
Teaching and Researching: An Auto-ethnographic Study

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Abstract

This article attempts to view myself through an auto-ethnographic lens and tries to answer one of the crucial questions - who am I from an academic perspective? The bedrock of this question is the deep realization of the significance of knowing oneself and reflecting on own teaching and researching experiences that can refine and sharpen the teaching profession in general, and own teaching and researching skills in particular. Therefore, I used my nineteen academic articles, four mini-researches, and one large-scale research as major sources of data for this auto-ethnographic study. I wrote them during my two-and-a-half decade-long teaching career. Indeed, they helped me know myself from an academic perspective; and I found that I am a professional teacher, reflective practitioner, critical thinker, classroom researcher, teacher-researcher, action researcher, and an auto-ethnographer who is keenly interested in fostering the research culture as a way of academic life following the essence of the glocalization.

Keywords: Experience, auto-ethnographic lens, teacher-researcher, reflection, action-research

Introduction

The connection between teaching and researching has received much attention these days in the field of teaching in general and ELT in particular. Shagoury & Power (2024) assert that “for many years, teachers have criticized education research as not being relevant to their needs, or written in a way that fails to connect with their

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classroom practice” (p.2). They further clarify that “teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching” ...and “observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting the curriculum to fit the needs of all students have always been important skills demonstrated by fine teachers” (p.3). Such observation, analysis, and adjustment of the curriculum to students’ needs require the reflection of teaching experience which is one of the main sources for conducting educational research. For Beard & Wilson (2010), experience is “interaction between self and the external environment” (p.19). Autoethnographic research is a recent trend of conducting research that emphasizes carrying out research based on the self-experience of a person. Therefore, this article attempts to connect teaching, researching, and auto-ethnographic research that focuses on reflecting personal experiences of teaching and attempts to apply the research findings for further betterment of the teaching profession. It follows the cyclic process of theorizing what has been practiced and practicing what has been theorized as Kumaravadivelu (2003) has suggested.

Although the history of auto-ethnography is more than five decades, scholars have been using this research method only for three decades. Adams & Harrmann (2020) state “as a method/orientation, the term “autoethnography” appeared formally in the 1970s but did not receive much academic attention until the 1990s” (p.2). They further view that “auto-ethnographic projects use selfhood, subjectivity, and personal experience (“auto”) to describe, interpret, and represent (“graphy”) beliefs, practices and identities of a group or culture (“ethno”)”. Likewise, Keles (2022b) critically examines the different characteristics of good autoethnography discussed by different scholars such as a deeper understanding of personal experience, well-theorized and contextualized method, emotionally engaging and critically self-reflexive, etc. that can be appreciated by both literary critics and social scientists at the same time (pp. 2033-2039).

Similarly, Trahar (2013) claims that auto-ethnography enables practitioners and researchers to identify the emotional aspects of experiences to understand and theorize them (p.374). Keles (2022a) also views that “auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that situates “self” (auto) in the broader society (ethno) and enables researchers to write (graphy) their own stories” (p.450). Moreover, “auto-ethnography has recently become a popular methodology in applied linguistics as a newly introduced method of research” (Yazan, 2019a, as cited in Keles, 2022a, p. 448). In line with this connection between teaching, researching applied linguistics, and auto-ethnographic research, I have also attempted to write this article based on my own teaching English and researching experiences that have been gained during more than two decades of my teaching career. Hence, the objective of writing this article is to critically examine my own English teaching and researching experiences through the auto-ethnographic lens so that I can know myself in a better way.

Methodology

As the title of this article suggests, this is auto-ethnographic research which is one of the latest methods of qualitative research paradigm. Keles (2022b) argues that “compared to other qualitative methods, autoethnography is relatively new in educational research” (p. 2027). He reviews many definitions of auto-ethnography and concludes that “the end goal of auto-ethnography is to better understand new cultural discourses shape and are shaped by individuals who inhabit, negotiate with, accept, and resist their immediate social groups” (ibid). As mentioned above, the objective of this article is also to view my own teaching and researching experiences through the auto-ethnographic lens that the experiences have shaped and reshaped my teaching and researching skills to a great extent. One of my interests in professional life is to theorize my practice and to practice what I theorize in a cyclic way that shapes and reshapes my teaching skills. Such

a cyclic process requires ongoing research works as a way of teaching life. As a result, I, as a teacher-researcher, wrote research articles, mini-researches, and large-scale research works during my teaching life aiming at knowing myself and applying the knowledge in shaping and reshaping the teaching profession.

I have been making such efforts because knowing oneself is one of the most difficult tasks in the world. Allen (2015) also tries to justify this claim by quoting a German theologian Meister Eckhart that “a human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don’t know ourselves” (p.33). I am also greatly influenced by this belief that I know less about myself compared to the external environment. I spend a great amount of time to know the external environment; however, I spend less amount of time reflecting on my own activities that may play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping my teaching and researching skills as a professional teacher. Therefore, I have made this effort to know myself critically examining my English teaching and researching experiences through the auto-ethnographic lens. Hence, I purposively selected my own academic works as the major sources of data for this article that are presented in the result section and discussed thematically in the discussion section as in the following paragraphs.

Result

As I mentioned earlier in the methodology section, this article is an effort to know me through the auto-ethnographic lens for further strengthening my teaching and researching skills. Very interestingly, while reviewing my past teaching and research experiences, I find consistency in almost all research works; i.e., researching those issues that are deeply realized during the teaching period and becoming the same issues for possible research topics. Almost all my research articles, mini-researches, and large-scale research works are guided by this consistent trend of reflecting on my own teaching

experiences. Thus, my academic works made me able to know myself so that I can easily identify the research issues in the classroom and carry out research as a way of my academic life connecting both teaching and researching.

Similarly, I examined a particular issue as my research problem at a time, and I tried to address the issue as far as possible by carrying out classroom research or action research. More interestingly, my research findings contributed a lot to addressing the problems faced by my students every year irrespective of their levels. Such contribution encouraged me to choose the next burning issue realized in the real classroom, and I conducted the next research in the form of a research article or mini-research. In this way, I became a self-motivated teacher-researcher to carry out different research based on my past experiences of teaching and researching. The series of carrying out such small-scale research works and my nature of becoming a self-motivated teacher-researcher for further research led me to carry out even large-scale research. As a result, I completed my PhD standing firmly on the strong foundation of the small-scale research that indicated some roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in general; and learning strategies and writing skills in particular. I have also tried to write this article reflecting on almost all those past experiences using the auto-ethnographic lens that can possibly lay the next strong foundation stone for further research to become a more effective teacher-researcher. I have presented the past research works related to my teaching and research experiences in the following tables.

Table 1

Articles

SN	Year	Articles
1.	2003	The Role of Sharing Ideas for the Enhancement of the Teaching Profession.

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2. 2004a Making English Teaching Effective Exploiting Classroom Environment
 3. 2004b An Overview of Common Misconceptions in the Field of Teaching & Learning in General and ELT in Particular
 4. 2006 A Comparative Study of Teaching Hours between a Higher Secondary School and a TU Campus
 5. 2007 A Study of Some Common Spelling and Grammatical Errors in Writing Skill Made by TU Campus Students
 6. 2009 Reflective Teaching: A New Trend
 7. 2011 Language Learning Strategy: Key to Successful Learning
 8. 2012a Language Learning Strategies Applied by Government Campus Students
 9. 2013 Hidden Factors in English Language Learning and Teaching vis-à-vis the Context of Nepal
 10. 2015a Reflection: An Effective Way of Professional Development
 11. 2015b Reflection of Own English Language Learning Experience and Its Influence in Teaching
 12. 2015c Changing Scenario of Language Classroom in the Present-Day World
 13. 2016 Validity of Practical Examination in English Education
 14. 2017 Critical Ethnographic Research in Multilingual and Multicultural Classroom
 15. 2018 Need of Increase in Students' Participation
 16. 2020a *Online Classes in Tribhuvan University: Opportunities and Challenges*
 17. 2020b A Study of Successful Students: A Classroom Research

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| 18. | 2022a | Trend of Doing Homework in Major and Compulsory English: A Case Study |
| 19. | 2023b | Pedagogical Shift in ELT through Post-method Pedagogy |
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Table 1 presents the history of my academic articles that consists of the list of nineteen articles written during the period of two decades; i.e., from 2003 to 2023. The articles attempt to address the teaching and learning issues in general and English language teaching in particular. The list shows that the ten articles listed in no. 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 19 seem to be more general and focus on the role of sharing ideas for the enhancement of the teaching profession; overview of common misconceptions in the field of teaching, learning, and ELT; reflective teaching as a new trend; language learning strategy as a key to successful learning; hidden factors in ELT concerning Nepalese context; reflection as an effective way of professional development; reflection of own English language learning and its influence in teaching; changing scenario of language classroom; critical ethnographic research in multilingual and multicultural classroom; and pedagogical shift in ELT through post-method pedagogy.

Likewise, rest of the nine articles listed in no. 2, 4, 5, 8, 13, 15, 17 & 18 focus on specific issues such as exploiting classroom environment while teaching, comparative study of teaching hours between a higher secondary school and a TU campus, language learning strategies employed by students, validity of practical examination in English education, need of increase in students' participation, online classes in TU, study of successful students, and trend of doing homework in compulsory and major English. I did not write only the articles during the period of two decades, I also conducted the following mini researches as shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Mini Researches*

SN	Year	Mini Researches
1.	2012	Reading Habit
2.	2014	Writing Problems and Solutions
3.	2020c	Linguistic Competence vis-à-vis Ethnicity
4.	2022b	Becoming both Teacher and Researcher: A Reflective Study

Table 2 demonstrates the list of four mini researches that I carried out from 2012 to 2022. The first two mini-researches are related to two language skills “reading” and “writing” respectively, and the other two mini-researches focus on more general issues; i.e., the third mini-research studies the relationship between linguistic competence and ethnicity, and the fourth one is a reflective study that attempts to justify the possibility of becoming both teacher and researcher reflecting on the classroom practice. One of the more interesting truths regarding the mini-researches is that the mini-research issues have been carried out based on the foundation of research articles that provided some insightful ideas for conducting those mini-researches digging into the issues in-depth. For example, the articles related to the comparative study of teaching hours between a higher secondary school and a TU campus; the role of sharing ideas for the enhancement of the teaching profession; and the overview of common misconceptions in the field of teaching, learning and ELT provided some insightful ideas to carry out the mini research focusing on reading habit.

Similarly, the article related to spelling and grammatical errors led me to conduct the second mini-research entitled “Writing Problems and Solutions”. The articles related to language learning strategies laid the foundation stone for carrying out the third mini-research focusing on linguistic competence and ethnicity. The reflective articles are the basis for the fourth mini-research that attempts to justify the possible way of becoming a

teacher-researcher. Similarly, I was also able to carry out the following large-scale research as a continuation of those articles and mini-researches primarily focusing on language learning strategies, reflective practice, and writing problems faced by Bachelor's level students whom I taught a whole session and collected necessary information whole year.

Table 3

Large-Scale Research

SN	Year	Large Scale Research (PhD)
1.	2023a	Learning Strategies Employed by Bachelor's First Year Students vis-à-vis Writing Problems: An Action Research

As mentioned earlier, my academic writing and publishing began in 2003; and Table 3 shows that I was able to carry out large-scale action research as PhD work in 2023 focusing on learning strategies employed by Bachelor's level first-year students in relation to writing problems faced by the students. The keywords mentioned in the title of this large-scale research like "learning strategies", "action research" and "writing problems" indicate that this large-scale research is the continuation of small-scale research works that were conducted in the past whether in the form of articles or mini-researches. Moreover, this large-scale research further justified the need for becoming a teacher-researcher as a part of academic life; and it also proved that it is possible to enhance the teaching profession connecting the teaching and researching with the specific practical problems which may differ from one context to another. Such a connection between teaching and researching in relation to specific problems faced by individual teachers in specific contexts may make free from the criticism that educational research fails to connect with the classroom practice as Shagoury & Power (2024) argue. Instead, such large-scale research can also be conducted based on classroom practice.

Discussion

The main objective of writing this article is to critically examine my own English teaching and researching experiences through the auto-ethnographic lens so that I can know myself in a better way. The aforementioned result of my past teaching and researching experiences helps me to know myself; however, the journey of knowing me has been continuing, and it will continue even in the future. The available literature examined in the methodology section also justifies this claim that knowing ourselves is a very difficult task, and I can also not become an exception to this reality. Indeed, the examination of my two-decade-long journey has made me able to answer the question “Who am I from an academic perspective?” When I tried to view myself through the auto-ethnographic lens based on my own academic experiences, I found that I am a professional teacher, reflective practitioner, critical thinker, classroom researcher, teacher-researcher, action researcher, and auto-ethnographer. Although all these themes share some common features, they have some unique features which are discussed in brief in the following paragraphs.

Professional Teacher

My academic articles, mini-researches, and large-scale research indicate that I am very interested in becoming a professional teacher. My personal experience and understanding regarding professionalism is that a professional teacher is always committed to the teaching profession being updated with new trends, knowledge, teaching methods, approaches, information technology in the field of education, and the continuous assessment process of students instead of focusing only on examination-oriented teaching and learning activities. The first article listed in Table 1 aims to enhance the teaching profession by sharing ideas with teachers, experts, and other stakeholders focusing on the curriculum and its challenges while implementing it (Nepal, 2003). The

next article which presents a model for professional development through reflection further strengthens the interest in becoming a professional teacher (Nepal, 2015a).

The mini-researches that give emphasis on forming good reading (Nepal, 2012b) and writing (Nepal, 2014) habits are the results of continuous assessment of the students. The critical examination of pedagogical shift in ELT through post-method pedagogy highlights the new trend in English language teaching examining the traditional method-based PPP (i.e., presentation, practice, and production) model and post-method PPP (i.e., particularity, practicality, and possibility) pedagogy (Nepal, 2023b). The discussion on opportunities and challenges of online classes at Tribhuvan University justifies the interest in the use of modern technology (Nepal, 2020a). Similarly, the rest of the articles, mini-researches, and large-scale research also address the issue of professionalism whether directly or indirectly. When I think about putting the all efforts together, I find that almost all efforts aim at grooming me a professional teacher; and this conclusion reflects my intrinsic motivation.

Reflective Practitioner

Reflective practitioners are committed to ongoing professional development, and the articles that are written focusing on reflective practice justify me as a reflective practitioner who critically reflects the teaching beliefs, experiences, methods, student learning outcomes, and learning strategies employed by students. One of the articles on reflection highlights the importance of reflective teaching as a new trend (Nepal, 2009). The next article further justifies the role of reflection as an effective way of professional development (Nepal, 2015a). The third article related to reflection critically examines the role of reflective practice connecting it with the English language learning experience and its influence in teaching (Nepal, 2015b). Likewise, large-scale research is action research in which reflecting is the fourth step and planning, acting, and observation are the first, the second, and the third steps respectively in the cyclic processes of carrying

out action research. The eight-level writing problems and the twenty-three learning strategies as the major findings of the action research are also results of the reflection of classroom practice (Nepal, 2023a). Thus, such reflective practice during my teaching life made me a reflective practitioner.

Critical Thinker

Critical thinkers are also reflective to some extent; however, they are more interested in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating some views, beliefs, theories, or any issues in a more reasonable, valid, systematic, and reliable way. They also deal with some problems more skilfully, cognitively, actively, and critically to judge such issues and try to reach a logical conclusion suggesting some possible solutions. Many articles, mini-researches, and the large-scale research listed in the aforementioned three Tables match these basic features of a critical thinker. One of the articles listed above critically examines the teaching hours between a higher school and a TU campus and suggests some solutions to increase the teaching hours in the campus presenting valid and reliable data with necessary evidence (Nepal, 2006).

Similarly, the next article analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes the spelling and grammatical errors committed by TU campus students and suggests some possible solutions (Nepal, 2007). One of the mini-researches studies the writing problems faced by the students in their real-life situations and provides appropriate solutions to solve the writing problems more systematically following the writing processes suggested by different scholars (Nepal, 2014). The next article views the validity of practical examination in English education that is unable to develop the necessary knowledge and skills of students as indicated by the curricula (Nepal, 2016). Likewise, the critical ethnographic research article examines the internal beliefs and behaviours of the students having different linguistic and cultural beliefs, values, and backgrounds, and attempts to

justify the need for ethnographic research to address the problems faced by students in such a multilingual and multicultural classroom (Nepal, 2017).

A case study analyzed and synthesized the trend of doing homework in major and compulsory English and made an effort to provide necessary feedback to the students for further improvement in their writing skills (Nepal, 2022a). Indeed, these articles and mini-research related to writing skills laid the foundation stone to the large-scale research that attempted to study writing problems in connection with different language learning strategies like affective, cognitive, meta-cognitive, social, compensation, and memory strategies (Nepal, 2023a). Thus, the critical nature of viewing the different issues in the teaching life places me as a critical thinker.

Classroom Researcher

A classroom researcher is a researcher who accepts a classroom as a mini-society that reflects the political, social, economic, educational, cultural, values, and beliefs; and conducts several classroom researches contemplating the diverse factors aiming at teaching more effectively by creating a good classroom environment. Classroom researchers identify the research issues and collect the necessary data through observation and interviews in a natural setting. In fact, almost all articles, mini-researches, and the large-scale research listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3 are the results of classroom research. However, some of them pay much attention to the classroom activities aiming at connecting the classroom practice to the students' and teachers' needs as Shagoury & Power (2024) argued the need for such connection regarding educational research. One of the articles advocates a new kind of classroom setting considering the various factors like the complex nature of the classroom, humanistic factors, social context, diversity, anxiety-free environment, and so on (Nepal, 2015c).

The next article emphasizes the need for an increase in students' participation and attendance in the classroom indicated by the curricula considering the belief that only the

active participation of students in each activity can develop the intended knowledge and skills of students fulfilling the objectives (Nepal, 2018). Classroom research of successful students justifies the claim that teaching, learning, and researching can go together in a classroom setting if the students are ready to do the given activities attending the class more regularly (Nepal, 2020b). Almost all the academic works and specific classroom research show that I am also a classroom researcher.

Teacher-researcher

Although a professional teacher, a reflective practitioner, a critical thinker, a classroom researcher, and an action researcher are also teacher-researchers for many reasons, a teacher-researcher is a natural extension of a good teacher as Shagoury & Power (2024) have stated. They also view that a teacher-researcher can adjust the students' needs with the curriculum by conducting teacher research. When we believe teacher-researcher is just a natural extension of a teacher, it tries to simplify the concept of research that can be conducted by each teacher. Shrestha, Laudari, and Gnawali (2023) stated that although many teachers thought research was a difficult thing to be conducted by only some experts at the beginning of their study, some of them realized at the end of the study that "teacher research can be done by anyone" (p. 411).

One of the mini-researches mentioned in Table 2 also justifies this claim that becoming a teacher-researcher is possible if a teacher is ready to be engaged more systematically in different activities determined by the curricula (Nepal, 2022b). The large-scale research mentioned in Table 3 also justifies the possibility of becoming a teacher-researcher that the learning strategies and writing problems were identified becoming a teacher-researcher in a natural classroom setting (Nepal, 2023a). More interestingly, I always teach focusing on such activities that provide me with many insightful ideas for conducting research in relation to the curricula. This practice of

teaching and researching together primarily based on the curriculum proves that I am a teacher-researcher.

Action Researcher

Action research is a systematic study conducted by a practitioner to solve some practical problems and improve the existing situation bringing about some changes. This research basically follows a cyclic process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The large-scale action research mentioned in Table 3 studied the practical writing problems faced by Bachelor's first-year students and they brought about some noticeable changes in their writing by employing language learning strategies (Nepal, 2023a). Indeed, this was more significant research that synthesized the past experiences of conducting many other small-scale researches to a great extent. Thus, this large-scale action research justified that I am an action researcher who can also do such large-scale research in a natural classroom setting.

Auto-ethnographer

Systematic study of own experiences using personal narratives, anecdotes, and past experiences as primary sources of data makes a person an auto-ethnographer. As mentioned in the methodology, an auto-ethnographer tries to know oneself which is one of the most difficult tasks in the world. Today, the auto-ethnographic method has been receiving much attention in the field of a qualitative research paradigm that aims at undertaking research about own experiences through self-reflection with deeper understanding. Dahal & Luitel (2023) also “believe that researchers must reflect on their own experiences to gain a deeper understanding of their own practices, thereby working towards improving their own actions via self-reflection” (p.1). Almost all articles, mini-researches, and large-scale research are the result of reflecting on my own teaching experiences based on my practices. This article is also the result of my past experiences that are written to justify the significance of auto-ethnographic research in teaching and

researching. These practical efforts of reflecting on my own experiences for further improvement prove that I am not only influenced by the growing significance of auto-ethnography in applied linguistics, but I am also practicing it in my professional life in a consistent way. Therefore, I claim that I am also an auto-ethnographer.

Conclusion

This auto-ethnographic study justifies that teaching and researching can go together following the series of self-reflections of different teaching and researching experiences. If a teacher views his own experiences very systematically through an auto-ethnographic lens and uses his personal stories or anecdotes as primary sources of data, he can become a good auto-ethnographer critically examining his own experiences and using the findings to further strengthen the teaching profession. The teacher who is committed to sharpening the teaching profession and developing the culture of research as a way of his academic life can be a good ethnographer and can refine his teaching skills by reflecting on his own experiences. This auto-ethnographic research further justifies the belief that research is not a difficult thing to be conducted only by some experts, but it can be done by each teacher easily using personal experiences which are gained automatically during teaching. Teachers may become professional teachers, reflective practitioners, critical thinkers, classroom researchers, teacher-researchers, action researchers, and auto-ethnographers using their personal experiences. Thus, each teacher can blend teaching and researching more meaningfully to sharpen the teaching profession through auto-ethnographic ways.

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