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Language teacher's pedagogical transformation through a critical autoethnographic lens

Soyhan Egitim^{a,*}, Darnell Watson^b^a Faculty of Global and Regional Studies, Toyo University, Address: Hakusan 5-28-20, Bunkyo-ward, Tokyo, 112-8606, Japan^b Faculty of Science and Engineering, Tokyo University of Science, Address: 6 Chome-3-1 Nijuku, Katsushika City, Tokyo, 125-8585, Japan

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ABSTRACT

The present critical autoethnography explores a language teacher's personal experiences of overcoming her resistance to change and transforming herself into an adaptive teacher through the practice of regular self-reflection. The subject of this study, Dar has been working in Japanese university English as a foreign language settings for over three decades. Dar had long identified as a language teacher with a strong sense of self-efficacy which helped her establish long-term teaching habits. However, as her autoethnographic narratives suggest, these habits promoted overdependence on the same pedagogical methods and approaches and gradually impeded her ability for creativity and pedagogical innovation in the classroom. One day she realized she needed to look inward and examine herself from a critical lens. As she unpacked her backpack, she acknowledged that being a white English-speaking American gave her a major advantage in the job market and thus, she was able to instantly secure a stable job. On the other hand, living in a foreign country as a single mother, which has one of the lowest levels of gender equality in the world (Lukyantseva, 2023; Nakamura et al., 2021), working in a predominantly male environment, having to learn a new language, and dealing with the challenges of raising a biracial child in a homogeneous environment helped her become more empathetic towards people with disadvantages. This empathetic lens allowed Dar to see the world through the lenses of her students. As she continued to engage in the practice of regular self-reflection, she also recognized her personal and pedagogical biases, which gave her an objective understanding of her position of authority in the classroom and enhanced her willingness to accept input from students and peers. As a result, Dar restored her curiosity for creativity and pedagogical innovation and regained her passion for teaching in the continuously evolving landscape of education.

1. Introduction

Language teacher (LT) self-efficacy is an essential skill for developing pedagogical methods and approaches that would best suit students' learning styles. Researchers associated high LT self-efficacy with enhanced teacher commitment, effective teaching activities, and better academic results, which contribute to establishing trust and credibility with students (Bandura, 1997; Fathi & Savadi Rostami, 2018; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). However, high LT self-efficacy in the long term could also promote certain teaching habits that may result in resistance to change.

Since the external environment is dynamic and subject to change, thanks to innovations and technological advancements, pedagogical habits/approaches may gradually become obsolete. Such was the case

during the global pandemic hit the world. Language educators across the globe were forced to adapt to the new educational landscape where all class activities were managed remotely. As a result, teachers had to abandon their old teaching habits and adopt new teaching approaches and strategies.

The question the present study raises is, "How do LTs become receptive to change while also possessing teaching habits cultivated through high self-efficacy?" Thus far, research has mostly focused on the positive characteristics associated with teacher self-efficacy including higher student engagement, motivation, and enhanced learning experience for students (Bandura, 2018; Farley, 2020; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). As these positive characteristics nurture pedagogical habits, little is known about how these habits affect teaching and learning outcomes in the constantly changing dynamic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: soyhanegitim@gmail.com (S. Egitim).

environment. In this regard, the present critical autoethnography explores an LT's personal experiences through the dialogical narratives focusing on the negative effects of the long-term pedagogical habits on her practices, and how she overcame those habits through the practice of regular self-reflection.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teacher self-efficacy and pedagogical habits

Self-efficacy is described as "a cognitive process where individuals learn new behaviors that affect their ability to improve future events" (Farley, 2020, p. 31). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) conceptualized teacher self-efficacy as "teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out classroom activities to attain maximum educational outcomes" (p. 1059). When it comes to language classrooms, self-efficacy is displayed through LTs' self-perception of their competence in managing the classroom, engaging students, and performing assigned teaching tasks (Bandura, 2018; Farley, 2020). As LTs achieve effective outcomes in these areas, they may develop a dependence on the methods and strategies leading up to these outcomes, which in turn results in teaching habits (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Certain benefits are associated with teaching habits such as effective management of time in preparation and execution of preferred activities, enhanced self-confidence when executing those activities, and decreased stress due to teachers' familiarity with the preferred methods and strategies (Ashton, 2022; Bandura, 2018; Krsmanovic, 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Furthermore, external factors such as excessive workload promote resistance to change. Many LTs experience burnout due to long teaching hours, lesson preparation, and other extracurricular duties (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Hence, depending on the same pedagogical methods and strategies can help manage long teaching hours with minimum preparation time. However, the external environment is dynamic, and bound to change (Burke, 2023). In this regard, resistance to change due to teaching habits could hinder LTs' ability to respond to the new challenges brought by the external environment and negatively impact the teaching and learning outcomes.

Major innovations require significant shifts in pedagogical approaches which may require experimenting with unfamiliar teaching methods, tools, and techniques (Koksal, 2013). In this regard, LTs need to develop an adaptive mindset to effectively respond to the new circumstances surrounding them. But "How do teachers break resistance and develop an adaptive mindset to effectively respond to the new circumstances surrounding them?" The following section tries to answer this question through the framework of reflective practice and unpacks the ways self-reflection can be used as an effective tool by LTs to think beyond their pedagogical habits and develop receptiveness towards change.

2.2. Language teacher self-reflection

Self-reflection is the process of examining one's beliefs, values, and underlying assumptions from a critical lens (Franklin, 2014; Wosnitza et al., 2018). LT self-reflection involves systematically examining how they plan and execute their practices, why they choose those practices, and what pedagogical outcomes they expect to accomplish (Egitim, 2022a; Farrell, 2020; Wosnitza et al., 2018). As LTs evolve into self-observing professionals, they give themselves the opportunity to "unpack their backpacks," examine their own practices, and grow confident to think beyond the pedagogical boundaries they set for themselves (Farrell, 2020; Franklin, 2014; Freire, 2020). By breaking through those boundaries, LTs can give themselves opportunities to experiment with new pedagogical methods and strategies, which would raise their confidence in planning, organizing, and executing new classroom activities (Bandura, 2018; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Skaalvik

& Skaalvik, 2010). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) described this phenomenon as "a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward" (p. 218). As LTs' sense of agency grows with their awareness of self, they become more confident in taking initiative for their growth (Wosnitza et al., 2018).

Furthermore, as LTs recognize the flaws and deficiencies in their practices, they develop receptiveness to adopting new ideas from their students and colleagues (Shonfeld & Gibson, 2018). Developing a collaborative perspective through reflective practice could also contribute to establishing meaningful interactions with colleagues at work, which may positively influence LTs' job satisfaction (Afshar & Doosti, 2016; Egitim, 2021a; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) studied the factors affecting LTs' job satisfaction and found that emotional factors such as LTs' sense of belonging and establishing meaningful relationships with colleagues were predictive of their emotional fulfillment in the work environment.

Finally, there have been numerous discussions around LT identity in relation to reflective practice (Barkhuizen, 2016; Farrell, 2020; Varghese et al., 2005). According to Barkhuizen (2016), identity negotiation often occurs when situations of inequality exist. Language classrooms are spaces where unequal power relations between LTs and students exist. Hence, LTs are often forced to engage in negotiating their identities (Barkhuizen, 2016; Farrell, 2020). In this regard, engaging in reflective practice can help "LTs become aware of and understand their professional identities which have direct implications for their practice" (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 40). As Franklin (2014) noted, if we think of our life-long experiences as our backpacks, unpacking them all would give us an opportunity to closely observe who we are in relation to others around us. This metacognitive process should help LTs recognize their limitations, biases, and privileges (Barkhuizen, 2016; Egitim, 2022a; Quan et al., 2019). When LTs recognize their position of power in the classroom dynamic, they can develop "an empathetic lens, which will not only help them understand the challenges others around them are experiencing but also, stimulate their desire to collaborate with them" (Egitim, 2022a, p. 25).

The present critical autoethnography explores the personal reflections of an LT who identified as an experienced educator with a high sense of self-efficacy. Through the dialogical narratives, the LT reflected on the pedagogical habits she formed over the years and the ways those habits affected her practices. The research question the present study seeks to answer is, "How does an LT perceive the role of regular practice of self-reflection in her pedagogical transformation?"

3. Method

3.1. Critical autoethnography

The present study employs critical autoethnography referred to as engaging in self-examination and self-reflection through complex, nuanced, and critically reflexive narratives in research (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Critical autoethnography is a research method that combines critical theory with autoethnography to better understand personal experiences through narratives and relate them to the broader contexts and processes of social inequality (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The term critical autoethnography was first used by Ellis and Bochner (2000) yet, its roots can be traced back to the work of Bourdieu (1993), who advocated for a reflexive sociology that would allow researchers to critically examine their own experiences and the broader social structures that shape them (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 2017). Since then, critical autoethnography has been used in a variety of fields, including education, sociology, and communication studies, to explore issues related to power, identity, and social justice.

In our critical autoethnography, we systematically analyzed my co-author, Dar's narratives to determine the changes she experienced in her teaching beliefs, philosophy, and practices from a critical lens. We used critical pedagogy, an educational philosophy premised on the

critical examination of power structures, as a framework to understand and make sense of the issues of power in the classroom, surface, and challenge the biases and oppressive structures resulting in inequality through Dar's self-reflective explorations of her personal lived experiences (Freire, 2020; Giroux, 2020, pp. 1–16). Dar's interrogation of self about "structures and systems, ideologies, assumptions, and norms by employing emic perspectives and self-narratives provided us with thick descriptions of the data to identify the intersections between the self and social life" (Adams et al., 2017, p. 1).

In this critical autoethnography, Dar's journals featuring her teaching artifacts and notes became the primary source of the data. Therefore, she was involved in the study as the co-author. Our conversations also provided additional insights to support the primary data. We used introspective analysis, which is referred to as closely examining the personal experiences of an individual in light of wider concepts and frameworks to allow them to identify the changes they experienced in their practices and beliefs (Hokkanen, 2017). For this purpose, we had three 5-h meetings over a month where we recorded key concepts to allow Dar to step outside of her own world, critically examine herself, and identify how her teaching philosophy, beliefs, and practices were transformed and what factors were behind this transformation.

We reviewed the recorded data using the in-vivo coding technique which allows participants' own words to serve as codes (Manning, 2017). Using Dar's own words in the data analysis brought authenticity and offered a deeper understanding of her personal accounts and perspectives. Then, we categorized the codes based on common characteristics to identify repeated patterns in each section from Dar's journals and our recorded conversations. Finally, we clustered those sections together under the emergent themes. We presented the data in the first person to maintain the authenticity of the findings. However, in other sections of this manuscript, we used, "we" and referred to Dar as "her" to maintain clarity throughout the manuscript.

What follows is a brief description of Dar as the researcher and participant:

I'm a 59-year-old white female American English teacher. I've lived and taught in the United States, China, and Japan. I've been teaching at the same university in Japan for 29 years now. I have a bachelor's degree in English and journalism and a master's in speech communication. Subjects I've taught include speaking and listening, public speaking, academic writing, intercultural communication, and science English. I'm a single mom of a biracial son. I love music, movies, anime, books, and art. I travel as much as possible. I've studied Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese, but I am not fluent. I don't have a great ear for music or language, and it's a struggle for me - something that profoundly influences me as a foreign language teacher giving me empathy for students who struggle as I do.

3.2. Positionality statement

As foreign language teachers who have been long-term residents of Japan with the experience of working within virtually every stage of the Japanese education system, we believed that we had a nuanced and detailed understanding of the social realities and common challenges facing foreign language teachers in Japan. However, as university faculty, we recognize our privileged position within the Japanese education system, as well as our disadvantages of being from an underrepresented background (first author) and being a single mother raising a biracial child in a predominantly male working environment (co-author). Although we made the utmost effort to strike a balance between our subjective lenses and the perspectives of Dar, we acknowledge that our individual experiences may have led to subjective interpretations of the social realities in Japan and influenced the findings of this study.

3.3. Ethical considerations

We followed the guidelines for conducting autoethnographic research designed by the university the first author was associated with. We ensured that we protected our own privacy and confidentiality by obtaining informed consent from those who were mentioned in Dar's autobiographical experiences (Dar and her son). As a result, all directly concerned individuals' rights were respected. They were treated fairly and equitably, and their welfare and concerns were taken seriously. Furthermore, we ensured that Dar was emotionally prepared to undertake the research and that she had access to appropriate support if needed.

3.4. Findings

Three major themes emerged through our introspective analysis of the autoethnographic data: *Unpacking the Backpack, Recognizing Privileges and Disadvantages, Pedagogical Transformation Through Self-reflection, and Global Pandemic and Beyond*.

3.5. Unpacking the backpack

I started teaching as a graduate teaching assistant at Portland State University while pursuing my master's degree. I will always remember those early days in my first classroom. I was so nervous on the first day that I finished my 60-min class in 15 min, mostly by talking too fast. Later, some of my students told me they gave up on taking notes because they couldn't keep up. Over time, I learned to talk slower, read the room better, and manage my lessons more effectively. I relied heavily on a textbook which very much became a crutch for me but a highly effective one at the time.

My next teaching experience was at a political science and law university in Beijing, China. This was my first experience living outside of the United States which was life-changing. I just assumed that basics like central heating, hot water, privacy, and Western-style supermarkets were universal. I was wrong - about many things. I learned to navigate my way around the city, mostly by bike. I learned enough Chinese to haggle at the local markets for groceries. And I had to unlearn even more. Many of my assumptions and expectations simply were not accurate. My Chinese students were my first experience with non-native English speakers, and I had to adapt many of my classroom habits. My students didn't understand much of what I said and had no cultural reference for many of the expressions and vocabulary I used. I had to learn to slow down, repeat things, find new ways to explain things, write everything down, and, most of all, learn to have more patience. I realized they were trying and motivated - but most of them had never had a native English speaker in the classroom, so it was a new experience for them as well. I would say that every day in the classroom was an experiment as I struggled to find meaningful and effective ways to teach them English.

One of the most helpful things occurred outside of the classroom. Because my students lived in dorms on campus, I was able to spend a great deal of time with them. Often, groups of them would come to my campus apartment to cook, partly to avoid the dreaded cafeteria and partly to practice their English with me. I even had students lining up outside my door to use my shower in the evening on the nights they had no hot water in their dorms. On the weekends, we would explore the city, and they would explain cultural and historical sites to me. The more we bonded outside the classroom, the better things went inside. By the end of the year, I had gained much confidence and felt I could teach anyone anywhere. Struggling to teach my first non-American students while living overseas for the first time taught me a lot about trying to understand what my students might be experiencing. Trying to navigate my way around a foreign city was similar to their attempts to navigate around a classroom with a foreign teacher.

Following this experience, I returned to the U.S. and began teaching

intensive English to Japanese students participating in study abroad programs. I was convinced that my trial-by-fire experience in Beijing would yield great results in all future classrooms, but I quickly learned otherwise. These classes required more adjustments as the students were far more passive. I had to learn an entirely new way of approaching my lessons to find ways to engage my students, who were often silent. Rarely would a student ask a question or even respond to one, and it was one of the most frustrating experiences I have ever had in the classroom. I had to make several changes, including adding structure and assuming a more autocratic role as a teacher. The students were attentive and interested but needed more structure.

After this experience, I was hired by a university in Japan, where I have taught for going on 30 years. This experience was, once again, unlike any of my previous classroom situations. My classes were much larger than any of my previous ones - approximately 50 students per class - and unlike my study abroad students who were eager to learn English, many of my new students showed little interest or motivation. These classes were 90 min once a week, and I sensed a great deal of boredom among the students and felt incredible frustration on my part. And I blamed all of it on my students, convinced that I was a wonderful teacher, and they were poor students.

3.6. Recognizing Privileges and Disadvantages

Many factors have contributed to the empathy I have for students. Living in a foreign country where I couldn't speak the language is one. My struggle trying to learn a foreign language is another. Facing discrimination as a female - it is clear that men are often favored over women for teaching positions in Japanese universities, is yet another, and Japanese teachers are often favored over non-Japanese (Egitim, 2022b; McCandie, 2021; Nagatomo, 2016). As the sole foreign teacher on my campus, there were many occasions when I was not approved for budget increases, which meant buying many resources out of my own pocket, including my own computers. The vote required unanimous approval, and it repeatedly came down to two professors who said the extra funds should not be allocated to a foreign teacher. When one retired, and one was fired, things finally changed. Moreover, as foreigners, many of us face discrimination, whether passed by for promotions or rejected by landlords. We have encountered rental companies and landlords who refused to consider renting to *gaijin* (non-Japanese), even when our sponsor was Japanese (Lee & Davis, 2020).

On the other hand, I can't deny that being a white English-speaking American has given me certain privileges. I have a stable position at a private university in a country where, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, only 30% of university positions are held by women. Privilege can be difficult to identify - it is undeniably relative and subjective. Sometimes it can be as significant as finding a job, and sometimes it can be something seemingly innocuous (Barkhuizen, 2016; Moosavi, 2022). When I lived in Beijing for a year, I could easily enter any international hotel without any questions - which I sometimes did, just to use a sparkling clean bathroom. On the other hand, Chinese people were denied entry unless they could prove they were a guest staying in the hotel. It seemed outrageous, but it didn't stop me from racing in to use the loo whenever possible.

Another challenging experience that taught me empathy was raising my biracial son in Japan. As he struggled to learn Japanese and fit in, I understood how hard it is to be different. I grew up in the United States and never experienced that particular challenge. Watching him try to make friends, communicate with his teachers, and experience rejection and ridicule was painful for both of us. Bullying is a serious problem, and my son has experienced it often (Rappleby & Komatsu, 2020). I went out of my way to communicate with other moms and invite their children into our home, hoping that playing together would remove some barriers. Eventually, he started making friends, and some things got easier as he learned more Japanese. Once his classmates had to begin studying

English in junior high, he became rather popular. I will never forget the pain he experienced, and I never wanted one of my students to feel ostracized or less than others. It had a profound impact on my classroom practices.

3.7. Pedagogical Transformation Through Self-reflection

I did recognize that changes were needed and started with the classes themselves - we shifted to smaller classes, different content, and level assessments. Things improved, but not to the extent that I imagined they would. I remained convinced that passive students with little motivation were the root of the problem. It didn't occur to me that I was part of the problem. Only when I started asking some of my students about their personal interests, did I start to question my assumptions and my own sense of efficacy. When I asked them what they did with their free time, their answers surprised me. Some of them were developing apps. Some were doing coding. Some were building robots, and at least one was busy applying for a patent.

It struck me that these were bright young people passionate about their interests and capable of accomplishing great things. I started asking myself why I wasn't getting more out of these bright young people who were clearly intelligent and motivated. I started making sweeping changes in my classes. Being mindful of their age, cultural background, and priorities, I stopped relying on textbooks and started creating content meant to be more relevant. One adjustment I've made is adapting lessons relevant to their age and experience. Units include part-time jobs, the challenges of living alone, school clubs, festivals, and goals. Goals, broken down into short-term, long-term, academic, language, and personal, are meant to challenge them to take responsibility for their effort and achievements and consider strategies to guide them. I have also created content aligned with their backgrounds in science and technology, including biomimicry, virtual reality, space technology, robotics, and AI, to include topics relevant to their future career goals. I no longer lecture my classes and put the onus on my students to write engaging passages on each topic to share in class. This process means reflecting on ideas or experiences and sometimes reading or watching relevant material.

Another component I added was keeping journals. This was a throwback to my time in China when my bonding with students outside of class yielded much better results in the classroom. Logistically, it's impossible to physically spend time with my students as I did in Beijing. Now, the journals have allowed me to have an ongoing dialogue with them that gives me much insight into their daily lives, struggles, interests, hopes, and ambitions. This also encourages them to study independently, to be more reflective, and to be more mindful of their goals. The journals also give me insight into what they're thinking, what they're experiencing, and what interests them. My lessons are much more output-oriented than in my earlier teaching years. Now, my students put far more effort into their work, and by the end of the year, they often say they have more confidence in their abilities and interest in learning English.

3.8. Global Pandemic and Beyond

Another catalyst for change was the Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020. The fact that everything shifted beyond the confines of campus was one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced as an educator. I had no experience whatsoever with teaching remotely, which made me seriously consider resigning. I had never heard of Zoom, let alone had any idea how to use it, nor did many of my colleagues, or our students for that matter. I should mention that many teachers at many schools struggled with this transition with varying degrees of success. Teachers who had a high level of technical expertise fared much better. Two things made all the difference for me.

First, the emergence of an online community for teachers in Japan, Online Teaching Japan (OTJ) meant to throw a lifeline to anyone who

needed help and the support of a few colleagues in a similar state of panic - both of which were immensely helpful. The OTJ was flooded with messages from teachers who needed help - mostly because very few schools provided any support for faculty or students. It was sink or swim, and it was a rare time in academia when teachers had enormous empathy for each other and reached out to help one another. For some of us, it also meant having empathy for our students, many of whom were also struggling. I say some of us because I observed many teachers overloading students with extra work to offset the lack of time spent in classrooms.

Moreover, only some students had the resources needed to function online - another fact frequently overlooked. Despite these circumstances, I tried to show my students the same degree of understanding that I needed - whether it was not using their cameras, zooming in from public places, signing in late, or turning in work late. Frankly, three decades of teaching expertise nearly went out the window when most of my lessons didn't transfer well to remote learning. I had to learn and relearn so many things, and I made many mistakes along the way. I still have some anxiety over the stress and despair of trying to change everything when none of my previous methods were effective. Now, after three years of teaching online, I'm readjusting to being back in the classroom and realizing that you can't simply go back to what previously worked. There are ongoing adjustments for me and my students, many of whom have mixed feelings about losing the freedom and autonomy that came with remote classes. I try to remember that we're all going through the same transition, and they still need my patience and understanding.

There have been many moments that caused me to reassess my habits and practices (Bandura, 2018; Farrell, 2020). Whether it was frustration with class performance or the necessity of teaching remotely during the pandemic, I would make changes, convinced I was making major improvements and could proceed comfortably and with ease. I think the best word here would be complacency. I think that is one of the biggest threats to self-improvement and progress. Complacency is a constant concern for me as I struggle to find new and better ways to engage my students. Years ago, I became aware that for many classes, students were sharing notes from year to year, photocopying hundreds of pages of notes to be passed along. I was initially surprised and then disappointed because it meant that many teachers had been recycling the same material for several years. I started wondering if my students were able to do this with my classes, and I was determined to change things up so they couldn't easily share things from year to year - mostly because I didn't want to find myself stagnating in the classroom. I don't think constant change is necessary, but I do think it's important to revisit ideas and find ways to improve them. I have created a lot of new content because of this, and I thought I was doing great things until the unexpected happened - the pandemic brought everything I was familiar with to a screeching halt.

As for the practice of recycling lessons and the constant threat of stagnation, all the blame can't fall on the faculty. Schools themselves play a large role in these circumstances. For starters, many teachers hold part-time positions, meaning they must work multiple jobs to survive - with none of the benefits of full-time work. They must teach excessively heavy classloads on multiple campuses earning no bonuses, no pension, and paying for their own insurance. There is little incentive for self-reflection or change when survival depends on streamlining lessons in the most efficient way possible (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Even full-time teachers can fall into this trap, with all the pressure for research and publishing on top of numerous department meetings and administrative work. Once a lesson plan or an exam proves effective, there might be little time for re-evaluation or improvement. Especially when all of the promotion criteria are based upon scholarly merit rather than classroom performance, students can end up being a low priority. Class evaluations are meant to be one of the most significant measures to motivate teachers to reflect upon and improve their classroom performance. However, they are largely ineffectual as the design lacks too

many ways, often revealing little more than a student's personal bias of liking or disliking a teacher. Teachers summarily dismiss them, which suggests that it's time to redesign these tools to provide more useful feedback.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present critical autoethnography explored an LT's experiences in and outside the classroom to understand the ways self-reflection facilitated her pedagogical transformation. Dar's personal narratives revealed that she identified as a teacher with a strong sense of self-efficacy which enabled her to plan, organize, and execute suitable activities for EFL students (Bandura, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). At first, Dar perceived her pedagogical practices as effective for students and brought enhanced learning outcomes in different settings. However, as she continued to use the same methods and strategies, she began to recognize the flaws in her practice.

Dar's engagement in the practice of self-reflection played an important role in recognizing her privileges of being white, American, and a native speaker, and the disadvantages of being a single mother of a mixed-race child in a patriarchal and homogeneous society (Lukyantseva, 2023; Nakamura et al., 2021). Hence, she developed an empathetic lens, which allowed her to view the world from her students' lenses (Egitim, 2022). The reflective practice was what led her to break through the boundaries she once set around herself. It allowed her to experiment with new pedagogical methods and approaches that catered to her students' needs and expectations.

Dar's experience of natural acquisition and scholastic learning of English would require possessing a high degree of empathy and introspection to comprehend the learning experience of the EFL students tasked with the complexity of second language acquisition. According to Egitim (2021b), "There is no other subject in which the teacher does not have the experience of learning the content in the same way as their students" (p. 1). Being aware of one's perceptions and abilities in contrast to others is a necessary element for creating an environment conducive to successful language teaching (Bandura, 2018; Farrell, 2020; Franklin, 2014). Engaging in regular self-reflection to recognize one's personal and pedagogical biases (Franklin, 2014), paired with an objective understanding of their position of authority, their willingness to accept input from students and peers (Egitim, 2022; Shonfeld & Gibson, 2018), and their curiosity for creativity and pedagogical innovation appeared to be the three premises for becoming an effective language teacher. Dar's transformation was the result of following these premises, which helped her think beyond the pedagogical habits she once had established (see Fig. 1).

The present critical autoethnography presents a case that teachers in similar positions may also relate to. Dar's responses revealed that the excessive workload was a factor in her pedagogical choices (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). It is not uncommon to see teachers embrace the practice of recycling lessons to cope with their heavy teaching load. Hence, the issue of teacher burnout needs to be further investigated so that sustainable strategies are considered at the administrative level to enhance the quality of language education in school settings.

We recommend that the potential benefits of reflective practice be emphasized in teacher training and developmental workshops. Encouraging teachers to look inward through a critical lens would give them the opportunity to examine their limitations, biases, and privileges and recognize their position of power and how that impacts teaching and learning outcomes. Furthermore, school administrators should reevaluate power structures and patterns of inequality through a critical lens. Reassessment of these structures and patterns can help establish more open, participatory, and democratic educational environments.

Limitations

Despite the critical perspectives offered through this

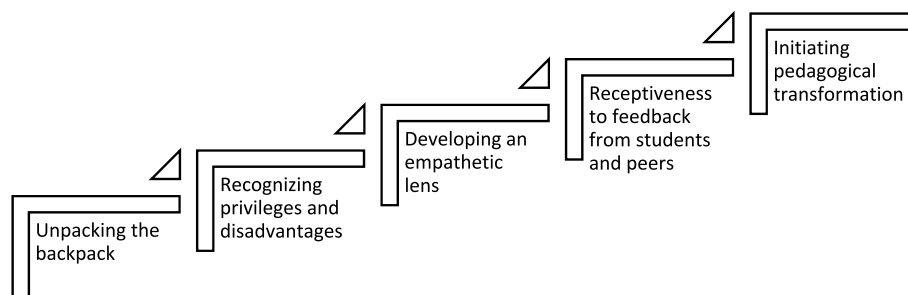


Fig. 1. Step-by-step process of reflective practice.

autoethnographic research, one of the limitations remains the over-reliance on one person's perspectives. Therefore, forming a focus group with people from different backgrounds, where multiple views are offered, has the potential to provide a well-rounded discussion on self-efficacy, pedagogical habits, and factors behind pedagogical transformations. Since there are no formal regulations regarding the writing of an autoethnographic account, Dar found herself engaging with difficult and often traumatic experiences which made it difficult to balance Dar's own voice and perspectives with the broader social context. Finally, although we made the utmost effort to remain transparent about all aspects of this study to enhance the rigor and objectivity, we were not able to share raw visual/handwritten data, to ensure individual identities were protected, in light of the increasing possibilities of technologies identifying particular features of a person's face, body language, and writing style.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Soyhan Egitim: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Darnell Watson:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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