

## Becoming a Teacher Educator and Researcher: An Autoethnographic Inquiry

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### Abstract

This study is an exploration of the autobiographical professional journey of my career path in English language education. The reflective account is a story about the change from being an English language learner to a teacher educator and academic researcher. The autoethnographic research aims to investigate the underlying reasons for choosing a career path for professional growth. The study, based on the reflections, revealed that the passion for teaching English, social prestige, and role-model teachers have a major impact on the job choice. The reflective account discussed how I enhanced my skills by attending conferences, workshops, seminars, and professional groups associated with English language teaching. Autoethnography, used as a tool for the research, helps to explore the experiences and challenges along the way. The reflective account, through self-reflection and construction of a new professional identity, is a story that reflects the regional perspectives on English language teaching and professional growth. The journey includes my transformation from my rural background with limited resources to where I am today as an English teacher, as well as my personal and professional transformation. The last section of the paper will focus on how I have reframed my professional experiences, which makes this study useful to other English language teachers looking for a way to reflect on and make meaning of their own professional journeys.

**Keywords:** autoethnography, collaborative learning, self-directed learning, professional development, traditional approach

### Introduction

An autobiographical narrative is a personal, first-person narrative that tells the story of the writer's experiences, with a focus on significant experiences and lessons that have created the writer's personal identity. As a method, autoethnography is both a process and a final product. The principles of autobiography and ethnography are applied by a researcher conducting autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography emphasizes the personal perspectives of the writer, involving a reflective examination of the writer's experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). An autobiographical narrative gives the reader an insight into the writer's personal experiences, encouraging the reader to connect with the writer's unique life experiences. This autobiographical narrative tells the story of my experiences in learning and teaching the English language, with a focus on lifelong learning as a significant theme. The narrative tells the

story of a personal and professional transformation from an English learner to a teacher and then a researcher, with a focus on the unique and personal experiences in teaching. Autobiographical methods, which have become a significant part of social science research, have been recognized for providing insights into the personal experiences of an individual's education (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Pavlenko, 2007; Coffey, 2016). These stories support me as I reflect on my roles and recreate my professional identities, with Borg (2013) and Canagarajah (2012) supporting my worth in exploring personal experiences in the classroom, which are the focus of my stories of learning and teaching English. Using the reflective approach, I have academic insights about my identity, which are meant to influence other learners and teachers of English language learning and teaching.

My decision to build a career as an English language teacher marked a significant change in my personal as well as professional life, nevertheless the initial difficulties and social norms I faced. Although in most cases, students who had performed well in their School Leaving Certificate (SLC) results were often advised to pursue a course in science. As an average student, I opted to major in English, a course that I chose and succeeded in becoming an English language teacher, in spite of traditional learning methodologies that emphasize memorization at the expense of effective communication skills, a factor that has led to poor results in most of our students. Furthermore, despite various training programs aimed at enhancing the quality of learning in our institutions, I wish to point out a significant research gap pertaining to different experiences of teachers in rural areas where learning is often a self-driven process.

The purpose of this study is to explore my experiences and practices of pain and gain in my personal and professional life as a learner and teacher of English, emphasizing my transformation through education. I also analyze my journey from being a learner in a hill learning English to becoming an English language teacher and an academic researcher emphasizing my personal and professional development during this process.

### **Research Questions**

This study addresses the author's experience of learning and teaching English with the following research questions.

1. How have my personal experiences shaped my personal and professional identity?
2. How have I transformed me from learner to teacher educator and academic researcher?

### **Methodology**

This article discusses the journey of my personal and professional life using autoethnography as a research method to explore personal and professional experiences related to English language learning and teaching. Initially, I engaged in narrative writing without knowing its research potential. However, exposure to various research methods during postgraduate level exploded an interest in autoethnography. In an autoethnographic study, researchers' expertise a thoughtfully composed, engaging

narrative that reveals itself through complete description (Adams et al., 2022). So, I developed a strong interest in conducting autoethnographic research to investigate my experiences with learning English and becoming a teacher and researcher while exploring various qualitative research methods. I reflect on my experiences as an English learner, a teacher and a researcher emphasizing the significance of personal narratives in understanding wider social contexts. I focus on my journey, permitting for a deeper connection between personal and professional growth. By employing autoethnography, I aim to shed light on my transformation from a traditional teacher to a student-centered teacher educator and academic researcher.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section is organized under the following subheadings: My English language learning journey, transforming from English language learner to teacher educator, and my transition: from teacher educator to academic researcher.

#### **My English Language Learning Journey**

My learning process for English in rural Nepal was dominated by traditional and teacher-centered approaches that emphasized rote learning over critical learning, greatly affecting both my academic and personal growth. I will describe my experiences with English learning in a rural and under-resourced public school in western Nepal, where I started in grade four. The traditional approach to English learning emphasized rote learning and translation, where the teacher would read out English texts and translate them into Nepali. This traditional approach to teaching a foreign language, though very common, is not very conducive to critical learning, as emphasized by Ahmed (2010). In spite of the lack of English exposure and academic support from home, I was able to complete my SLC examinations, a great academic achievement for me and my community. In continuing my education and learning English, I was taught by strict teachers who never allowed me to ask questions and who never encouraged collaborative learning. The traditional and teacher-centered approach greatly obstructed my academic and personal growth, as emphasized by Shrestha (2020). The traditional and teacher-centered approach greatly influenced my academic and personal growth.

However, I was not forced to become an English teacher, but rather it was my passion. I had a dream to become an English teacher and gain popularity. The people in my village used to respect English teachers at that time, and everyone used to meet the English teacher. I decided to compete with them. The personality of the English teacher at the secondary level was another significant event that inspired me to become an English teacher. The English teacher in my school, Mr. Gyawali, was a young and vibrant English teacher with excellent English skills. He was very diligent and inspiring. I decided to become an English teacher not by chance but by choice. This was due to the fact that I had excellent English teachers and professors, and my parents inspired me to pursue higher studies. Because of their excellent teaching skills, I really liked my English teachers. The personalities of the English teachers inspired me too much to become an English teacher. The desire to become an English teacher started growing in my heart.

Field experiences in schools are crucial in the professional development of new teacher educators, especially those who have never experienced a classroom environment themselves. It gave me a firsthand understanding of the disconnect that exists between theory and practice, as seen in my attempts to practice task-based learning. Field experience is not just about teaching, but it is also about the kind of support that one can offer beyond the general feedback level. From the experience, I learned the importance of offering constructive and context-dependent advice that addresses the needs of the students and the learning environment. Workplace experience also gave me the chance to contribute to the curriculum and the administration of the school. From the experience, I gained a unique perspective that helped me offer personal recommendations to the school. Autoethnography helped me to study and improve my teaching practice. Through this self-reflection, my knowledge about the educational environment was developed, and this, in turn, improved my research skills as well. This inclusion of practical experiences in teacher training programs can be very effective and can not only enhance the teaching skills of the educators but also enable them to make a more significant impact on the educational environment as a whole.

### **Transforming from English Language Learner to Teacher Educator**

My transformation into an effective teacher is a story of determination that has been shaped by my continuous learning, personal experiences, and self-reflection. I will reflect on my journey to becoming an effective teacher, focusing on the need for patience, willpower, and continuous learning. Through my continuous learning, exposure to different conferences, research materials, and international discourses, I have transformed my traditional practice into one that emphasizes the importance of creativity, collaboration, and students' engagement in group/pair work activities. In this regard, Kagan (2014) stated that pair/group work can facilitate students' learning by providing opportunities to clarify their thoughts both to themselves and to other students. I struggled a lot to create my own identity and reach this position. My "painful and gainful lived experiences" (Luitel & Dahal, 2021, p.1) with my families, communities, and schools have affected my own presentation of self both in my academic life and professional life.

I completed my education through the community schools, and my constituent campuses provided me with my English teaching authorizations. I earned my M. Ed. degree in English education. I specialized in English education from the proficiency certificate level to B. Ed. and M. Ed. from Tribhuvan University. Finally, I earned my M. Phil. from KU because I had a great desire to become a proficient, native-like English teacher. I interacted with my peers and participated in activities such as conferences and training to improve my English. After completing my master's degree, I started my job by teaching at the schools. Finally, I started my job by teaching at the campus. One major turning point that affected my professional life and my teaching was my two-year M. Ed. course in Kathmandu.

My continuous teacher professional development is of vital importance to keep myself up-to-date of the latest trends in terms of research and teaching. I keep myself updated on a regular basis through scholarly reading of books and journals, attending conferences, seminars, workshops, and training sessions, as well as engaging myself with professional bodies such as NELTA and international ELT forums. My contributions to the field include conducting training programs at local as well as national levels, writing research articles, and conducting action as well as mini-researches. In general, I believe that my professional development activities help me to better understand the subject matter as well as to enhance my knowledge, skills, teamwork, and finally the quality of teaching.

My journey as a teacher, with the added richness of experiences from diverse institutions and advanced academic pursuits, has influenced my perspectives on student-centered pedagogy, teacher empowerment, and the ongoing evolution of teacher identity. I have worked as an English teacher at Jana Jagriti Secondary School in Bonga Dobhan, Baglung, for three years following the completion of my B.Ed. I have also worked as an English teacher at Shanti Niketan Boarding High School in Bhaktapur during the day, and as a lecturer to the B.Ed. English department at Sharada Campus in Bhaktapur in the evenings, for the duration of my Master's Degree. I have accumulated three years of experience in the field. I have worked as a teacher at Solukhumbu Multiple Campus in the morning, Jana Jagriti Secondary School in the daytime for three years, Junbesi Ma Vi, and Himel Darshan Secondary School in the vacation for a few months. I have been working as an educator at Butwal Multiple Campus since 2053 B.S. My entry to the M Phil program at Kathmandu University was a significant turning point in my academic research experience. Earning an M.Phil. from Kathmandu University was a significant step in my academic research experience because it helped me improve my research skills and academic writing skills. In spite of the restrictions imposed on teacher autonomy in Nepal's centralized educational structure, I strongly advocate for a learner-centered approach to teaching, creativity in lesson planning, and the effective use of technology to remain pertinent in the classroom. I see teaching as a socially constructed process in which teacher development is influenced by both lived experiences and ongoing professional development. In this study, I explored why I chose to become an English language teacher. Through this self-reflection, I reveal that my passion for English and my genuine passion for teaching English were the driving forces behind my becoming an English teacher. The most significant factor behind my becoming an English teacher was my previous teacher experience because I was inspired by my own teachers.

My reflection, which is a painful and gainful experience, reveals that students can be transformative English teachers in rural areas with few resources. They can improve and change, can be proactive, and can be actively involved in professional development opportunities. My journey of self-empowerment has transformed my values, beliefs, and approaches to teaching, and has motivated other teachers to help construct and consider their own professional identity.

**My Transition: From Teacher Educator to Academic Researcher**

My growth as an English language teacher from a product of traditional, teacher-centered approaches to English language teaching to a reflective practitioner who is a proponent of student-centered approaches to English language teaching is a result of my growth as a teacher, my learning experiences, and my commitment to transforming English language teaching and learning experiences. In this paper, I shall reflect on my growth as a teacher, my learning experiences, and my commitment to transforming English language teaching and learning experiences, drawing on my experiences as an English language teacher, inspired by my high school English language teachers who were my role models and who were proof that English language learning is essential to personal and professional success. In the beginning, my English language teaching to my students was traditional and teacher-centered, emphasizing the grammar-translation method and memorization. In my class, my students were silent all the time. In our school, student participation is defined as the students' presence, attention, and obedience in class (Duong & Dejaeghere, 2022). Based on experiential learning and action research, I applied approaches that encouraged critical thinking and curiosity among students, gradually transforming from a strict teacher to a facilitator. This allowed me to enhance my professional identity and improve the learning experience for my students (Canh, 2018; Barkhuizen et al., 2014). I published more than fifty research articles in various journals both locally and internationally.

**Conclusion**

This study explores my painful and gainful experiences during my personal and professional development as an English language learner, educator and researcher. Despite the challenges that I have faced, I was inspired by factors such as parental influence, support from my Nepali and English teachers at school, and a desire to uplift my social stand-up by learning the English language. I reflect on my educational experience, which was mainly rooted in memorization, and recognize that a family environment that was conducive to learning, as well as exposure to English language learning, were fundamental to my development as a learner. Over a career that has spanned more than three decades as a teacher, I have managed to improve my English language skills as well as teaching methodologies, despite the many challenges that I have faced in terms of resources for professional development. Professional development associations that I have worked with, such as the Curriculum Development Centre and NELTA, have been instrumental in providing me with valuable connections that have been fundamental to my development as a teacher.

The main objective of this study is to provide insights for people in similar situations, highlighting the importance of motivation and community support in the quest for successful English language teaching. I hope that through the stories, I can inspire other teachers and provide them with a valuable resource for applying transformative teaching approaches in difficult settings. In reflecting on my long and challenging road, which has been characterized by a plethora of untold painful experiences, I recognize the challenging roads that I have walked as well as the untrodden roads that I considered. As I reflect on a myriad of enriching experiences that have contributed to

my self-reliance, I recognize a new strength that has been created within me, as revealed by hopeful insights and fueled by aspirations. At the junction of this untrodden path, I recognize a twinkling light that has emerged from darkness. Amongst these struggles, I recognize the enabling influence of my mentors, who are encouraging me. Finally, I recognize that my road has been rewarded by more successes than struggles, ending in a profound sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Through writing this personal narrative, I have been able to reflect on emotions and motivations in a way that has given me insight into professional development and personal interests. In my thirty years of teaching experience, I would like to reiterate that learning a language is an emotional process, and it is not age-bound. My personal and professional development from a basic school teacher to a university teacher and researcher has been influenced by my experiences, interactions with ELT professionals, and my passion for lifelong learning. I would like to create a supportive and culturally responsive learning environment for English education in Nepal.

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