivated by self-interest based on fear (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), is a likely response to the power imbalance experienced by new professionals. For instance, junior doctors frequently fail to speak up about supervising doctors' poor hand hygiene practices due to entrenched hierarchies and intimidatory behaviours that let them know they are to be seen and not heard (Dendle et al., 2013). *Acquiescent silence*, a disengaged behaviour (Van Dyne et al., 2003), is based on the individual's belief that speaking up is futile and that nothing will change even if one does (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Female soldiers, for example, withheld their experiences of workplace sexual harassment and assault from those capable of addressing the problem because of 'organisational norms and practices that block disclosures of abuse' (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 332). Experience had shown them there was little recourse available to low-ranking victims of workplace injustices. Their decision to suffer in silence despite their awareness of alternatives was further described as *quiescent silence* (Pinder & Harlos, 2001), or the unwillingness to explore the potential to voice. Suffering in silence can also be linked to an individual's belief that they lack self-efficacy to voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003), and to occupational ideologies that position suffering in silence as a sign of commitment to calling (Dean & Greene, 2017). *Organisational silence* refers to situations in which employees collectively believe that 'speaking up about problems or issues is futile and/or dangerous', leading to group-level 'climates of silence' in which withholding voice is the norm (Morrison & Milliken, 2000, p. 708).

Conversely, *prosocial silence* – in which work-related opinions or ideas are withheld to protect colleagues or the organisation – is proactive, altruistic, and motivated by cooperation (Van Dyne et al., 2003). In the academic context, this could include maintaining confidentiality about intellectual property generated by a research centre, supervisor or colleague. Another form of socially motivated silence is *relational silence* (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Unlike prosocial silence, however, relational silence is based on the fear of harming workplace relationships and subsequent loss of social capital and thus opportunities for advancement (Milliken et al., 2003). For example, junior doctors maintain relational silence for fear of damaging their relationships with their senior doctor supervisors (Jamshaid & Arshad, 2020), on whom they depend for career progression. Relational silence can also be used to avoid bullying by supervisors by maintaining physical and psychological distance from them to ensure the relationship continues to function without aggravation (Rai & Agarwal, 2018).

Work context as a determinant of voice and silence

Although management studies have identified an array of factors that enhance or inhibit voice, a review of voice and silence research in the last decade (Morrison, 2023) located only two that explicitly examined contextual factors. One investigated the impact of voice content and identification with

profession on voice (Burris, Rockmann, & Kimmons, 2017); the other how occupational ideologies effect voice (Dean & Greene, 2017). Indeed the majority of voice and silence studies focus on proximal factors at the individual, group, or organisational level of analysis (see Bashur & Oc, 2015; Brinsfield, 2013; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011), although some nominate distal factors such as economic forces (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). A multi-level model of the elements and processes that lead to individual and collective voice and silence (Knoll, Wegge, Unterrainer, Silva, & Jønsson, 2016) provides another example of how management scholars think about the factors that lead to voice or silence, and how they consider those related to work context. The authors nominate organisational, team, individual, intra-individual (e.g., mood states) as proximal effects that lead to workplace voice and silence. Elements in the distal category include the political, economic and legal environments, the zeitgeist and national culture. Professional culture, the sole factor related to work context, was listed as a distal element but not described – a pattern noticed elsewhere (e.g., Nechanska, Hughes, & Dundon, 2020; Wilkinson, Townsend, Graham, & Muurlink, 2015). This sidelining of contextual factors means little is known about how they shape voice and silence.

The ECA work context

Other contextual factors that are omitted in considerations of voice and silence are those related to employees' work arrangements. As Oyetunde, Prouska and McKearney (2022) observed, voice and silence research assumes a homogeneity of traditional workers (those in standard employment) but gives little consideration to non-traditional employees (in alternative work arrangements) and their differences. Early career academia provides rich territory in which to explore this theme as ECAs are subject to a range of atypical and hierarchical work arrangements and relationships, noting these vary from country to country (Zacher, Rudolph, Todorovic, & Ammann, 2019). The example of Australia, where this research was conducted, illustrates the idiosyncratic nature of ECA work. ECAs who are tenure-track academics, post-doctorate researchers and research fellows are more or less 'regular' employees on fixed-term, full or part-time contracts with a single supervisor (manager). The work of permanent staff is supplemented by casual academics who constitute a significant proportion of the academic workforce (Norton, Cherastidtham, & Mackey, 2018) and who are often also ECAs. Relative to permanent staff, casual staff are excluded from decision-making processes, are offered few research opportunities, and face uncertainty (Bassett & Marshall, 1998; Meissner et al., 2024).

ECAs who are HDR students are not employees but are subject to employment-*like* arrangements and their activities can be conceived as work (Hughes & Tight, 2013). HDRs who are full-time doctoral students with a scholarship receive a government stipend via the university payroll system, are subject to the terms of their scholarship contract, and work with (rather than report to) supervisors who are not managers but more experienced and senior academics who act as advisors. Other, predominately domestic students are part-time and not in receipt of a stipend. In some countries, HDR supervision typically occurs in student-supervisor dyads; in others, including Australia, HDR students are often co-supervised by teams of two or more academics (Guerin & Green, 2015). Some ECAs occupy dual roles and are both student and staff. This can lead to situations in which ECAs have multiple supervisors, one of whom might be their manager and advisor. Additionally, in Australia, many HDR students are international students on a visa and are potentially subject to different conditions. For example – accepting policies and procedures differ between universities – although domestic and international students on a PhD scholarship are subject to the same timeframes, different scholarship rules for international students can result in them having less time to complete than their domestic counterparts.

The atypical nature of ECAs' work arrangements, the often complex nature of the ECA-supervisor relationship and their vulnerabilities as new professionals suggests they will experience challenges voicing at work. To understand if this is the case, the overarching research question *How do ECAs experience voice and silence at work?* was formulated along with the sub-questions *What are the barriers to and enablers of ECA voice?, What are the outcomes of ECA silence?*, and *How might ECA voice*

be enhanced?. How the research was conducted is described next, followed by a discussion of the findings, consideration of limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Methods

The study utilised the five-stage scoping review process devised by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). Stage 1 involves the formulation of research questions (shown above). Stage 2 involves the identification of relevant studies; Stage 3 addresses study selection; Stage 4 charts the data; and Stage 5 collates, summarises, and reports results. This section describes Stages 2–5.

Search strategy and search term selection

A search strategy was devised with the aid of two librarians expert in scoping literature reviews. An initial search conducted in Google Scholar checked for peer-reviewed publications on employee voice and silence and ECAs in the management discipline. This yielded only two results (Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Kalfa et al., 2018), suggesting there is a paucity of management research on this topic and that the search would need to be transdisciplinary. To expand the search, the terms 'employee voice', 'speak* up', and 'employee silenc*' were tested in discipline-specific databases hosted in Scopus (social sciences, psychology, and business/management/accounting) and ERIC (education), using 'employee voice', 'speak* up', and 'employee silenc*'.

These searches either yielded too few results, or too many of little relevance. Too many irrelevant results reflected the volume of employee voice and silence research overall. That few results emerged was congruent with the dearth of research on ECA voice and silence in the management discipline, and the likelihood that few studies in other disciplines use employee voice and silence theory. Initial search terms were therefore refined by combining them with synonyms to articulate the ECA context ('higher education'; university; academi*; 'early career academic'; doctora*; PhD) and produce more relevant results. The term supervis* was also tested in conjunction with the voice/silence and ECA terms. The search string that yielded the most relevant results (silence AND universit* AND academi* AND 'early career' AND supervis*) was used for the full search.

The salience of the silence term (rather than the employee voice term) can be explained in two ways. First, 'employee voice' is a specific construct and is not used in research that does not draw on employee voice and silence theory. Research that touches on these themes but is unaware of the voice and silence literature often uses the terms 'speaking up' or simply 'voice'. The latter term is generic to the degree that results can have little to do with voice at work and yield imprecise results. Second, congruent with the voice experiences of other kinds of early career professionals (Brown & Coupland, 2005), it is likely that ECAs experience difficulties voicing due to their low status in the academic hierarchy and that silence is the norm. As a result, articles that examine their experiences in terms of silence rather than voice were expected to be more common, and relevant.

Database selection and screening

The serendipitous discovery (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005) of an article on ECAs in a biology preprint server (Christian et al., 2022) demonstrated research on ECAs occurs across disciplines and that researchers interested in this topic will discuss ECA voice and silence in other ways. Thus, rather than survey discipline-specific databases, the search string was ultimately applied in multidisciplinary databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science) with the modifiers 'all databases', 'journal articles and scholarly literature', 'all fields', 'English', 'article', or equivalents. As a result, 713 articles were retrieved and stored in an EndNote X9 (The EndNote Team, 2013) reference management library (500 from Google Scholar; 161 from Scopus; 52 from Web of Science). As items from Google Scholar cannot be imported directly into EndNote, the citation analysis tool Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007) was used to perform the search. This requires limits to search finds and this was set at 500 items, considered sufficient for this review. All articles were imported from EndNote into the Covidence (Veritas

Health Innovation, 2023) collaborative review management software where screening and review took place. The two articles located in the initial scan of the employee voice and silence literature (Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Kalfa et al., 2018) were added, bringing the total to 715 articles. Sixty-two duplicates were automatically removed leaving 653 articles for initial review.

Three of the authors were involved in the review process. First, one author completed title and abstract screening which resulted in 572 exclusions and 71 articles for full text screening. Next, two full-text reviews were conducted. The first assessed the 71 articles for quality in line with the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018), which can be used for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods articles. In qualitative studies (the majority of the identified works), the MMAT screens for items such as clarity of research questions; whether the data answered the research questions; appropriateness of method; adequacy of findings and their interpretation; and overall coherence between these items. Similar criteria are applied to other types of studies. The second full-text review process screened for relevance in line with exclusion criteria (see Figure 1). Excluded studies were those that were not peer reviewed journal articles (e.g., theses, books or book chapters); were about clinical rather than academic or managerial supervision; were similar to already included studies by the same author/s; or were not significantly about voice, silence, work arrangements, or work relationships.

In both instances, search results were reviewed independently by two of the authors, and consensus was reached on inclusion or exclusion. This step was repeated when the research team examined the results of the dual independent review. Quality appraisal and relevance screening were therefore blind as both processes were reviewed by at least two authors before achieving a consensus. The full-text review process resulted in 36 exclusions and a total of 35 studies for further analysis (listed in Table A1). As Covidence operates in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Page, McKenzie, & Bossuyt et al., 2021), it can generate PRISMA reports. The report for this review is shown in Figure 1, noting the MMAT process is not shown in it.

Charting the data and collating, summarising, and reporting results

The 35 papers selected for analysis were read and assessed by the main author. Rather than aggregate data, scoping reviews facilitate the identification, documentation, and iterative synthesis of relevant information to form holistic, rich narratives (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005; Pickering & Byrne, 2014). Data that summarised each article in line with the areas of interest were therefore extracted. Focusing on ECA rather than supervisor participants, the following fields captured the information in Covidence: title, author/s and year, journal, country, research aim/s, research design, number of participants, sample population, underpinning theories, work relationship, approach to voice and silence, themes, silence types (organisational, acquiescent, quiescent, defensive, prosocial, relational), voice barriers, voice enablers, negative outcomes, and strategies for improvement. The choice of fields related to voice and silence was guided by the literature review and research questions. The key outcomes of this process are shown in Table A2.

Of the 35 articles, 32 used qualitative research methods and 3 used mixed methods. One of the qualitative papers used a longitudinal design. Data were primarily collected in interviews. Open-ended survey questions, focus groups, and self-studies were also utilised. Sample sizes ranged from 2 to 595 participants; however, most studies sampled between 3 and 30 ECAs. The majority of the data was collected in Australia, Canada, Europe, NZ, UK, and the USA. One study was conducted in Malaysia and two in South Africa. That the studies emerged mostly from developed nations possibly reflects their long histories as providers of HE research and services to local and international markets.

Doctoral students were the ECA cohort of interest in 24 of the 35 studies. Three studies sampled both PhD and Master-level students. Of all the HDR student studies, many occurred in internationalised university environments and two explicitly sought to understand the views of

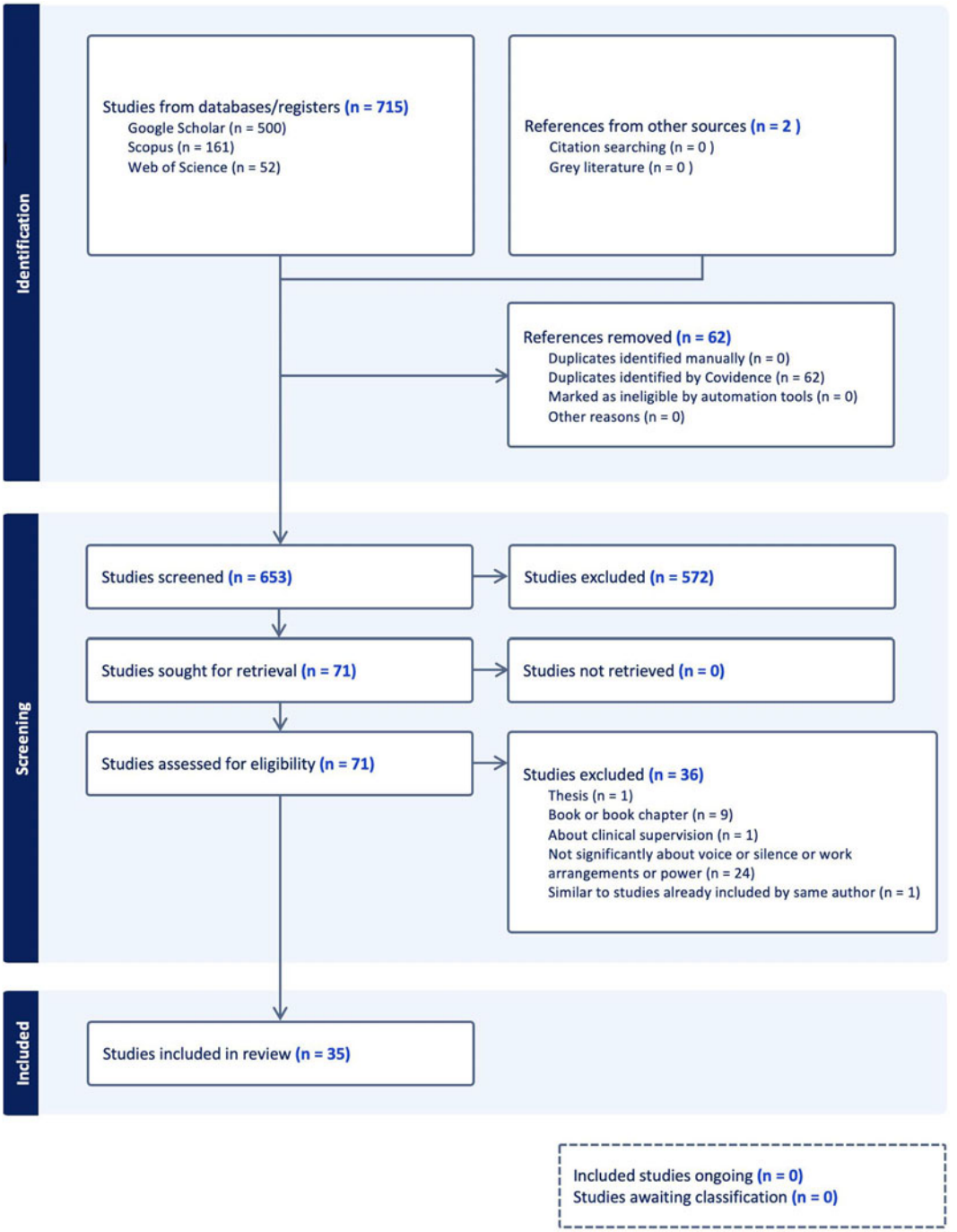

Figure 1. The PRISMA report of the scoping review process performed in Covidence.

international students. One captured data on students who had not completed their degree as well as those who had. Two studies examined the experiences of dual-status ECAs (employed academics undertaking a PhD) and two studies concerned tenured-only ECAs. One study one examined the

case of doctoral students who were also research assistants. All studies included information on the nature of the employment/work (ECA-supervisor) relationship. Many involving HDRs focused on student-supervisor dyads although some focused on dyads and teams of co-supervisors.

Findings

Several findings emerged from the scoping review in line with the research questions and guided by the data in Table A2. First, the data revealed insights about ECAs' experiences of their work arrangements, including their supervisory relationships, highlighting conditions that explicitly or would likely lead to silence. These are described in the first sub-section on barriers to ECA voice. Second, the data described the outcomes of ECAs' silences, most of which were negative. Third, and on a positive note, enablers of ECA voice were also identified. Fourth, the data yielded strategies for improvement.

Barriers to ECA voice

ECAs are immersed in a complex world (Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017) that can make work challenging, interpersonal relationships difficult, and voice unlikely. The scoping review found many ECAs are acutely aware of the power imbalance in the supervisory relationship (Richards & Shiver, 2020; Woolderink, Putnik, Boom, & Klabbers, 2015) and that they lack cultural capital (Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017). This can lead them to feel controlled (Brodin, 2018) and unable to assert themselves (Rambe & Mkono, 2019), a situation discussed in terms of the master-apprentice model of supervision (Schulze, 2012). Conversely, some ECAs reproduce traditional hierarchies to maintain the status quo, or to avoid reprisal (Schmidt & Hansson, 2022) or feeling insecure (Rambe & Mkono, 2019).

Cultural and personal factors influence the degree to which ECAs feel empowered. Female ECAs, along with doctoral students from countries in which individuals in positions of authority are held in high esteem, can face additional constraints (Baydarova, 2022; Schulze, 2015). In a collaborative self-study (Richards & Shiver, 2020), an ECA supervisor and doctoral student describe times when traditional power structures undermined their relationship and led them to engage in superficial interactions and self-censoring – the latter response indicating silence was a feature of the relationship. International students can conform to supervisor expectations of obedience (Baydarova, 2022) and beliefs about authority ensure some develop dependencies on their supervisors (Jones & Blass, 2019). A study of international doctoral students identified 'cultures of silence' (Cotterall, 2013, p. 184) that suppress voice and stifle change.

The often solitary nature of ECAs' work can exacerbate feelings of isolation and disempowerment. HDR students in particular are often 'ghettoised' (Bettinson & Haven-Tang, 2021) – separated from senior academics (Ryan, Baik, & Larcombe, 2022) and unable to find their place in an academic community of practice (Niemczyk, 2019). International students are especially at risk (Bettinson & Haven-Tang, 2021). Competition between academics creates further division and environments in which collaboration and cooperation are rejected (Bettinson & Haven-Tang, 2021; Löfström & Kirsi Pyhältö, 2017; Schulze, 2015). Doctoral students frequently perceive there is no one to turn to for support when things go wrong and guidelines for institutional support are often unclear (Falk, Augustin, Torén, & Magnusson, 2019; Schulze, 2015). Many are not equipped to cope with the challenges of their program and experience poor, inadequate, or inexperienced supervision (Hunter & Devine, 2016).

ECAs in dual roles worry about 'mixing money and marks' (Skorobohacz, 2013, p. 210) and about exploitation and reputational harm, also perceiving they have little agency. This leads them to accept unfair practices and bullying by supervisors (Niemczyk, 2019), which can have a silencing effect (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). Dual-role ECAs with supervisors who manage their paid work *and* advise

their doctoral work experience supervisor role conflict, and struggle with complex power differentials and the potential for loss of face as professional academics (Billot, King, Smith, & Clouder, 2021). Dual-role ECAs who are female can face additional challenges that threaten their self-efficacy, such as a lack of support for professional development and elimination of barriers to participation (Schulze, 2015) – and, presumably, threaten their propensity to voice.

Similarly, tenure-track ECAs found their gender-based harassment concerns were minimised by their supervisors and managers and that '(a) people can challenge the system only if their issue is uncommon and significant; (b) one should trust the system to accord justice; and (c) negative consequences follow those who challenge the system' (Fernando & Prasad, 2019, p. 1573).

Outcomes of silence

Issues related to work contexts and conditions in academia have been associated with a myriad of negative outcomes for ECAs, rendering the voicing of ideas, concerns, or suggestions for improvement unlikely. Consequences of speaking up identified in this review include the experience of not being noticed, facing backlash or encountering negative consequences. Research has shown that such experiences create a hostile environment within academic institutions, which in turn discourages open dialogue and collaboration among individuals (Acker & Haque, 2015; Billiot et al., 2021; Denicolo, 2004; Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Guerin & Green, 2015; Jazcac-Martek, 2009; Jones & Blass, 2019; Löftström & Pyhältö, 2017; Niemczyk, 2019; Schulze, 2012). Hostile environments can be detrimental, as they foster atmospheres of fear and reticence, impeding the free exchange of ideas and knowledge sharing. As a result, academic progress is hindered, and opportunities for mentorship and advancement become limited (Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017; Robertson, 2017). Furthermore, the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases are additional ramifications of these voice and silence issues. When individuals are discouraged from voicing their diverse perspectives and experiences, existing biases in academia are reinforced, hindering participation and representation of marginalised groups (Acker & Haque, 2015).

In addition to the hostile environment and perpetuation of biases, voice and silence issues also have a profound impact on the emotional wellbeing and career prospects of individuals in academia (Makhamreh & Stockley, 2020). The potential for dissatisfaction, anxiety, and stress is a prevalent consequence, as graduate students and ECAs often find themselves silenced or unable to challenge the status quo (Cotterall, 2013; Falk et al., 2019; Gunasekera, Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2021; Hunter & Devine, 2016; Ryan et al., 2022) or in some instances prefer to suffer, as was identified in one study (Makhamreh & Stockley, 2020).

Moreover, failure to complete and the loss of data and years of work are not uncommon outcomes for ECAs who are doctoral students (Brodin, 2018; Schulze, 2015). The inability to voice concerns or the fear of backlash can lead individuals to abandon research projects or academic pursuits altogether, resulting in significant setbacks (Devos et al., 2015). Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding career prospects due to the lack of supervisory endorsement is a pervasive concern. When individuals are not allowed to challenge supervisors, or experience misaligned expectations, they may struggle to gain the necessary support and mentorship to advance their careers, resulting in uncertain career trajectories within academia (Audardottir, 2021; Falk et al., 2019; Jazvac-Martek, 2009).

Enablers of ECA voice

All the articles in the review spoke to the 'problematic and embedded power imbalance within the supervisory relationship' (Riva, Gracia, & Limb, 2022, p. 922; see also Morris, 2011). However many also identified working conditions that ECAs had experienced as (or believed would be) supportive (see Table A2) – conditions that are likely to reduce power differences and thus support voice.

For example, ECAs were keen to experience work relationships characterised by empathic leadership, support, professional respect (Hunter & Devine, 2016), equality (Cotterall, 2013), and caring (Devos et al., 2015). Trust in the supervisory relationship was also nominated as important (Billot et al., 2021; Denis, Colet, & Lison, 2019; Devos et al., 2015; Robertson, 2017).

Clear, constructive and frequent communication (Denis et al., 2019) and the ability to facilitate genuine dialogue (Baydarova, 2023, Richards & Shiver, 2020) were also considered critical, especially where doctoral supervision is delivered in teams of two or more supervisors (Guerin & Green, 2015). Shared environments that lead to opportunities for coffee catch-ups and informal conversation (Riva et al., 2022) were suggested as strategies to increase connection and communication between ECAs and more senior academics. One study investigated the use of technology-mediated communication (Rambe & Mkono, 2019). It found use of the instant messaging service What's App facilitated doctoral student voice in the supervisory relationship. The informal nature of the mechanism flattened the student-supervisor hierarchy and increased doctoral students' and supervisor authenticity, enabling students to express themselves in a way that accommodated rather than exposed their vulnerabilities.

Supervision that allows for divergent thought and the development of personal agency (Richards & Shiver, 2020), academic identity (Jazvac-Martek, 2009), and creativity in scholarship (Brodin, 2018) were considered important, as were relationships that encouraged growth, positivity, and confidence (Makhamreh & Stockley, 2020). Qualities ECAs looked for in supervisors included emotional intelligence (Gunasekera et al., (2021) and the ability to see HDR students as people first (Schulze, 2012). Conversely, some studies highlighted the need for increased agency in doctoral students in particular (Hunter & Devine, 2016) – to take an active role in their supervision (Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2022; Schulze, 2012) and reduce their dependency on their supervisor/s (Falk et al., 2019).

Several studies advocated for structural and institutional support and or change to support ECAs, such as clear guidelines for doctoral students experiencing difficulties (Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2022; Schmidt & Hansson, 2022); increased time for doctoral supervision and guidance on milestones, progress, and direction (Ryan et al., 2022); and structures to support students who believe that their working conditions are unreasonable, that they are not receiving the support they need, or that their supervisory team needs to change (Falk et al., 2019). What is less clear is what voice support might be available for ECAs who are tenure-track academics. HDR students have the option to change supervisors (Falk et al., 2019; Schmidt and Hansson (2022), a process not available to regular ECAs. Conversely, it has been pointed out that union support is not available to HDR students (Falk et al., 2019).

The capacity to envisage the ECA supervisory relationship as a partnership was considered key to doctoral relationship optimisation in two studies (Denis et al., 2019; Richards & Shiver, 2020). In their analysis of their doctoral supervisory relationship, Richards and Shiver (2020) suggest using the self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) method that underpinned their research as a doctoral student supervision pedagogy. S-STEP facilitates shared understanding, the challenging of assumptions and confrontation of difficult realities, and insights into how doctoral students develop their practice and are socialised into their profession (Richards & Shiver, 2020). Although a self-study process, engagement with others as a 'critical friend' – a 'trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers a critique of a person's work as a friend' (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50) – is encouraged. The study found although power will always be present in the supervisory relationship, it can be minimised if named and discussed, and need not be something with which students strategically comply (Richards & Shiver, 2020). As the study's authors note, 'engaging in a critical friendship … provided us with the space and encouragement to critique traditional power structures and develop a more honest relationship …' (Richards & Shiver, 2020, p. 247) – an outcome that demonstrates how ECA-supervisor relationships can be approached to minimise silence and enhance voice.

Strategies for improvement

Improving the work and voice and silence experiences of ECAs requires a multifaceted approach that involves institutions, supervisors, and ECAs themselves. A number of the reviewed studies suggested institutions can adopt strategies that view doctoral students in particular as capable, creative agents in their own right, and permit creativity in their education (Brodin, 2018; Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017; Riva et al., 2022; Robertson, 2017; Schulze, 2015). It was believed these shifts of perspective would empower students to take more active roles in their research and develop their own 'voice' within the academic community. Whilst this reference to voice was not consistent with the employee voice construct, it is possible the development of a robust academic identity would activate ECA voice. Additionally, it was suggested that institutional support could include recognising the role of emotions in shaping the doctoral experience. Acknowledging and addressing the emotional aspects of research and academia can help students navigate challenges related to confidence and resilience (Baydarova, 2023; Devos et al., 2015; Jazbac-Martek, 2009; Roberston, 2017) – and enhance wellbeing and voice (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2021).

Moreover, institutions can aim to promote clear, constructive, and frequent communication, treating doctoral training as a partnership. This approach would reduce the hierarchical differences inherent in the ECA-supervisor relationships, and foster trust between the two parties, allowing for more open dialogue and reducing the likelihood of negative consequences for speaking up (e.g., backlash or isolation) (Robertson, 2017; see also Holland, Cooper, & Sheehan, 2017 on the role of trust in enhancing voice). Establishing structures to support students who feel they are not receiving the assistance they need or who encounter unreasonable working conditions is crucial for their overall wellbeing and progress, and would be especially helpful where communication in the supervisory relationship is absent or suppressed. This includes mechanisms for changing supervisors when necessary (Ryan et al., 2022), venues for sharing and verbalising work (Riva et al., 2022), and providing mental health training for supervisors (Richards & Shiver, 2020) to better support the emotional needs of their students (e.g., leadership and mental health training for supervisors; continuous education in coaching and supervision).

Furthermore, institutions can implement clear procedures for dealing with diverse feedback, involving students in discussions about feedback to create a safe and inclusive environment (Guerin & Green, 2015). Encouraging student and supervisor self-awareness, along with a focus on the fit between students and supervisors, can help address challenges related to misaligned expectations and difficult supervisory relationships. Supervisor training in the development of high-quality relationships and feedback, coupled with faculty workload policies that protect doctoral students' interests, can create more supportive environments (Hunter & Devine, 2016; Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2022). Additionally, increasing supervisor awareness of students' shifting agency and their quest for legitimisation could help address issues related to voice and silence. Institutions can improve ECAs' working conditions and thus the likelihood of voice by conducting periodic reviews of supervision practices, student-supervisor matching and external supervision, as well as implementing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating supervision practices.

To promote a culture of open dialogue and inclusivity, institutions can also aim to create avenues for voice that challenge managerial prerogatives within academia, ensuring that the concerns and perspectives of ECAs are heard and valued (Kalfa et al., 2018). This may require organisational sanctions for non-compliance, proactive prevention measures at the institutional level, and the establishment of clear mechanisms for reporting concerns. Additionally, fostering an understanding of students' experiences and providing comprehensive support, including career development and intercultural competence, can empower ECAs to voice their concerns and navigate the academic landscape more effectively (Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2022). Finally, promoting shared environments and informal conversations between students and supervisors can facilitate collaboration and break down hierarchical barriers and power imbalances (Riva et al., 2022). These strategies collectively aim to create a supportive and inclusive academic environment that empowers ECAs to find their voice and overcome challenges related to silence and lack of agency.

Discussion

The purpose of this scoping review was to uncover what is known about ECA voice and silence. The first search, described in the methods section, revealed only two management studies on ECAs (Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Kalfa et al., 2018), highlighting a gap in the extant voice and silence literature. This lead to the gathering of information from similarly themed HE research. Yet this review calls for more than voice and silence studies that focus on a neglected cohorts. Following Morrison (2023), it strengthens the case for research that examines how different work contexts create the conditions for voice or silence. Although the majority of the studies were HE or HE-informed, they demonstrated scholars in these disciplines have noticed the impacts of challenging work environments and relationships on ECAs and that silence is a feature of their work experiences. They also confirmed what was noted in the literature review: ECAs' work arrangements are atypical, asymmetrical, and complex and are connected to their disenfranchisement at work.

The review also found silence rather than voice is the norm in early career academia. All studies yielded data that could be linked to different types of silence, organisational silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) being the most prevalent. That is, ECAs are immersed in institutional environments in which it is apparent that it is not safe to speak up or it is futile to do so, creating climates of silence in which individuals collectively believe speaking up is not welcome to the extent silence is an organisational norm (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). At the individual level, ECAs predominately experience defensive or fear-based silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003). For example, it was noted some ECAs perceive the supervisory relationship to be inherently unequal (e.g., Richards & Shiver), a state that leads those who feel especially powerless to choose quiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001) in which there is little will to change the status quo. The data also revealed the possibility of *diffident silence* (Brinsfield, 2013), an inward-focused silence that is the product of insecurities, a lack of confidence, and fear of embarrassment and aims to avoid negative outcomes. Although diffident silence was not identified as a key concept in the literature review, it describes ECA experiences in several of the included studies (e.g., Hunter & Devine, 2016; Niemczyk, 2019). For example, isolation and not knowing where to turn for help was a common theme among doctoral students, especially international students, suggesting some ECAs will lack self-efficacy to voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

The 'cultures of silence' identified by the international students in Cotterall's (2013) study were reminiscent of the aforementioned climates of silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Cotterall was referring to the cultural norms and values that prevent some doctoral students from speaking up. However, she also challenged the perception that international students are less adept at voicing concerns than their domestic counterparts, stating their silences 'may have less to do with culture than power' (Cotterall, 2013, p. 184). This implies cultures of silence will prevail among doctoral students regardless of country of origin. It also aligns with management scholars (e.g., Kaufman, 2020) who posit that the employment relationship is inherently unequal and that power asymmetry is a characteristic of employee silence. However, where Hirschman (1970) states voice has the power to remedy dissatisfaction with the status quo, Cotterall is less sure, proposing in academia, the 'prevailing culture of silence militates against systemic change' (Cotterall, 2013, p. 174). Her assessment of the ECA environment is echoed in Fernando and Prasad's (2019) study on the organisational silencing of ECAs, which resulted in their reluctant, acquiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Kalfa et al. (2017) uncovered a similar phenomenon, in which their ECA participants believed vocal resistance was useless in the face of managerial imperatives. However, as the authors suggest, their silences were not only acquiescent but defensive (Van Dyne et al., 2003), driven by the desire for career progression and the fear of unemployment. Neglect of less important duties and exiting the university were other reported options. The concept of *exit* as an alternative to voice was first advanced in Hirschman's (1970) seminal exit-voice-loyalty framework, devised in the context of consumers rather than employees. *Neglect* was added to the model by Farrell (1983) and, in the workplace context, refers to the propensity to signal discontent by disregarding duties or similar rather than speaking up. Hirschman's concept of *loyalty* was somewhat synonymous with silence. It referred

to the individual's decision to remain loyal and hope circumstances will change, rather than voice dissatisfaction or exit.

The loyalty concept has further salience in the employment context. Dean and Greene's (2017) study – one of the two work context studies identified by Morrison (2023) – found members of some occupations embrace occupational ideologies that lead them to tolerate poor working conditions. This propensity to 'suffer in silence' for one's vocation could be mirrored in academia, driven by competition for resources, publications, and recognition and the desire to prove oneself competent. This in turn suggests *relational silence* (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken & Morrison, 2003), in which individuals avoid speaking up to ensure they are able to progress in their careers, could flourish among ECAs. This is a phenomenon that has been observed among new professionals in medicine, a similarly competitive and stratified field (Lister & Spaeth, 2024).

The silence experiences of the tenure-track ECAs in Kalfa et al. (2018) study were reminiscent of other types of silence. *Cynical silence* refers to employee silence born of the belief that superiors are 'selfish and dishonest' (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018, pp. 627–8) in the way they use external circumstances, such as economic crises, to justify internal decision-making. Additionally, *managerial silencing* (Donaghey et al., 2019) describes ways in which managers ostensibly endorse employees' right to speak up whilst organising them out of the voice process, ensuring the asymmetry inherent in the employment relationship (Kaufman, 2020) remains intact. Such activities undermine trust, a quality that has been identified as a voice enabler in studies of employee voice and silence (e.g., Holland et al., 2017). As Kalfa et al. (2018) observed, there were few genuine mechanisms for individual ECA voice as the flow of information was one-way. They also noted that collective voice in the form of union action might not be enough to overcome managerialist logic.

Limitations and future research

As this scoping review revealed, employee voice and silence researchers in the management discipline have paid scant attention to ECAs and how their work arrangements and supervisory relationships impact their ability to speak up. Yet the two management studies that were identified (Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Kalfa et al., 2018) enriched much of the discussion in the previous section, suggesting a need for more research on ECA voice and silence by voice and silence scholars. This is especially the case regarding the impact of contextual factors on voice. As the review demonstrated, with its employment and employment-like arrangements, the idiosyncratic nature of the ECA world provides a complex and intriguing milieu worthy of further examination.

This is not to diminish the quality of the evidence extracted from the HE studies identified in this review. Although absent of voice and silence nomenclature, they paint vivid pictures of the power dynamics inherent in the ECA-supervisor relationship and the difficulties ECAs face that make speaking up about their concerns and ideas challenging if not unlikely. These studies indeed 'tell us how it is', suggesting transdisciplinary approaches to this topic are also warranted.

The limitations of this scoping review are acknowledged. One is that most of included studies involved doctoral students, presenting an incomplete picture of the ECA cohort. As a result, less is known about employed ECAs' voice and silence, particularly sessional ECAs not undertaking a HDR, and post-doctoral researchers and research fellows in non-tenure-track roles. Another is whilst the use of the MMAT assessment process enhanced the overall quality of the review, it could have led to the exclusion of relevant data.

Overall, the review has made a step towards understanding the nature of ECA voice and silence, predominately by examining the work of scholars unacquainted with employee voice and silence theory or whose focus was not ECA voice and silence. To gain a deeper understanding of this topic, exploratory empirical research on ECA voice and silence grounded in management theories of employee voice and silence is indicated.

Conclusion

This scoping review found that ECAs' accounts of their experiences are characterised by negative perceptions and that ECAs are immersed in cultures in which hierarchical norms prevail, creating collective-level climates of silence in which speaking up is unlikely (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). These and other barriers related to their work arrangements and supervisory relationships motivate ECAs' silence at the individual level, with fear (Van Dyne et al., 2003) being the most common reason for silence. Several of the studies explicitly highlight these barriers and their impact on ECAs' upward voice about their workplace-related (relational and professional) concerns and ideas for improvement. Discussion on how future research can best expand understanding of voice and silence in the ECA context, and tie voice and silence theory to the study of different work contexts, is required. As employee wellbeing is in part contingent on the ability to speak up at work, suggestions on how to optimise future research to influence policy and practice in the context of ECA wellbeing at work and HDR student supervision are also sought.

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Appendix

Table A1. Selected studies by author, year and title

Author/s and year	Title
Acker & Haque (2015)	The struggle to make sense of doctoral study
Audardottir et al. (2021)	The complexities of the doctoral candidate-supervisor relationship: Voices of candidates at the University of Iceland
Baydarova (2022)	The impact of neoliberal education on the alignment of student-supervisor expectations in Malaysia
Bettinson & Haven-Tang (2021)	Voices of isolation and marginalisation – An investigation into the PhD experience in tourism studies
Billot et al. (2021)	Borderlanders: Academic staff being and becoming doctoral students
Brodin (2018)	The stifling silence around scholarly creativity in doctoral education: Experiences of students and supervisors in four disciplines
Cotterall (2013)	More than just a brain: Emotions and the doctoral experience
Denicolo (2004)	Doctoral supervision of colleagues: Peeling off the veneer of satisfaction and competence
Denis et al. (2019)	Doctoral supervision in North America: Perception and challenges of supervisor and supervisee

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Table A1. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Title
Devos et al. (2015)	Doctoral supervision in the light of the three types of support promoted in Self-Determination Theory
Falk et al. (2019)	Doctoral students' perceived working environment, obstacles and opportunities at a Swedish medical faculty: A qualitative study
Fernando & Prasad (2019)	Sex-based harassment and organisational silencing: How women are led to reluctant acquiescence in academia
Guerin & Green (2015)	'They're the bosses': Feedback in team supervision
Gunasekera et al. (2021)	The role of emotional intelligence in student-supervisor relationships: Implications on the psychological safety of doctoral students
Hunter & Devine (2016)	Doctoral students' emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia
Jazvac-Martek (2009)	Oscillating role identities: The academic experiences of education doctoral students
Jones & Blass (2019)	The impact of institutional power on higher degree research supervision: Implications for the quality of doctoral outcomes
Kalfa et al. (2018)	The academic game: Compliance and resistance in universities
Löfström & Pyhältö (2017)	Ethics in the supervisory relationship: Supervisors' and doctoral students' dilemmas in the natural and behavioural sciences
Makhamreh & Stockley (2020)	Mentorship and well-being: Examining doctoral students' lived experiences in doctoral supervision context
Morris (2011)	Doctoral students' experiences of supervisory bullying
Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson (2022)	International students enacting agency in their PhD journey
Niemczyk (2019)	Mentorship within doctoral research assistantships: A Canadian case study
Olmos-López & Sunderland (2017)	Doctoral supervisors' and supervisees' responses to co-supervision
Rambe & Mkono (2019)	Appropriating WhatsApp-mediated postgraduate supervision to negotiate "relational authenticity" in resource-constrained environments
Richards & Shiver (2020)	Managing the critical friendship: Using self-study in the doctoral supervision process
Riva et al. (2022)	Using co-creation to facilitate PhD supervisory relationships
Robertson (2017)	Trust: The power that binds in team supervision of doctoral students
Ryan et al. (2022)	How can universities better support the mental wellbeing of higher degree research students? A study of students' suggestions
Schmidt & Hansson (2021)	"I didn't want to be a troublemaker": Doctoral students' experiences of change in supervisory arrangements
Schulze (2012)	Empowering and disempowering students in student-supervisor relationships
Schulze (2015)	The doctoral degree and the professional academic identity development of female academics
Stackhouse & Harle (2014)	The experiences and needs of African doctoral students: Current conditions and future support
Vahamaki et al. (2021)	Doctoral supervision as an academic practice and leader-member relationship: A critical approach to relationship dynamics
Woolderink et al. (2015)	The voice of PhD candidates and PhD supervisors. A qualitative exploratory study amongst PhD candidates and supervisors to evaluate the relational aspects of PhD supervision in the Netherlands

Table A2. Silence types and voice barriers and enablers extracted from the articles selected for review

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Acker & Haque (2015)	Canada	Qualitative	27 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational Acquiescent Defensive	Racial differences (being the outsider), cultures of silence, competition for brilliance ('silence means you don't know'), departmental politics, competition for scarce resources	Not being noticed	Speaking up to be noticed (competition for brilliance)	Not discussed
Audardottir et al. (2021)	Iceland	Qualitative	148 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads	Defensive	Control, micro-management, belittling, lack of openness to ideas, lack of engagement	The potential for dissatis-faction, anxiety and stress; lack of completion and loss of data and years of work; uncertain career prospects due to lack of supervisory endorsement	Availability, encourage-ment, support, autonomy, quality feedback	Improved university support, doctoral student ombuds-man, support for supervisors (e.g., training, workload reduction)
Baydarova (2022)	Malaysia	Qualitative	5 doctoral students, 12 supervisors	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational Quiescent	Supervisor expectations of obedience, monologic relationships, hierarchi-cal status, misaligned expectations, lack of awareness of guidelines for supervision	Not allowed to challenge supervisors; doing what the supervisor wants even if they want something different; misaligned expectations	Dialogue	Fostering climates in which students feel safe, respected and valued
Bettinson & Haven-Tang (2021)	UK	Qualitative	15 doctoral students (interna-tional and domestic), 10 supervisors	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational Defensive	Solitary nature of the PhD journey, competitive cultures in which collaboration is rejected	Isolation, loneliness, lan-guage barriers, difficult supervisory relation-ships, lack of academic community, separation	Addressing negative fac-tors (e.g., ghetto-isation of doctoral students, lack of status)	Physical and research spaces for peer and staff interaction, re-visiting of strategies for pastoral and language support, increase time allocation for supervision, move away from fast supervision

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Billot et al. (2021)	New Zealand and UK	Qualitative	10 dual-status ECAs	Colleague-student/ colleague supervisor	Organisational Defensive	Dual identities, supervisor role conflict (advisor and manager), risk of loss of face, complex interpersonal relationships and power differentials	The possibility of - reduced morale and self-esteem - stalled completion - poor collegial interactions - staff dissatisfaction Experiences of - feeling drained - juggling priorities - skirmishes with supervisors - complexity in interpersonal relationships - personal deficiency (not having a PhD) - separation from student culture - uncertain identities.	Self-efficacy to negotiate the terms of their research	Tailored pedagogies for dual-role ECAs; a more transactional approach to supervision, horizontal supervision, clear expectations, trust
Brodin (2018)	Sweden	Qualitative	28 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational	Controlling intellectual, political and economic agendas	Lack of creative independence and critical thought (novelty, problem solving, innovation or resourcefulness); production of acceptable but not outstanding work	Encouraging creative scope	View doctoral students as capable, creative agents, permit creativity in doctoral education
Cotterall (2013)	Australia	Qualitative	6 international doctoral students	Not specified	Organisational	Cultures of silence informed by power that suppresses voice and change	Anger, anxiety and frustration, time loss	Equality in the supervisory relationship	Student confidence, institutional acknowledgement of role of emotion in shaping the doctoral experience

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Denicolo (2004)	UK	Qualitative	9 dual-status ECAs, 4 colleague-supervisors	Colleague-student/ colleague-supervisor	Organisational Prosocial Relational silence	Uneven distribution of expert power, divergence of responsibilities, public nature of supervision	Production of 'safe' research; additional vulnerability of supervision with colleagues; perception of others	Awareness and mitigation of power imbalances	Institutional consideration of difficulties related to colleague supervision
Denis et al. (2019)	Canada	Qualitative	5 doctoral students, 12 supervisors	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational	Lack of trust, transparent communication and empowerment	Not explicitly identified but can be inferred from the discussion e.g. decreased opportunities for employment in academia	Relationship optimisation e.g. allowing space to think and discuss	Clear, constructive and frequent communication, perceiving doctoral training as a partnership
Devos et al. (2015)	Belgium	Qualitative	Former doctoral students (8 completers and 13 non-completers)	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational	Negative judgments, behaviours, and attitudes, leaving students alone, contradictory demands, controlling research directions and daily work organisation, overt or covert control, double binds	Non-completion	Trust	Development of trust by: encouraging, caring, being positive about their work, recognising, supporting, understanding
Falk et al. (2019)	Sweden	Qualitative	17 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational Acquiescent Quiescent Defensive Relational	Low status in a hierarchical system, cultural differences, self-censoring for fear of career/ reputation/relational harms and other consequences, dependence on supervisor, lack of structural and union support, not knowing where to go for support, personality issues	Frustrating structures in the academic culture, stress, differences in career building	Supervisor relationship (good listener, supportive, accessible, understanding)	Structures to support doctoral students who feel they are not receiving the assistance they need, believe they have unreasonable working conditions, or need to change supervisors to complete. Institutional support in the form of leadership and mental health training for supervisors; continuous education in coaching and supervision.

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Fernando & Prasad (2019)	UK	Qualitative	5 ECAs 20 senior academics and professionals	Employee-employer	Organisational Acquiescent	Fear of the consequences if the system is called into question, messaging from line managers, HR and colleagues that discourage voice	Invalidated complaints, blame shifting, archiving of issues, sidelining by colleagues, working conditions repercussions leading to confusion, shame, low spirits and fear	Not discussed	Further research
Guerin & Green (2015)	Australia	Qualitative	11 doctoral students	Student-team supervision	Organisational Acquiescent	Deference to established authority, interpersonal dynamics in supervisory teams	Discouragement, feeling attacked or excluded from discussion, strategising to deal with conflicting advice.	Student agency	Agreed procedures for dealing with diversity in feedback, including students in the discussion, recognition that diversity (in feedback) can be threatening
Gunasekera et al. (2021)	Australia	Qualitative	3 doctoral students and their primary (1) supervisor	Student-supervisor	Quiescent Prosocial	Isolation, lack of psychological safety and supervisor emotional intelligence	Anxiety, stress, mental and physical exhaustion related to international student status; emotional exhaustion from projection of a 'favourable' identity	Supervisor emotional intelligence, peer support	Student and supervisor self-awareness, institutional attention given to supervisor/ student fit, supervisor relational skills development
Hunter & Devine (2016)	Canada	Mixed methods	186 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational Quiescent Defensive	Students unprepared or poorly equipped to cope with the challenges of their programs, Inadequate/ inexperienced/poor/ supervision	Emotional exhaustion, intention to leave academia, anxiety, reduced job satisfaction, lower organisational commitment, and weaker job performance	LMX (contribution, loyalty, affect, and professional respect), supportive relationships, at departmental and supervisor levels	Supportive environments, supervisor training in development of high quality relationships and feedback, reward faculty for involvement with doctoral students, faculty workload policies that protect doctoral students' interests, codes of ethics that establish professional standards for supervision

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Jazvac-Martek (2009)	Canada	Qualitative, longi-tudinal	9 doctoral students	Not specified	Organisational	Student role identity imposed by higher-status individuals (e.g., supervisors), self-imposed difficulties assuming an academic identity, those with power over progress	Imposition from authority figures higher in the hierarchy suppress voice leading to difficulties; awareness of position in the academic hierarchy and lack of faculty collegiality.	Confirmation of and confidence in academic identity by academic colleagues	Increase supervisor awareness of students' shifting agency and students' quest for legitimisation /projected of agency on to supervisors. Venues for sharing and verbalising work, sessions to support student self-awareness.
Jones & Blass (2019)	Australia	Qualitative	23 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational Quiescent Defensive	Having a different opinion, working with only one supervisor, dependence on supervisor, seeking academic and institutional acceptance	Inadequacy, social isolation, pressure, mental exhaustion, vulnerability stemming from the push to publish; closing of academic markets leads to dependency on senior colleagues and institutional good will, limit ideas and challenges and drives conformity to institutional norms; vulnerability and possibility of abuse	Student agency, informal extra-supervisory mentoring	Institutional review of HDR supervision practices, student-supervisor matching, external supervisor on team, monitoring and evaluation of supervision practice
Kalfa et al. (2018)	Australia	Qualitative	10 academics, (mostly ECAs) 10 professional staff	Employee-employer	Defensive	The need to stay employed in an increasingly insecure labour market, the desire for career progression, few genuine mechanisms for voice (the flow is one-way)	Compliance with managerial imperatives	Not discussed	A need for avenues for voice that can challenge the managerial prerogative in academia. But union action might not be enough to overcome managerialist logic

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Löfström & Pyhältö (2017)	Finland	Qualitative	28 doctoral students, 14 supervisors	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational Defensive	Exploitation and abuse, misappropriation, emotionally/ psychologically confounded relationships, lack of a collective culture, supervisor competence, structural issues, boundaries of role/support, intrusion of supervisor views, narrowness of perspectives, abandonment, inadequate supervision, disrespect, inequality, unfair owner/authorship	Misfit between students' goals and expectations; norms and practices in their scholarly community impact completion; students perceiving a misfit adopting norms counter to the academic ideal Experiences of overwork and exploitation. Lack of supervisor competence and student support.	Encouragement to develop 'researcher voice' (deviate from supervisor's views), respect for students' research decisions	Additional research focusing on ethical discrepancies in the supervisory relationship.
Makhamreh & Stockley (2020)	Canada	Qualitative	19 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Quiescent Defensive	Absent supervisors, over-authorised or negative supervisors, authoritative relationships, egotism, below average/toxic supervision	Compromised wellbeing – anxiety, fatigue, depression; compromised performance. preferred to suffer in silence	Authentic mentorship (presence, engagement, self-awareness), space for growth, positivity and confidence	Individual, group, departmental/ institutional-level reflection on the findings
Morris (2011)	Australia	Qualitative	8 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads	Acquiescent Defensive	Power struggles, feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty around what is training and what is bullying, supervisor attitude and tone of voice, supervisor abuse, hopelessness	Confusion; impacts to well-being; negative impacts to career; exit	Not discussed	Organisational sanctions, proactive prevention at the institutional level, training, mechanisms for reporting

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson (2022)	Australia	Qualitative	6 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational	Language barriers, supervisors' structural power, cultural norms regarding authority figures	Not explicitly examined but can be inferred in line with other studies in this review	Use of agency e.g. 'soft' strategies to air issues, active pursuit of institutional change and grievances, development of autonomy	Understanding students' experiences; technical, managerial and emotional support; career development; support to develop flexibility; openness for feedback, the ability to take initiative and be a team-player, systemic institutional structural changes to policies, grievances, progress review and reporting; enhanced intercultural competence
Niemczyk (2019)	Canada	Qualitative	6 doctoral students/ research assistants (RAs) 5 research supervisors 2 administrators	Doctoral student/ RA-doctoral supervisor/ research supervisor dyads	Organisational Acquiescent Defensive	Supervisor control, lack of communication and guidance, concern about reputation, powerlessness, acceptance of unfair practices, being bullied. Challenged dual relationships (RAs working under the supervision of their course instructors or doctoral advisors) – 'mixing money and marks'. Assumptions about authority figures. Being exploited	Bullying, oppression, no sense of belonging, lack of recognition for contribution	Partnering, providing support, bringing the RA into a community of practice	Assigning responsibility for RA development, recommendations for practice development, training for supervisors

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Olmos-López & Sunderland (2017)	UK	Qualitative	26 doctoral students 18 supervisors	Doctoral student-team supervision	Organisational Quiescent	Complex institutional and interpersonal relationships, the 'extra' dimension of communication required, conflicting advice, unproductive games, lack of cultural capital for progression	Confusion, compromised communication, power and relationship struggles	Mutual surveillance – more transparency and visibility in the supervisory relationship (regulation of supervisory practice where co-supervision occurs)	Active management of the power relations between all members of the supervisory team, principled flexibility and sensitivity to individual needs, observational research to identify displays of power of co/supervisors and students
Rambe & Mkono (2019)	South Africa	Qualitative	26 HDR students	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational Defensive	Steep power gradients; reproduction of traditional hierarchical boundaries by both parties to maintain the status quo, off-set insecurity or assert authority	Not applicable	Informality mediated by use of What's App accommodated rather than exposed student vulnerabilities; increased authenticity, understanding and empathy; flattened hierarchies	Challenges for supervisors: being 'on call' to answer student queries, dilution of disciplinary power, student over-disclosure
Richards & Shiver (2020)	USA	Qualitative	1 doctoral student 1 ECA supervisor	Supervisor-student dyad	Organisational Defensive	Power dynamics that can threaten the capacity for critical friendships and result in self-censoring and superficial interactions	Not discussed, but can be inferred in line with other studies	Developing trust, student agency, capacity for divergent thought; awareness of power dynamics, vulnerabilities, and relational challenges.	Use of S-STEP as supervisory training and use by students as a form of self-appraisal; critical friendship as a doctoral student pedagogy; sharing outcomes for learning.

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Riva et al. (2022)	UK	Mixed methods	25 doctoral students, 9 supervisors (qualitative study); 86 doctoral students, 69, and 5 postdoctoral researchers-supervisors/supporters (surveys); 7 doctoral students, 45 supervisors (co-creating workshop) (n= 276)	Doctoral student-supervisor/supporter supervision	Organisational Defensive Relational	Supervisory models not tailored to the individual, lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, misalignment of expectations, power imbalances, intimidated by expert status, 'fitting in' rather than challenging, fear of damaging relationships and reference opportunities	Imposter syndrome, serious thoughts of leaving, barriers to social contact with peers, wellbeing and work-life challenges	Co-created environments in which students can reposition themselves as an active part of the solution and rather than passive participants in the process	Promoting shared environments and opportunities for informal conversations (e.g. coffee catch-ups) to facilitate student-supervisor collaboration and break down hierarchical barriers and power imbalances; more training and support for supervisors
Robertson (2017)	Australia	Qualitative	10 doctoral students 12 supervisors	Doctoral student-team supervision	Acquiescent Quiescent Defensive	Absence of trust, disempowerment, differences in expectations	Exit, struggle to complete, fear (e.g. of criticism); difficulties with co-supervisors	Trust, as a form of power in team supervision, leading to voice, resilience and creativity in teams Empowerment stemming from trust in the relationship.	Strategies that build mutual trust and empower

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Ryan et al. (2022)	Australia	Qualitative	595 HDR students	Doctoral student-team supervision	Organisational	Exclusive, hierarchical departmental culture (lack of integration between academics and HDRs)	High rates of depression, anxiety, chronic stress and/or emotional exhaustion	Inclusivity, integration.	Increase time for supervision, provide more specific guidance/ feedback on milestones, progress and direction; improve communication with HDRs and show more care, empathy; increase the accountability of supervisors, and improve processes for changing or complaining about supervisors; increase mental health training and support for supervisors
Schmidt & Hansson (2021)	Sweden	Qualitative	27 doctoral students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Organisational Quiescent Defensive	Abuse of power, upholding established power structures for fear of reprisal	Remaining in an unhappy supervisory relationship, quitting, changing supervisors, increased level of mental health problems, difficulties in personal life, oppression, depression, loss of identity, seeking distraction and validation elsewhere, potential for retaliation	Resistance and unfair treatment lead to willingness to 'enter the battlefield' (negotiate the supervisory change process)	Clear guidelines that are documented and implemented, de-dramatisation of changes in supervisory arrangements, an open-minded environment, co-design of agenda and planning in supervision, experienced study directors, strong peer networks

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Schulze (2012)	UK	Qualitative	15 HDR students	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Defensive	Hierarchical relations (master-apprentice model, coercion); fear of repercussions; lack of availability, pastoral care and emotional and academic support	Disempowerment, struggle	Facilitation-centred supervision, collaboration and cooperation between students and supervisors, pastoral care –acknowledging the student as a person and not just a student, ability to take ownership of projects and overcome cultural beliefs that inhibit speaking up, upfront communication about expectations	Institutional discourse that facilitates reflection on supervisory practices so supervisors identify their own styles and the implications for learning; reflection on learning theories; facilitative supervision that treats students as equals; students prepared to take an active role in their supervision
Schulze (2015)	South Africa	Qualitative	2 dual-status ECAs	Student-supervisor dyads	Organisational	Cultural and personal factors determine comfort with hierarchical relationships and the degree to students are powerless (depend on others). Limited time, negative affect, writing block, insufficient resources, inadequate support, and a focus on discipline-based knowledge and skills only inhibit the development of robust professional academic identities. Lack of management support for female academics in particular, especially in the development of self-efficacy and addressing of constraints.	Not identified	Obtaining a doctoral degree, self-efficacy	More opportunities for female academics, identification as an academic, addressing of personal and institutional constraints

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Table A2. (*Continued.*)

Author/s and year	Country	Design	Participants	Work relationship	Silence type/s	Voice barriers	Negative outcomes	Voice enablers	Strategies for improvement
Stackhouse & Harle (2014)	UK	Mixed methods	455 doctoral students	Not specified	Defensive	Lower frequency of supervisor meetings, infrequent communication as formalising supervision (by the institution) has taken time, lack of institutional support	Not applicable	Supervisor is available and connects students with relevant resources, supervisor is supportive	Fully funded studentships, engage with peers internationally
Vahamaki et al. (2021)	Finland	Qualitative	33 doctoral students	Doctoral student-supervisor	Defensive	Imbalance of power in the relationship, low-quality relationships, unethical, dysfunctional and destructive supervisor behaviour, structural difficulties (e.g. failure to inform student the supervisor had left their job), personal difficulties (e.g. supervisor stops caring about student's progress)	Lack of trust leading to low-quality relationships, lower motivation and worse evaluations of their own work, distress when the situation is prolonged	Social and communication skills; trust, support, respect and co-operation with the supervisor; reciprocal respect; empowering of students resulting in self-esteem and self-worth; ethical behaviour that encourages and motivates learning	Increased awareness at university level of quality of supervision (scientific skills and leadership and interpersonal skills); balance formal and informal supervision practices to build trust and overcoming traditional expert-novice model of supervision; viewing supervisory practices from students' perspective; position HDR study as an opportunity to educate and model ethical behaviour
Woolderink et al. (2015)	Netherlands	Qualitative	54 doctoral students 52 supervisors	Student-supervisor dyads, student-team supervision	Quiescent	Awareness of power differences, dependence on supervisors, lack of trust in self	Not clear. 'In case of the workload being too high, PhD candidates handled this by structurally working overtime and not by communicating about it. However, it is not clear from the findings whether they did not raise the subject at all or whether they tried to discuss it but were turned down.'	Good coaching skills, constructive delivery of feedback, leading when necessary, providing a clear direction, communication among supervisors, creating a safe environment	Ensuring best fit, discussion and agreement on expectations and responsibilities, open and safe learning environments, supervisor sharing of learnings, enhancing knowledge of advice and support

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