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**autoethnography in
online doctoral education**

**A SPECIAL ISSUE EDITED BY
KYUNGMEET LEE**

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Oma Eguara, Thomas Leach, Kyungmee Lee, Mary L McDowell Lefavier,
Jean-Baptiste Maurice, Sophia Mavridi, Regina Obexer,
Konstantinos Petsiosis, Lenlandlar Singh, Fayola St. Bernard,
Panagiota Tzanni, Karen Villalba, Puiyin Wong

16 full-length articles,
a collective reflection
and an editorial



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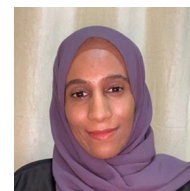
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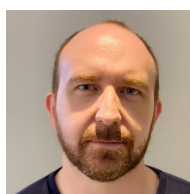
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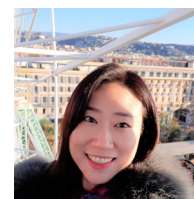
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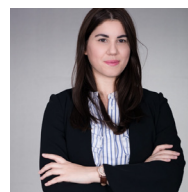
Panagiota's research interests include online professional development and how it can be designed and implemented in order to reach its full potential. In addition, Panagiota is very interested in those constraints and barriers that do not allow faculty members to use learning technologies in higher education. For example, several institutions around the world have initiated digital transformation projects and faculty members are required to include learning technologies or teach online. This new reality seems challenging for some of them, and I am interested in finding out these types of professional development or training that will help them in their new roles. Finally, I am also interested in developing digital skills for higher education learners, especially in contexts with low resources or learning cultures that do not support the use of learning technologies.

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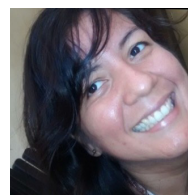
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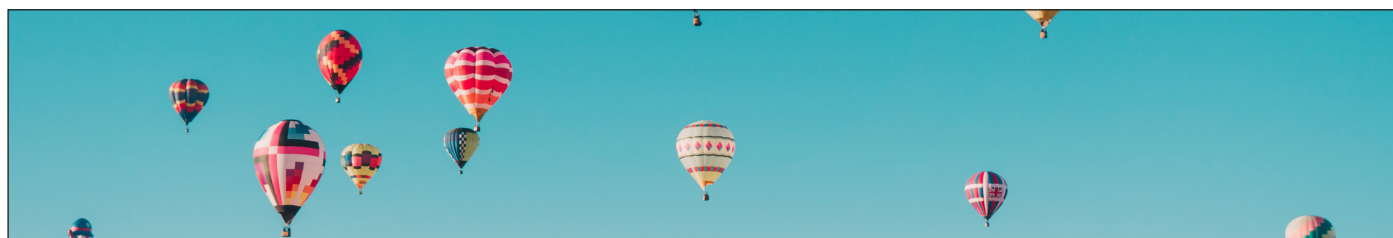
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Introducing 16 doctoral autoethnographers in an online PhD programme

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1. Situating the autoethnographies in context

Keywords

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This special issue consists of 16 autoethnographies and a collective reflection written by doctoral students while participating in the first module of an online PhD programme, *e-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning* (TEL), at the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University in the UK. The programme, each year, welcomes an international cohort of about 25-30 new doctoral students who are working professionals in different educational and cultural contexts. These students, who are also performing multiple social roles in their personal lives, choose to enrol in this particular online programme as it offers greater accessibility and flexibility than other campus-based programmes. For many, online education is almost the only feasible option to obtain a PhD degree without disrupting their established professional and personal lives *too much*. However, it is crucial to develop a realistic sense of the accessibility of online doctoral education. Whether online or not, doing a PhD is a massive challenge for all doctoral students who are likely to experience some degree of disruption and destabilisation in their everyday routines, habits, and relationships (Lee, 2020a). Although the physical flexibility of the online PhD programme allows them to embark on their studies without leaving their living and working contexts, completing the academic requirements of the programme as a part-time student alongside all other responsibilities can be extremely challenging.

The first module, *Research Methods in Education and Social Science Settings*, is designed to help these new doctoral students develop the philosophical and methodological foundations required to successfully plan and conduct TEL research. More importantly, the module aims to support students in becoming doctoral researchers who can effectively and critically engage with academic conversations and debates in a personally and socially meaningful way. As the diversity among the topics of the 16 articles in this issue effectively demonstrates, each doctoral student (a mature adult in their 30s to 60s) joins the module with unique life (hi-)stories and diverse cultural and educational experiences. Nevertheless, most doctoral students, at least in my own experiences teaching this module for the past seven years, have somewhat similar research ideas (or *a priori* goals) that are well-aligned with mainstream TEL discourses and propositional knowledge embedded in such discourses—enhancing *others'* educational experiences by utilising a range of technologies and technological affordances (Bligh & Lee, 2020b). Many also want to learn and use research methods commonly used by established TEL researchers. Although the more specific research topics each student plans to explore are primarily drawn from their professional contexts and practices, doctoral researchers themselves are always seen as distant from their research subjects. In other words, their planned research projects are always about helping others, most frequently other students and other teachers.

2. Tracing the beginning of the autoethnographies

Personally, my PhD was a transformative learning journey through which I grew into a different person, although not totally new but a significantly different person with new knowledge and beliefs that are not necessarily commensurable with my old ones. That journey involved many moments of self-doubts and confusion. As an international student in a new academic and cultural space (relocated from South Korea to Canada), the journey was about struggling to make sense of who I was and who I wanted to become. I chose to deal with disorienting dilemmas (Lee, 2020b) in my everyday life by actively investigating those moments through academic reading, discussion, and writing, that is, through research activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, connecting the two dots—personal struggles and academic engagement—was not fully encouraged in my postgraduate programmes (I believe it was not different from most of the TEL programmes worldwide). It was, at best, allowed in a rather limited sense such that adding a brief “personal motivation” section in the introduction of the thesis was recommended. I was fortunate to have supportive academic advisors and

close colleagues who experienced similar struggles and were willing to work with me. Through those interactions, I could integrate my subjective perspectives, emotions, and experiences more directly into my research. Nevertheless, the process was neither natural nor guided.

Eventually, I became a TEL researcher who believes that meaningful research endeavours should depart from the researcher herself, and the effective integration of the researcher's self into the research activities creates both personally and socially beneficial outcomes. I also developed critical perspectives on the mainstream TEL discourses and research, which I found conflicting with my everyday experiences. Luckily, upon the immediate completion of my PhD, I became a doctoral advisor working with a large group of doctoral researchers from around the world. Despite the academic privilege of being on a permanent contract with one of the respected UK universities, as a new PhD myself, advising doctoral students in an unfamiliar cultural and educational context was not straightforward. Expectations and experiences of my part-time students online are significantly different from what I had as a funded full-time PhD student on campus (free from financial and social obligations). Especially during the first two or three years, the learning curve was steep, and there were countless moments of self-doubt and confusion, which during this time, naturally and directly became the focus of my research (Lee, 2019; 2021; in press). Utilising key methodological principles informed by autoethnography, a qualitative research approach that puts the researcher at the centre of the scholarly inquiry to explore specific social relationships and cultural practices, I have investigated the struggles and discomforts I experienced while teaching on the online PhD programme.

3. Doing the autoethnographies for research and teaching

I incorporated autoethnography not only in my research but also in my teaching as a means to create an organic but deliberate connection between my research and teaching endeavours and further help my students do the same. I have conducted and taught autoethnography in my research methods module for the past five years (it was for my third year when I decided to entirely scrap and rewrite the first module to bring autoethnography as the main research methodology that every student learns and performs). Although the full explanations can be found in my previous publications (see Lee, 2019, 2021), simply put, understanding my students and my struggling relationship with them (or some of them) became my primary research agenda. Student autoethnographies turned out to be extremely

useful research resources for that purpose. In guiding and supporting their autoethnographic journey as a module tutor, I continuously deepened my understanding of *our struggles* (not only mine but students') inside and outside our relationships. Such understandings (i.e., my autoethnographic research outcomes) have dramatically transformed my perspectives on online doctoral students and their learning (and living) experiences, leading to better and more mutually respectful relationships. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that I still meet new and unexpected challenges in that process even after the five years of doing so. Thus, I do not want to overclaim or fantasise about the effectiveness of doing autoethnography, but it has undoubtedly helped me to be a better tutor.

On the teaching side of my endeavours, I hoped to offer structured and guided support (as I wished to have) for doctoral students to establish a meaningful connection between their personal struggles and academic engagement. There was a strong pedagogical conviction about the value of autoethnography as a useful tool for novice TEL researchers to explore their own past to make sense of the present and envision a better future—ultimately, to become a more ethical TEL researcher. The most valuable lesson that I have learned so far is how unique each doctoral researcher is as an authentic being in their own historical and cultural contexts. Their learning motivations, attitudes, and experiences in the module are shaped by the complex dynamics of their unique personal histories (including professional career trajectories) and cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. On the surface, these doctoral students come across as confident professionals with an extensive level of experience, knowledge and expertise. However, by learning and doing autoethnography in the module, they develop a shared sense of unfamiliarity and discomfort with this new research approach, focusing on themselves (i.e., their struggles, weaknesses, problems) as a subject of their scholarly inquiry. The unfamiliarity and discomfort further enable them to realise and reveal the underlying social and cultural problems that they were not necessarily aware of before carefully researching them. Thus, personal struggles caused by unjust social structures and relationships are among the shared themes in many autoethnographers in the module.

4. Preparing the special issue: What can this special issue offer?

As demonstrated by the 16 autoethnographies in this special issue, whether conscious or not (and obvious or not), there are always different forms of injustice in any given society. These doctoral autoethnographers, as social beings,

have also been subjected to and influenced by such injustice in their participating society. However, they realise that while they have never been entirely free from the damages of the particular injustice, they have also contributed to the injustice leading to damaging others in their lives without intending to do so. Nevertheless, their autoethnographic narratives are not simply pessimistic as they also speak about how they have successfully navigated and overcome such problems and minimised the subsequent damages throughout their lives. Doing a PhD, in some cases, is also a means to address those problems. Therefore, autoethnography in this online doctoral programme is a deliberate attempt to move *ourselves* from marginal and peripheral positions to central and core positions in our TEL research, creating more critical and ethical academic discourses and practices (Lee, in press). By investigating their own experiences of social injustice and associated struggles, doctoral students learn how to critically engage with (and refute or refuse) dominant TEL discourses that often dismiss the unjust social conditions in which a particular technology is developed and used. Also, the doctoral autoethnographers develop a balanced perspective on TEL and technology, which is not a neutral tool, but a political force that can both address and exacerbate the existing social and educational problems.

This special issue, *Autoethnography in Online Doctoral Education*, is intended to show other TEL researchers what it looks like for us to connect our personal struggles and academic engagement, reflecting on more ethical TEL research methods and practices. The special issue, a collection of online doctoral students' authentic voices, can also be a unique and beneficial add-on to the previous literature on (online) doctoral education, helping readers to genuinely appreciate the great diversity of the group. Furthermore, researchers interested in autoethnography as a research method and educators intrigued by utilizing autoethnography as a pedagogical method may find this collection of autoethnographies useful—in particular, they may find *A collective reflection on writing an autoethnography* at the end of the issue interesting. Each autoethnography with a distinctive topic can also attract different groups of audiences.

In Summer 2021, as an editor of the special issue, I circulated a call for papers to be included in this special issue to about 100 doctoral researchers who wrote autoethnographies in my module between 2018 and 2021. The call suggested revising their autoethnography assignments based on the module tutor's final feedback before submitting them to the journal. Among 26 autoethnographies that were initially submitted, five were considered incomplete and thus, excluded from the peer-review process. Another five

were rejected based on the peer-review outcomes. Among the 16 autoethnographers, seven authors and I have co-written and edited the collective reflection. Before readers dive into this special issue, I would like to briefly introduce the 16 doctoral autoethnographers.

5. Introducing 16 doctoral autoethnographers

5.1 Five teachers

Five autoethnographies in this special issue are written by teachers in different educational contexts. These teacher autoethnographers will be introduced below in alphabetical order according to their surnames.

The first author, Salwa Al Sulaimi, is an English lecturer at a university in Oman. Her contribution to the issue, *Teacher-student rapport in emergency remote teaching: Autoethnography* (Al Sulaimi, 2022), explores her emergency remote teaching experiences during the first part of the Covid-19 pandemic. Among different aspects of the educational disruption caused by the complete absence of face-to-face communication, Salwa focuses on teachers' difficulty establishing rapport with their students. Her clever use of a theoretical framework called "categories of teacher-student rapport antecedents" to systematically analyse her experiences and coherently present her findings stands out. Salwa also includes the voices of three other teachers to validate and deepen her understanding. The autoethnography, thus, provides a clear overview of different rapport-building strategies teachers adopted for face-to-face versus remote teaching and a range of challenges teachers found difficult to overcome during the pandemic.

Next, we have Thomas Leach, an English teacher currently working for the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates as an English editor and proofreader. Leach's (2022) autoethnography, *The hammer and the scalpel: A teacher's experience of workplace bullying*, deals with a frequently happening but less frequently discussed and researched social problem. Victims of workplace bullying often find it challenging to report and prove such incidents due to their subtle and subjective nature. Despite the challenge, Thomas powerfully illustrates and reflects on his past experiences of being bullied at two different institutions by adopting an evocative writing approach. Thomas also effectively interweaves his personal voices with other victims' voices represented in academic literature, which makes his autoethnographic narratives more persuasive. Readers may feel relieved to learn that Thomas has grown out of the negative experiences, becoming resilient.

Another powerful evocative autoethnography, *Thirty-one and counting in the shadow: A teacher's autoethnography*, is written by Konstantinos Petsiotis. Petsiotis (2022) has long held a dual teacher identity as a Greek state school English teacher and a private English tutor. Given that such involvement in private tutoring is complex under Greek policies, his somewhat confessional piece of autoethnography feels dangerously engaging and strangely therapeutic. Konstantinos, based on careful recollections of life events and documents, has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics between the two identities and their impact on his professional and personal life. Konstantinos has also effectively used literature to draw deeper insights from his autobiographic narratives, through which he has successfully revealed some of the underlying mechanism that enables the dual teacher identity in the Greek social and educational context.

Panagiota Tzanni is an English as Academic Purpose (EAP) Lecturer at a transnational higher education institution in China. Tzanni (2022), in *Discrimination and native-speakerism in English for Academic Purposes*, critically reflects on her and her colleagues' experiences of being and feeling discriminated against in favour of other EAP teachers who are native English speakers. Although native-speakerism is a well-acknowledged phenomenon (often considered inevitable) across English teaching and learning contexts, how it influences non-native teachers' professional and personal development has not been fully unpacked and discussed. In that sense, reading through Panagiota's emotional accounts of disappointments and discouragements is upsetting but helpful. Readers can also learn that a lack of transparency in employment practices makes it even more difficult and distressing for non-native teachers to prove and fight against such native-speakerism and subsequent discrimination.

Our last teacher autoethnographer is Karen Villalba, an English Lecturer at a university in Colombia who teaches both face-to-face and online. Villalba's (2022) autoethnography, *Learning to "see" again: Overcoming challenges while teaching English to visually-impaired students*, deals with one of the critical issues in TEL—increasing the accessibility of educational provisions for students with different disabilities. Karen's research context is uniquely interesting from two perspectives; firstly, it is about face-to-face education required to supplement online education, which is often the opposite. Secondly, it directly refutes the common assumption of the accessibility of online education by vividly illustrating both students' and teachers' emotional frustrations in inaccessible online learning environments. The graphics also play an ironically interesting role; firstly, it makes online learning inaccessible to the students in the autoethnography,

but secondly, Karen's attempt to visualise her findings makes the autoethnography more accessible to its readers.

5.2 Five TEL practitioners

Next, we have five doctoral autoethnographers whose everyday responsibilities lie in supporting and managing other people's TEL practice and educational development. Readers can meet each of them below in alphabetical order of their surnames.

The first TEL practitioner here is Kristo Ceko. Kristo is a Principal of a language school in Albania, where he is responsible for the effective integration of technology across the institution. In his autoethnography, *Barriers to utilizing technological tools and the role of a principal: Autoethnography*, Ceko (2022) focuses on the long-existing tension between himself and English teachers who resist using technology in their classrooms. His critical self-reflection and semi-structured interviews with teachers suggested that he had an autocratic (not democratic) approach to working with the teachers, failing to fully understand and appreciate different issues and problems experienced by the teachers when using technology. TEL practitioners' frustration with teacher resistance is almost cliché now, but it is rare for us to be self-critical about our beliefs and attitudes. In that sense, Kristo's honest sharing is unique and much appreciated, making readers hopeful about the future of the field.

Mary L McDowell Lefaiver is a Learning and Development Manager in a private education sector in the United States. Lefaiver (2022), in her autoethnography, *An invisible fork in the road: The autoethnography of a female social scientist*, critically reflects on her upbringing and educational trajectory that has led her to move away from mathematics and science, where she had a great passion and curiosity as a young girl, to social sciences, where she was more accepted and welcomed as an educated girl. The reconciliation with her parents, who unconsciously carved the move, and the irony that she has eventually chosen to be a social "scientist" may make readers feel both pleased and bitter. The autoethnography is her first attempt to engage with feminist theory to make sense of her own becoming, which has become a core part of her scholarly identity.

Next, we have Sophia Mavridi, a Digital Learning Specialist and Lecturer in English language teaching from the UK. Her autoethnography, *Emergency remote teaching and me: An autoethnography by a digital learning specialist during Covid-19* (Mavridi, 2022), vividly describes her experiences of becoming a recognised voice through her active interactions with other teachers on social media

platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sophia honestly shares the complex feelings of excitement, disappointment, and frustration she experienced while striving to support teachers' online transition. However, working with teachers with diverse pedagogical beliefs and perspectives different from hers, Sophia reconsidered and transformed her beliefs and developed more nuanced and balanced perspectives. It is interesting to follow her narratives, helpful to understand how TEL practitioners learn and develop.

The fourth doctoral autoethnographer, Regina Obexer, is a Senior Lecturer and Head at the Center for Responsible Management & Social Impact at the Entrepreneurial School in Austria. Her autoethnography (Obexer, 2022) in *Lost in third space: Identity work of a higher education "blended professional"* deals with the difficulty of constructing a coherent professional identity, which is one of the everyday struggles experienced by many TEL practitioners. Regina employs the notions of "blended professional" and "hybrid space" to unpack such difficulty. As her job titles suggest, having a fluid professional identity has required her to consistently move between academic and professional spaces, often without her own will. Her autobiographic narratives offer valuable insights into how TEL practitioners might be positioned in the hybrid space in the first place and how they would navigate hybridity afterwards.

Puiyin Wong is the last to be introduced in this section. Puiyin is a Learning Technologist at a university located in the UK. Her autoethnography entitled *Surviving institutional racism as a Chinese female in UK higher education* (Wong, 2022) directly tackles one kind of injustice prevailing across higher education contexts. Puiyin reflects on a series of critical incidents she has experienced throughout her university life, both as a student and a staff member from a minority background. Puiyin does not reduce those upsetting incidents to interpersonal problems but conceptualises them as representations of institutional racism—the failure of university systems to tackle racism. While readers can hear her anger and frustration facing the glass ceiling, seemingly unbreakable, her story does not end there. As the title suggests, Puiyin sees herself as a survivor who has fought against injustice and pushed the glass ceiling one step up.

5.3 Two networked learners

Next are two doctoral autoethnographers, Oma Eguara and Lenandlar Singh, who have studied their professional development experiences in networked learning contexts.

Oma Eguara is a Primary School Teacher in the UK with a research interest in facilitating children's engagement

in online learning networks. To Eguara (2022), one of the ultimate barriers to such educational practices is that most teachers are not networked learners themselves simply because they have never been educated in such democratic learning paradigms. Thus, in her autoethnography, *Becoming a networked learner: Unpacking identity development in networked learning communities*, Oma explores her experiences participating in three networked learning communities of different natures, including one developed in the TEL doctoral programme. Utilising analytic lenses drawn from Bourdieu's social theory and networked learning theory, Oma has systematically recorded and analysed her identity development as a networked learner. This piece offers useful insights into how to effectively design and nurture networked learning communities.

The next networked learner who contributed to the special issue is Lenandlar Singh, a Lecturer in Computer Science at a university in Guyana. Singh's (2020) piece, *An autoethnographic account of the use of Twitter for professional development by novice academic*, explores his use of Twitter as a medium of communication and networking with other educators and researchers around the globe. The autoethnography is well-grounded in a series of Twitter data analysis methods whose outcomes vividly demonstrate the interesting mixture of intentional, serendipitous, and spontaneous elements of Lenandlar's networked learning experiences. What is particularly valuable about this autoethnography is that it provides a balanced perspective on both the benefits and challenges associated with networked learning, followed by potentially practical strategies to address those challenges.

5.4 Four students

We can also hear some specifically *students'* voices in this special issue. Three doctoral autoethnographers look back on their educational experiences in the past, and one investigates current university students' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic from the staff perspective.

Mohanad Alani, an English Lecturer at a vocational training institute in the United Arab Emirates, is the first to be introduced. Alani (2022), in his autoethnography *Identity and academic performance in higher education: The effects of racial profiling on the motivation and psychological needs of foreign students in Europe*, attempts to make sense of his previous academic experiences being subjected to racial bias and discriminative treatments as an international student from the Middle East in the UK. These incidents, often mistaken as insignificant, can have significant (and potentially very negative) impacts on the self-perceptions

and learning motivation of minority students like Mohanad. Although it is a relief to learn that Mohanad has successfully turned those negative incidents to grow his inner strengths and autonomous learning abilities, the narrative urgently calls for more inclusive and sensitive pedagogical attitudes among students, teachers, and staff in higher education.

Next, we have Franci DaLuz, an Associate Director of Admission at a public higher education institution in the United States. *Finding "your" people: The impact of mentoring relationships in overcoming barriers to academic achievement in underrepresented student populations* (DaLuz, 2022) describes her academic experiences as a first-generation college student with a minority background. Franci's autoethnography focuses on one of the common struggles shared by this group, the so-called "Imposter Syndrome", and explores how it impacted her academic choices and experiences. Franci gradually overcame her imposter feelings by meeting and interacting with three mentors who genuinely cared—found and encouraged her academic potential and commitment. The beauty of her autoethnography is that it includes both her and her mentors' voices together, constructing a coherent and complete narrative.

Thirdly, Jean-Baptiste Maurice is a Director in a Business school in France, managing the digital transformation & innovations department. Maurice's (2022) contribution, *The student experience in higher education reshaped by the pandemic: The autoethnographic perspective of a business school staff member*, approaches the investigation of university students' well-being issues during the Covid-19 pandemic in a unique and powerful manner. Jean-Baptiste has developed a close and trusting relationship with his students by showing his genuine interest and care for their well-being and determination to help them. Readers will be surprised by the honesty of students' sharing and the depth of Jean-Baptiste's emotional and intellectual response to students' difficulties, which makes the post-pandemic restoration hopeful. The piece certainly makes a strong call for holistic and authentic pedagogical approaches in higher education.

Last but not least to be included in this editorial is Fayola St. Bernard, who is currently working as a Lecturer in Computer Science at a university located on the Caribbean Island of Trinidad and Tobago. St. Bernard's (2022) piece, *Embracing humanities in computer science: An autoethnography*, describes her interdisciplinary learning journey moving from Humanities to Computer Science, through which she has successfully integrated knowledge from both disciplines with distinctive methodological perspectives. According to Fayola, the knowledge and skills from Humanities have enriched and accelerated her academic and professional

development in Computer Sciences. In the current society, where particular disciplines gain more popularity based on their instrumental measures such as practicality and employability, her autoethnography helps us revalue the often neglected disciplines and rethink the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to higher education.

6. Closing remarks

From Salwa Al Sulaimi to Fayola St. Bernard, it has been a privilege to work with these 16 doctoral autoethnographers and support their first step of scholarly development, as the first tutor in their doctoral journey. The best thing about teaching and more like doing an autoethnography with students is that I genuinely get to know them and deeply understand each of them as a person, not just as one of many online doctoral students. This has been a humbling and transformative learning experience, having a full impact on my personal and professional growth. I want to thank these 16 and all my other doctoral students who were willing to take a risk to engage with this autoethnography assignment and reveal and share their vulnerability with their cohort community and me. I know that even today, they are furiously and fully living their academic, professional, and personal lives all at once, navigating and juggling many responsibilities. As I always tell them, I cannot imagine myself doing a PhD as they do, but I do believe that their efforts will bear great fruits. Some of these thoughts will be further unpacked in the last piece of the special issue, *A collective reflection on writing an autoethnography*.

It is worth emphasising that all 16 autoethnographers introduced in this editorial are still on the programme working on subsequent modules or their thesis projects, considerably novice TEL researchers. To most authors, it has also been their first experience of publishing in an academic journal, which must be celebrated. However, on the other hand, there is tremendous pressure on them to share their honest stories and emotions (and private selves in some works) at the beginning of their scholarly journey. The journal, *Studies in Technology Enhanced Learning*, is the voluntary initiative of a small group of committed TEL researchers, currently being operated without any financial or institutional support. It aims to foster new and critical conversations in the TEL field and create a safe space for novice researchers and practitioners—whose voices are often neglected and disregarded by exclusively focusing on a single path (out of many possible ones) to pursue scholarly rigour in the field—to voice out (Bligh and Lee, 2020a). Therefore, it is not our intention to showcase the perfectly finished and polished academic writings but to share our collaborative work-in-progress with

the hope that it will trigger more meaningful conversations, methodological reflections, and mutual respect among those who care for online doctoral education and TEL. In this sense, the great sensitivity of readers may be required when reading and judging these efforts.

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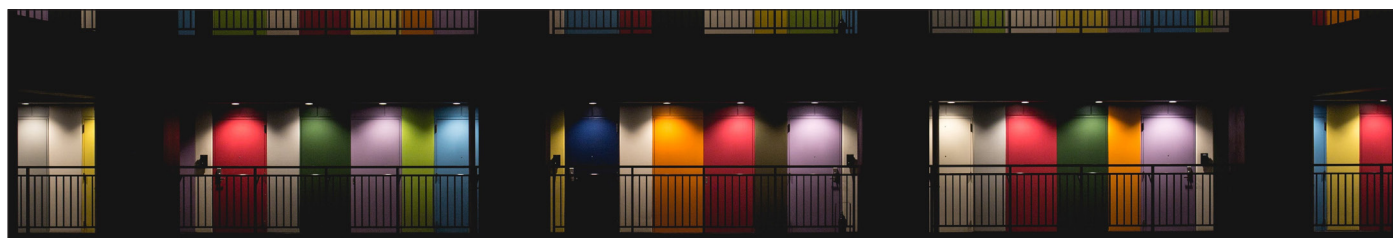
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Teacher-student rapport in emergency remote teaching: Autoethnography

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Abstract

This autoethnographic work explores how four university English teachers in Oman approached rapport-building with students during Emergency Remote Teaching. Based on an analysis of the researcher's personal teaching experiences as well as interviews with three colleagues, the findings revealed that the absence of face-to-face communication compelled these teachers to adopt alternative rapport-building strategies, such as interacting via email, listening to students during synchronous classes, being friendly and using humour. The teachers failed, however, to find ways to implement some key elements of rapport-building, such as recognising students, giving praise and providing intervention when needed. Cultural, institutional and technical difficulties hampered their concerted efforts to build interpersonal relationships with students.

1. Introduction

Teacher-student rapport refers to the harmonious and positive relationship between a teacher and their students and is important for the creation of a learning-conducive environment and learning success. It correlates with students' retention, motivation and learning (Benson et al., 2005; Frisby et al., 2016; Frisby

& Martin, 2010; Glazier, 2016; Wilson & Ryan, 2013). Rapport develops through simple actions like eye contact, smiling and calling students by their names (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990; Wilson & Taylor, 2001). Personalised feedback, comments on students' work (Eom et al., 2006; Glazier, 2016) and care for students' success (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990) can also enhance rapport. When students are physically present in class, rapport-building is generally viewed as an opportunity rather than a challenge. In distance education (DE), however, the physical distance between teachers and students makes rapport-building a difficult task (Glazier, 2016; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008). Teacher load and technical limitations can also hinder rapport-building in DE contexts (Buus & Georgsen, 2018; Jones, 2015; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2012).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, most educational institutions shifted to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Institutions, teachers and students were not prepared for online education, and the focus of ERT was maintaining basic educational services during a time of crisis (Hodges et al., 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020). As a language teacher, it was evident to me that the absence of face-to-face communication limited class interaction. Consequently, I have felt unsatisfied with my teaching experience during the ERT period. Many students also have expressed that they have felt unheard, disconnected and disregarded. I teach English to university students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman, and in March 2020, all classes shifted from face-to-face instruction, with minor portions of asynchronous online components, to completely online delivery. Since then, classes have been held synchronously on Microsoft Teams®. These classes are recorded and made available for students from remote areas with limited Internet accessibility.

This study aims to explore, through personal experience, English teachers' approaches to and challenges with rapport-building during ERT at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do university English teachers build rapport with their students in normal circumstances?
2. How do university English teachers build rapport with their students during Emergency Remote Teaching?
3. What challenges do university English teachers experience in rapport-building during Emergency Remote Teaching?

2. Literature review

2.1 Teacher-student rapport: Definition and importance

Classroom rapport is an interaction between a teacher and their students that is characterised by harmony and positivity (Bernieri, 1988; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2012). Rapport-building has two important elements: reciprocity and coordination (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2012). It involves mutual attentiveness, respect, understanding and openness, as well as coordinated interaction and movement. Buskist and Saville (2001) emphasise that building rapport requires a combination of these behaviours, as well as consistency. Overall, building rapport means building a relationship that is coordinated, regular and ongoing (Glazier, 2016).

Rapport is linked with teacher immediacy (Benson et al., 2005), the verbal and nonverbal behaviours that physically and psychologically bring teachers and students closer (Andersen, 1979). Teacher behaviours that help establish immediacy include praising students, smiling and making eye contact. Previous research indicates that immediacy, like rapport, correlates with a positive learning environment and motivation (e.g., Frymier, 1993; Gol et al., 2014; Velez & Cano, 2008). In addition to teacher behaviours, rapport is also associated with particular teacher characteristics, such as respect, helpfulness and enthusiasm (Wilson et al., 2010). That is, 'rapport is about ongoing relationships that embody harmony, caring, coordination, and openness' (Granitz et al., 2009, p. 53).

Research shows that teacher-student rapport-building can lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and students. It is associated with motivation, attentiveness, attendance, participation (Benson et al., 2005; Granitz et al., 2009) and enhanced learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Glazier, 2016; Wilson et al., 2010; Wilson & Ryan, 2013). For teachers, building an interpersonal relationship with students in online classes leads to teaching satisfaction and positive attachment to their institution (Frisby et al., 2016).

2.2 Rapport-building in distance education

In distance education, building teacher-student rapport is even more important since face-to-face interaction is absent. Nir-Gal (2002) states that distance learning settings require instruction with personal-emotional support. Early research into interaction in online education has highlighted the importance of the social aspect of the learning process. One of the three essential forms of interaction in Moore's (1989)

online interaction model is the learner-teacher interaction, both instructional and interpersonal. Mason's model (1991) and Berge's model (1995) of online interaction propose that maintaining a positive social environment in online classes is essential for their success. Some research evaluating the use of new technologies aimed at enhancing social interaction in online classes has yielded positive results. For example, using such technologies as online forums (English, 2007) and social media (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016) led to more teacher-student interactions.

While online technologies have the potential to facilitate classroom interaction, including interpersonal interaction, the design and construction of these communication technologies in online courses must be carefully considered if they are to be effective. Interpersonal interactions in online classrooms should be 'premediated, [and] consciously promoted' (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008, p. 1068). When effectively implemented, teacher-student rapport-building results in a positive learning environment (Galeshi & Taimoory, 2019; Redmond et al., 2018), knowledge gain (Song et al., 2019) and academic success (Glazier, 2016; James & Shammas, 2018). However, relational interaction in online classes is challenging because of the physical, and subsequently psychological, distance between teachers and students (Glazier, 2016; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008). Students often feel isolated and disconnected. Therefore, online teachers must find strategies to promote interaction and build rapport (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008). Walther (1992) suggests that constructing interpersonal relationships among online class participants is possible, but it takes time and effort. In his social information processing model, he argues that there is less social information conveyed through digital messages than in face-to-face interaction, and due to this lack of 'nonverbal cues', online class participants construct interpersonal skills more slowly.

Rapport-building in online classes is very important but also challenging. Murphy and Rodríguez-Manzanares (2012) summarise the challenges:

Challenges to building rapport relate to the geographic dispersion of students, the asynchronous nature of DE, teacher workload, limits of the software, and teachers and students not seeing the need for rapport. (p. 167)

Interacting socially with students can overwhelm teachers when they have a large number of students because it requires more time (Jones, 2015) and increases their workload. The change in the teacher's role is a challenge. When students are not physically attending their university,

the teacher becomes the main contact point in the learning environment (Buus & Georgsen, 2018).

2.3 Rapport-building in ERT

Covid-19 has affected teaching and learning in almost all higher education institutions around the world (Marinoni et al., 2020). To maintain instruction during the pandemic, most educational institutions had to adopt an ERT mode to ensure social distancing, regarded as the most effective preventative measure (McGrail et al., 2020). ERT is a temporary shift in teaching modes (from face-to-face to online delivery) due to a crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). Regarding teacher-student rapport, two main elements make structured online education different from ERT implemented in response to Covid-19. First, during ERT, institutions, teachers and students were not prepared for online education, and the focus was on delivering any sort of instruction regardless of its quality. The sudden shift to online education presented various challenges, including the need for technical infrastructure, support and literacy (Marinoni et al., 2020; Reimers et al., 2020). Focusing on how to overcome these complications resulted in overlooking affective learning variables. Second, the Covid-19 crisis disrupted the lives of individuals involved in the learning and teaching process. Students suffered well-being and mental health problems, such as stress, depression, loneliness and disconnection (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Qiu et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). In comparison to rapport-building in structured online education, rapport-building in ERT is thus both particularly challenging as well as especially important.

Many studies on ERT have investigated online classroom instruction and pedagogy, as well as the attitudes of teachers and students. Research on social and affective factors in ERT has highlighted students and teachers' feelings of isolation and physical and psychological distance due to the lack of relational interaction. For instance, Maican and Cocoradă (2021) investigated students' emotions in an online language class during the pandemic and found that students experienced negative emotions, such as stress, feelings of isolation and distress at the lack of interaction with teachers and peers, which they felt had resulted in their voices going unheard. Similarly, students indicated that classes being delivered online during the pandemic impeded teacher-student rapport-building (Hill & Fitzgerald, 2020). Teachers also reported feeling isolated and experiencing challenges in rapport-building in ERT (e.g., Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). However, less research investigated the process of rapport-building in ERT. Harris et al. (2021) concluded that conducting synchronous classes led to a more personal and social learning environment. Joseph Jeyaraj

(2021) noted that strategies like showing empathy, caring and providing clear instructions and timely feedback helped establish rapport between teachers and students in ERT. More research is needed on strategies that teachers adopt to establish and maintain rapport and the challenges they face trying to do so. Glazier (2016) describes rapport as simple but significant ‘instructor-driven intervention’. Therefore, exploring the topic from a teacher’s perspective may shed light on teacher-student rapport in ERT.

3. Method

3.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that uses personal experiences (auto) to explore and analyse wider cultural or relational experiences (ethnography) and to bridge gaps in the literature, providing research that is accessible to a wide audience (Adams et al., 2017). It enables readers to understand cultural experiences based on a systematic analysis of personal experiences and incidents (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography employs storytelling to highlight the value of a researcher’s personal experiences, relationships with others, and reflexivity and self-reflection in describing cultural phenomena. It ‘balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity’ and shows the process through which people resolve their struggles (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2).

It is our reflexivity and understanding of emotions that give meaning to our experiences (Adams et al., 2015). The sudden shift to ERT in response to Covid-19 created new and unfamiliar situations for teachers in my educational context. Although teachers’ contextual experiences differ, following this research methodology can help us gain a deeper understanding of the situation. Furthermore, autoethnography can guide me, as a teacher, to ‘figure out what to do . . . and the meaning of . . . [my] struggles’ (Bochner & Ellis, 2006).

The main source of data is my recollection of incidents that occurred during the past year. To ensure the reliability of these recollections, I created an ‘autobiographical timeline’ of the most important events and then chose the ones most strongly linked to the topic (Chang, 2008). Five key events were identified and a short narrative was written for each event. I referenced my Microsoft Teams® recorded sessions, Teams chats and email interactions while creating the timeline. In addition to my stories, I interviewed three of my colleagues (X, Y and Z) to enhance data validity and provide data triangulation. Including people with similar experiences as ‘co-participants’ in this way is an important

aspect of autoethnography as it helps researchers avoid the pitfall of depending on themselves as the sole source of data (Chang, 2008). In order to control for possible moderating factors, the three participants selected were colleagues working in the same institution and teaching the same subject in the same teaching context. During a total of 150 minutes of conversation, participants shared their experiences and personal narratives related to the following questions:

1. Is building teacher-student rapport important in ERT?
2. How did you build teacher-student rapport before ERT?
3. How did you do so during ERT?
4. What are the challenges you faced trying to build teacher-student rapport in ERT?

3.2 Theoretical framework

This paper explores the strategies that teachers adopt to build rapport with students. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) provide one of the most comprehensive works on rapport-building strategies, which they refer to as antecedents or indicators. Based on a review of rapport-building literature, Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) categorize rapport-building antecedents in both face-to-face classes and distance education. They identify eight categories of general teacher-student rapport antecedents commonly found in face-to-face classes:

1. *Disclosure, honesty, and respect*: sharing personal information, showing respect and apologising;
2. *Supporting and monitoring*: showing concern about student success, giving praise and helping students with differing needs;
3. *Recognising the person*: recognising students as individuals;
4. *Sharing, mirroring, mimicking, matching*: sharing and mirroring body language;
5. *Interacting socially*: participating in social interaction and using humour
6. *Availability and responsiveness*: being accessible and providing feedback;
7. *Caring and bonding*: showing concern and empathy;
8. *Communicating effectively*: facilitating easy and smooth communication (pp. 172–173).

Table 1. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's (2012) categories of rapport antecedents in distance education (p. 177)

Recognising the person/individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliciting personal information Expressing personality Acknowledging the person 	Supporting and monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting and monitoring Praising Providing feedback
Availability, accessibility, and responsiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being available Responding quickly 	Non-text-based interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing each other Seeing each other Interacting in real-time, face-to-face
Tone of interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being friendly Being humorous Being respectful and honest 	Non-academic conversation/interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversing socially Showing care and concern

These eight categories are used to analyse RQ1: What are teacher-student rapport antecedents in normal circumstances?

Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) identify six categories of teacher-student rapport antecedents in distance education (Table 1). Due to the difference in instructional delivery mode, new categories, such as tone of interactions and non-text-based interactions, are added to the previously described categories of recognising, supporting and availability.

The second research question regarding teacher-student rapport antecedents in ERT is analysed based on these DE teacher-student rapport antecedents.

3.3 Data analysis

The current study adopted a deductive and inductive qualitative content analysis, following Elo et al.'s (2014) three phases: preparation, organisation and reporting. First, I selected units of analysis from personal recollections and interviews. Second, I coded the data using pre-identified categories. Then, I reported the results of the analysis.

Deductive content analysis is used when data organisation and categorisation (phase 2) is based on earlier work, such as theories, models and literature reviews (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2004). In this study, I used Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's (2012) General Rapport Antecedents and Antecedents of Rapport in Distance

Education as pre-identified categories for the data analysis related to RQ1 and RQ2.

Inductive content analysis was adopted to analyse data for RQ3. Categories were generated through a process of open coding where themes are identified and then grouped (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Data from the personal narrative and the three interviews was carefully examined for indicators of challenges and difficulties in rapport-building, and then these were labelled and grouped by the researcher. Three categories were identified: cultural challenges, institutional challenges and technical challenges. For reliability, the categorisation, coding and analysis of data was later reviewed and discussed with a colleague.

4. Findings

Findings on rapport-building strategies are presented in two parts: rapport-building in face-to-face classes and rapport-building in ERT. I provide personal narratives of five key events (one regarding rapport-building in face-to-face classes and four regarding rapport-building in ERT, the main focus of the paper). I follow each of these narratives with related experiences shared by my colleagues.

4.1 Rapport-building in face-to-face classes

It had been a long day, sitting at my desk in the teachers' room! My eyes were fixed on the computer screen trying to finish some work when I heard a familiar voice calling me. I

looked back and stood up in shock: ‘Khalid?! What are you doing here?’ I had taught Khalid the previous semester in the foundation program that our university offers to freshman students. Khalid and his two friends had come to class mainly to joke around and challenge me as an inexperienced teacher. That was during my second year of teaching, and I had developed more patience after a rough first year; I decided not to give up on any student. It helped that I was young enough to make my students feel I was more of a friend to them than a teacher. I cared for them.

Six weeks before this unexpected visit to the teachers’ room, Khalid had been in a car accident and was in a coma for two weeks. He woke up not remembering many of the details of his life. I had been planning to go see him at home. And now he was at my desk. He had lost a lot of weight, and his father was behind him. His dad said he had been taking him to familiar places and that I was one of a few people he could remember. I stayed standing there for a few minutes after they had left. Without noticing it, we, as teachers, deeply affect the lives of some of our students. It was a big lesson to learn at an early stage, and I have always been glad I did.

Realising the importance of the interpersonal relations we, as teachers, build with students, I always try to establish rapport with my students from the first class. I ask my students to introduce themselves and note down their interests, hobbies and aspirations. Students appreciate it when they are acknowledged as people. I have found that recognising and appreciating every single student is key to building positive relationships with them. Furthermore, being particularly caring and patient at the beginning builds the trust necessary for strong interpersonal relationships. I make sure I share some personal information with them and ask them about their needs and expectations. To maintain this relationship throughout the course, I check their progress and provide supervision and academic and affective support.

Colleague Y also sees that building rapport with students is fundamental as *‘it’s a teacher nature we want to bond with them . . . to connect with them and we cannot actually teach without that’*. Colleague X thinks that having good teacher-student rapport drives students to study harder *‘because they know that the teachers are there to offer them [support] . . . the teacher is always there to listen to them’*.

To help build teacher-student rapport in face-to-face classes, the teachers used various strategies, such as simply *‘knowing students and calling them by names’*, as Z emphasised. Other methods included caring for students and sensing their needs through observing their facial expressions,

noticing their successes and providing intervention when necessary. X added, *‘[even] if they don’t come to us . . . we could identify that this person needs something, and I could tell him. Please stay for a while. Let’s talk’*. In face-to-face classes before ERT, communication was immediate. X continued, *‘Many personal conversations happen, and many issues are solved in the corridor or walking from and to the class’*. Before ERT, what students could not express using language (as it is a language class), a teacher could easily understand through eye contact and facial expressions. All of that was immediate and real; it *‘cannot be faked’*.

4.2 Rapport-building in ERT

The country went into lockdown on March 23, 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Classes were all moved online. As a result, teachers had to approach rapport-building differently.

4.2.1 The beginning

I went to my first online class and introduced myself while trying to throw in some jokes to create a good first impression. I asked students how they had been doing, about their lives and their expectations, and what they had heard about me and the course. I received a few answers, from the same students every time. I didn’t insist and assumed some students were shy about talking in an online class, so I skipped student introductions and started talking about the course instead. Under normal circumstances, by the end of the first class of a course, I used to know my students—their interests, why they hate writing—so I would be able to set the class tone and give most of them a reason to come to the next class. That day, it was just uncomfortable.

The first week passed and everybody was trying to adjust to the new situation. Students generally handled the technical aspects of the shift fairly well. On the few occasions when a student encountered technical difficulties, I provided support or directed them to the college’s Education Technology Centre. I still had that feeling that I didn’t know who I was talking to every day and whether most of the 30 students in each of my four classes were even listening to me! I decided, for the first time in my 10-year teaching career, to change the rules of the game; I allowed the use of Arabic in class and replied to emails written in Arabic.

4.2.2 The exam period

The exam period is very stressful for students, but during Covid-19, it was also stressful for me as a teacher. A few days before the first exam, a month after the beginning of

the course, the university decided that all forms of assessment, including exams and quizzes, had to be conducted synchronously online with students' cameras turned on. I thought this decision was unfair, not only because it was not announced early enough for students to prepare but also because it disregarded students with serious Internet and technology access issues. I pointlessly argued with the head of the department and then decided to let it go. I went to my class and patiently listened to my students' complaints and questions, for which I had no answers. I didn't know what to say but apologised for the very short notice.

Y stressed that to try to connect with students during Covid-19, he made sure to do two things: *'I address [students] by names . . . and I try to reply to their emails as soon as possible'*. Calling students by their names made them feel connected as *'I make them feel that I care for them'*, he added. X stated that he felt closer to his students when he used breakout rooms. When students did activities in small groups, *'I call[ed] their names and correct[ed] them then and there. I [could] give immediate and personalised feedback'*. In addition, X tried to build rapport by supporting students and addressing their concerns:

I make sure that I answer their emails. If they have questions, I make sure that I answer them, just to show them that I am there for them. Even though some of the problems couldn't be solved ... the least I can do is answer them.

Z used a different strategy: *'I try to make jokes and use Arabic, something I never do in face-to-face classes, so students feel I am close to them'*.

However, many barriers prevented the construction of teacher-student relationships. In a language course, language can be a barrier. With the absence of face-to-face contact, students and teachers rely entirely on language. This can affect both instructional and relational classroom interaction. Y thinks students might *'feel shy to participate in online classes'* when their language is poor. Unlike face-to-face classes, online classes are recorded and usually shared later. Therefore, Y explained, a teacher *'cannot really talk to one student. You don't want to. . . highlight [a particular student]'*. In a classroom, you can have personal conversations with students.

Weak network connections hindered interaction too. Students *'are unable to focus. They are unable to understand because it is only because of the medium . . . when the medium is not supporting them, automatically they are demotivated'*,

and *'If there is a [technical] disconnection, then you cannot connect with them'*. Administrative rules and policies can also make rapport-building challenging. X commented that *'teachers and students should be involved in decision making and when this is not possible, due to emergencies for example, policies have to be clearly announced to teachers and students'*. Students lose trust in teachers when they cannot provide guidance.

4.2.3 The university disciplinary committee

Being in direct contact with my students for the whole semester, I had sensed that students were generally dissatisfied with the online learning experience, but after attending the Disciplinary Committee meeting at the end of the three-month semester, I sensed students' anger and frustration.

I had become a member of the college disciplinary committee two years before, which had exposed me to the negative side of students' academic and personal lives. However, this experience also made me more considerate and understanding. Students come to class from different backgrounds. They are more than the individuals we see in front of us, and they are definitely more than the voices we hear through video conferencing.

The university had been closed for months. Four staff members and I were called for a student disciplinary meeting after final exams. The number of malpractice cases was three times higher than usual!

Students mostly did not talk about plagiarism and cheating but rather about the challenges they had faced in the previous three months. They were angry! One student seemed to put it all in a few words: *'I admit it. I know what I did is wrong but nobody replied to our emails. When we needed help, nobody replied, nobody listened'*. This hit me and kept me thinking about my students for the rest of the day. I had 120 students that semester. I received dozens of emails every day!! I must have missed an email here or there. A student will always remember sending an email for help and getting no reply. After all, this was the only way they could approach us! I had had concerns about my inability to reach out to my students throughout the semester. I had tried my best as I had always done but this time, I felt unsatisfied and frustrated just like my students. Building connections with students was a struggle and I realized on that day that we had all failed. The students had simply lost their trust in us.

Colleague Y said replying to students' emails was a priority during ERT. *'I make sure I answer students' questions and*

concerns as soon as possible'. However, he also talked about the challenges he faced trying to do so:

it takes days to solve an issue and takes 100 emails [laughing], yes! . . . it doesn't happen immediately. It takes time . . . if a student has a problem and to solve that problem, it takes this [much] time, then I don't think they will feel like coming back again to me . . . I think this is creating a gap between us and our students . . . and the number of students! That's also a problem.

Colleague X emphasised language as a barrier that made it difficult to connect with students:

This semester I couldn't help two students . . . they tried to ask me something and I couldn't understand. When I asked them to explain what they wanted to say, they stopped contacting me. Maybe because they are shy.

When students came to campus it was easy for them to seek help and guidance from their teachers. There were various barriers to finding such guidance in ERT. Teacher-student rapport did not develop because teachers faced difficulties reaching out to their students.

4.2.4 Who have I been teaching?

It was the end of the semester and part of the course assessment involved individually meeting with students through video conferencing. I looked forward to these meetings, the first time I was going to see my students. Throughout the semester, most of them were just names to me; now I finally had the chance to not only see them but also personally talk to each one of them.

I knew my students only through very limited interaction in synchronous classes, emails and their performance on exams and assignments. On that basis, I had made assumptions about them. It was not until I talked to each one of them that I realised that this limited knowledge was not enough for me as a teacher to build a relationship with them. It struck me only then that I hadn't really known my students. I had just delivered instruction without knowing who I was delivering it to or whether it had been received! I had not praised good students and, more importantly, had not been aware of who needed more attention.

This realisation took me back to an article I had read on the effects of Covid-19 on students from a student's perspective (Wilson et al., 2020). I stopped at the main finding of the study: Students felt 'disconnected' from the learning

experience. Only then did I realise what that meant. I felt disconnected too.

X described the experience of teaching synchronous classes with a large number of students explaining, '*They don't know us. We don't know them; you would not really know who is who; you don't know who needs intervention*'. In the absence of physical contact and with very limited interaction, you 'couldn't identify if [students] understood what you are talking about'. Another side to the situation is that teachers '*do not know what is happening on the other end because of the network issues*'. Motivation and culture were not the only factors preventing students from participating in the online synchronous classes; '*there are . . . learners who want to get involved, but online technical issues prohibit them*'.

5. Discussion

Teacher-student rapport is essential for any learning environment. Although rapport is mutual, it is mainly the responsibility of the teacher (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Glazier, 2016; Heinemann, 2006). Teachers feel the need to connect with students and thus adopt various methods to build rapport with them, depending on the context and available resources. In this section, Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's (2012) categories of rapport-building are used to provide answers to RQ1 and RQ2.

5.1 Rapport antecedents

5.1.1 Rapport antecedents in face-to-face classes

In face-to-face classes, teachers in the current study adopted rapport antecedents related to *supporting and monitoring* students' learning and *recognising* students as individuals. Much of the rapport-building happened in the classroom where teachers knew the students (by name and face) and observed their interactions and nonverbal feedback. Interacting with students face to face facilitated communication, allowing for easier rapport-building. Teachers also perceived *availability* as an important factor in having a good relationship with students. Outside of the class, teachers responded to students' emails and met students after classes.

Table 2 shows the antecedents that teachers used to build rapport with students in normal circumstances, classified according to Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's (2012) eight categories.

Table 2. Rapport antecedents that teachers used in face-to-face classes

Disclosure, honesty, and respect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanking 	Supporting and monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending to students' needs • Caring about students' success • Providing intervention • Fostering a friendly environment
Recognising the person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing students and recognizing them as individuals • Calling students by their names 	Sharing, mirroring, mimicking, matching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-verbal cues: smiling and showing interest through facial expressions Sharing values and interests
Interacting socially <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in personal conversations (in class and outside of class) 	Availability and responsiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to students after class

5.1.2 Rapport antecedents in ERT

Due to the absence of nonverbal communication and physical presence in online education, teachers compensate in other ways to build rapport with students (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008). Similarly, in ERT, teachers adopt methods that differ from those used in face-to-face classes, mainly because of the physical separation. For example, teachers in the current study tried to enhance rapport through *supporting and monitoring*, but they achieved this through providing written feedback on assignments instead of observing students learn in the class. To compensate for the absence of face-to-face contact, they used other strategies, such as listening to students, using humour, and switching to the students' first language mother tongue. Research on interaction in online education reveals that in the absence of nonverbal communication, students and teachers 'make up for this lack by manipulating content, using, for example, humor, [and] linguistic style' (Heinemann, 2005, p. 190). Despite the four teachers' awareness of the importance of giving praise and providing intervention when necessary, physical separation and class sizes made it difficult to do so.

Showing *availability*, through quickly replying to students' emails and messages, is perceived as important for rapport-building in ERT. It is how teachers can show their care for students. Email and messaging were used to complement communication in ordinary classes, but they are used as a basic tool for interaction in virtual classes. Maxwell (2015) found that email interaction does not help build teacher-student rapport. Because of high teacher-to-student

ratios and low language proficiency, email interactions are slow and indirect, calling their effectiveness into question.

Due to various challenges (discussed in the next section), teachers failed to *recognise* students and to have *non-academic and non-text-based interactions*. Table 3 provides examples of rapport antecedents that participants used (shown in parentheses). Antecedents with an asterisk (*) are those that teachers failed to employ.

5.2 Challenges

This section addresses RQ3 regarding the challenges that teachers faced in building student-teacher rapport in ERT. As challenging as rapport-building is in online education (Glazier, 2016; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008), rapport-building in ERT is more challenging because ERT is not planned or structured to allow for student-teacher interaction and social support (Hodges et al., 2020). In an endeavour to build teacher-student rapport with university students in ERT, teachers in the specified context faced, based on the identified themes, a combination of three types of challenges: cultural, institutional and technical. Notably, they highlighted that these challenges affected both instructional and relational interactions. When teachers face difficulties delivering instruction, building relationships is no longer the number-one priority.

Although online classes were synchronous, the teachers in the current study did not have the advantage of seeing the students face-to-face. For *cultural* and privacy reasons,

Table 3. Examples of rapport antecedents used by participants in ERT

Recognising the person/individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliciting personal information* • Expressing personality* • Acknowledging the person* 	Supporting and monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting and monitoring • Giving praise • Providing feedback (giving written feedback on students' work)
Availability, accessibility and responsiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being available (ready to attend to students) • Responding quickly (responding to students' messages and emails as soon as possible) 	Non-text-based interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing each other (listening to students in class) • Seeing each other* • Interacting in real-time, face-to-face*
Tone of interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being friendly • Being humorous • Being respectful and honest (admitting mistakes and apologising) 	Non-academic conversation/interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversing socially (at the beginning of the class, through communication apps)* • Showing care and concern (listening to students' problems and helping to address them)*

at this institution, students could not be forced to switch on their cameras during classes. In other cultural settings, synchronous classes were found to have provided more opportunities for rapport building, both between teachers and students and between students and their peers (Harris et al., 2021). Nonverbal communication is a key element of the communication process, and it is missing when cameras are turned off. Students lose interest and focus due to the 'absence of eye contact, gesture, and classroom atmosphere' (Mohammed et al., 2020, p. 6). Nonverbal cues, such as smiling and head-nodding, are significant antecedents of rapport-building (Wilson & Taylor, 2001). Language was perceived as another barrier by the participants. In language classes, it is not easy to connect with students by depending on spoken language only. Body language and facial expressions are particularly important in facilitating communication when interacting using a second language. Students with low language proficiency might feel shy interacting in online classes, especially because these classes are recorded. In a study on interactions in online foreign-language classes during the pandemic, students reported 'shyness or shame' because of their lack of linguistic competence (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021).

Institutional policies and decisions can also hinder teacher-student rapport-building. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many educational institutions abruptly shifted to online classes without being equipped to do so. This had a negative impact on pedagogy and student inequity

and inequality (Hodges et al., 2020, Shin & Hickey, 2021; Teräs et al., 2020). Examples from the results of this study include an increase in teacher load and number of students per teacher (teacher-student ratio). Heavy workloads pose a challenge to rapport-building as teachers feel that they must limit their communication to academic discussion (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2012). Furthermore, teachers cannot address students' inquiries and meet their needs due to decision enforcement influencing the teacher-student relationship. Hodges et al. (2020) suggest that in ERT, institutions should be more flexible 'with deadlines for assignments within courses, course policies, and institutional policies' (p. 12).

Network disturbances and limited Internet bandwidth not only limit access to instructional resources but also prevent students from connecting with teachers (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Ferri et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Shin & Hickey, 2021). Out of 424 international higher-education institutions surveyed by Marinoni et al. (2020), 91% indicated that despite having the technical infrastructure, students and staff reported challenges communicating online. In a study conducted in the Omani context, limited access to the Internet for students living in remote areas was one of the constraints faced during the implementation of ERT (Mohammed et al., 2020). Technical disconnection led to low class participation and after-class interaction with the teachers in the current study. As one of the participants

indicated, 'It is hard to connect with students when you don't know what is happening at the other end'.

6. Conclusion

In the beginning of 2020, most educational institutions abruptly shifted to online instruction in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In my institution, teachers found themselves having to deliver the same content to the same number of students as they had had previously through the vastly different medium of online platforms and video-conferencing applications, making instructional and relational interactions challenging.

This paper explored teacher-student rapport, using personal experience as the main source alongside the experiences of three colleagues, focusing on how teachers tried to build rapport with their students and the challenges they faced. Comparing their rapport antecedents in ordinary classes and ERT revealed that during ERT, these four teachers adopted a variety of rapport-building strategies, such as interacting through email, listening to students during class, being friendly and using humour. However, the teachers failed to find ways to implement other key elements of rapport-building, such as recognising students, giving praise and providing intervention when needed. Sharing personal information and interacting socially, though perceived as important, remained out of reach after more than one year of ERT. Institutional and technical challenges hampered the teachers' efforts to build and maintain rapport with students, leaving them stressed and unsatisfied with their teaching.

Further research on this topic should consider the limitations of this study. First, deductive and inductive content analyses were used to analyse personal events and interviews with three colleagues. The author carried out theme coding in the inductive approach and pre-identified categories in the deductive approach, and the analysis was reviewed by one colleague, which might affect the reliability of the results. Second, the study explored classroom rapport from a teacher's perspective. What teachers see as essential for enhancing rapport might not necessarily be viewed as important by students. Researching teacher-student rapport during ERT from a student perspective would provide a comprehensive picture of the situation.

6.1 Possibilities?

'This, I think, would be a good example that I've built a good relationship with my students . . . A student sent

me an email about a problem she was facing in another course . . . she felt like I could help her'. (Colleague X)

Rapport-building in virtual classes is not impossible, but it takes more work (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008). No matter the situation, teachers will always feel the need to interpersonally connect with their students and try to adopt new ways to build relationships with them. Z stated, 'I'll try to use personalised voice comments next semester . . . so when they listen to my recording, they will feel I am talking to them. . . . Things are much better this semester, compared to previous semesters, but email will not replace a real-life teacher'.

It's been a long day. Now I'm sitting at my desk in the teachers' room! My eyes are fixed on the computer screen as I try to finish some work. I open Microsoft Teams® chats to check if there are messages from students. There are five new messages: two with concerns related to the course, two with teachers' day greetings and one asking if I can talk to him privately. I reply to the five messages and continue my happy Omani teachers' day.

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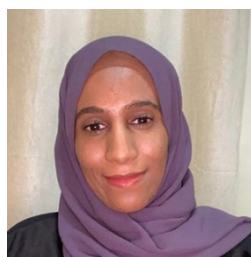
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The hammer and the scalpel: A teacher's experience of workplace bullying

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Abstract

Through autoethnography, I explore and reflect on my past experiences as a target of workplace bullying in two institutions, a university and language school aimed at adult education. By doing so, this autoethnography's purpose is to allow me to gain a deeper understanding why bullying takes place. I explore my own personal experiences of being bullied, how I responded to being bullied each time, and how being bullied changed me as a person. Through research and reflection, I found that these negative experiences fostered a spirit of resilience and growth. An outcome of bully marginally explored in the related literature.

1. To begin

I was never bullied at school. I wasn't popular or a bully myself but bullies never tried to fight me either. I started learning karate before I could form long-term memory, and one day a kid from school saw me fight at a demonstration. He told everyone in our year about the fight and it was enough to keep even curious bullies away.

That sounds like a boast, but it isn't, I wouldn't consider myself to be tough at all, it's just a precursor to two points. First, it wasn't until I was an adult that I first experienced bullying. Second, there's something different about workplace bullying, being able to fight won't help you. The rules are different and they're not in your favour.

To share my experiences, I'll use a method of writing sometime referred to as "evocative" autoethnography. Though I'll talk about it in more detail later, autoethnography can be described as a research method which uses our own personal experiences and relationships as part of the research. It allows us to engage in meaningful self-reflection, to provide examples of how we dealt with and found meaning in our struggles and to push for social justice by bringing these issues to the fore (Adams et al. 2015, p1-2).

With this in mind, the purpose of this autoethnography is threefold, to look back at my experiences of being bullied, to reflect on how I responded each time, and to understand how it changed me.

2. All about workplace bullying

First, I need to talk about workplace bullying. It's very well-researched (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.157). It's common enough that it's been called a "silent epidemic" due to its prevalence but lack of focus compared to other forms of discrimination (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1211). In fact, it's suggested that somewhere between 15% (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012, p.319) to around half of all employees get bullied at some point (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.158).

Bullying is also sometimes referred to as mobbing, workplace abuse, workplace harassment (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002, p.397) scapegoating, health endangered leadership, and even petty tyranny (Einarsen, 2020, p.381). These names are synonyms with the only difference between mobbing and the other terms being that mobbing is used to refer to a group of perpetrators rather than just one (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1212). However, all of the terms refer to the same behaviour (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002, p.397). This behaviour is said to last at least six months (Leymann, 1996, p.168) and occurs regularly (Caponecchia et al., 2020, p.105). It aims to discomfort, break down or torment (Einarsen, 1999, p.16-17) an unwilling target (Namie, 2003, p.4). Workplace bullying is normally psychological, with most attacks being covert (Namie, 2003, p.2) though bullying can become physical, it seldomly does (Einarsen, 1999, p.17. This typical discreetness can make

the behaviours hard to pinpoint (Einarsen, 1999, p.18) and therefore prove (Beng, 2010, p.61).

Workplace bullying is considered as being 'status-blind' in that gender and race aren't considered contributing factors to why people are targeted (Namie, 2003, p.1). In addition, the laws which have been put in place with the intention of preventing discrimination against protected classes, do not apply to general workplace bullying (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1211). Of note is that only a quarter of bullying cases are reported to involve people from protected groups (Namie, 2003, p.2) which in part is probably due protected groups making up a smaller percentage of the researched countries' populations. As a result of this though, there is often no legal remedy (Namie, 2003, p.1) for the majority of incidents.

It may also surprise you that bullies are actually more often women and we typically bully our own gender (Namie, 2003, p.2). It's noteworthy that there's nearly always a power disparity between the bully and the bullied (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.160) with seventy to eighty per cent of perpetrators being a workplace superior (Einarsen, 1999, p.18), so it's a fight where the target has their hands tied from the start. Because of this, I use 'target' and not 'victim' because the idea of weakness and disempowerment (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1212) 'victim' conjures is inaccurate. Workplace targets aren't selected because they're weak, it's normally for the exact opposite reason (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1212). The thing that leaves us open to bullying is the power difference (Einarsen, 1999, p.18) that restrains us and leaves us disadvantaged.

Bullying escalates in frequency and aggressiveness over time (Einarsen, 2020, p.392). It can be put into three stages, the first being subtle and indirect, the second being more direct, with the target being made to feel increasingly isolated, and the third can introduce physical violence alongside the psychological attacks (Einarsen, 2020, p.392).

But who's targeted and why? There are two schools of thought on this. On one hand, there are those that think targets bring it on themselves, the other think targets are seen as a threat. Starting with the former, if a target doesn't behave as expected, it annoys others and paints a target on their back (Felson, 1992, p.4). This could be because the targets are seen as overachievers, have an overinflated belief in their abilities or are overly rigid (Einarsen, 1999, p.19). Targets are described as conscientious, literal-minded, naïve, or neurotic (Einarsen, 1999, p.20), and are often members of an out-group (Einarsen, 1999, p.21). Though negative, there are elements of truth to this. The other side's argument touches on similar ideas but more positively. They argue that

targets are picked because they're exceptionally competent, well-liked by others, highly moral, and resistant to domination (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1214). You could argue an overachiever or someone overly rigid is the same as someone exceptionally competent or highly moral, it just depends on your point of view.

It's strange that someone with arguably positive characteristics is targeted but bullies are said to feel threatened by their target, which triggers the negative behaviour (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1212). Sometimes the target is better skilled or qualified than the bully (Beng, 2010, p.63) which causes job insecurity and envy, making bullying an act of self-preservation (Einarsen, 1999, p.21). Perpetrators may feel threatened by their target's independence or social skills (Namie, 2003, p.3). Overall, the reasons are usually either competition, dominance, or power (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1213).

Bullies are described as selfish, inadequate, totally insensitive, evasive, manipulative, dishonest and persuasive, in that they are able to convince their superiors and peers that their behaviour is acceptable (Beng, 2010, p.63). They bully to hide their weaknesses and deficiencies (Beng, 2010, p.63), and calculate the risks and rewards of their actions (Einarsen, 1999, p.22), which might explain why bullying happens in phases of increased intensity as they become emboldened by the lack of repercussions. Sadly, senior leadership often protects bullies (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1215). Only 13% of cases end with the bully punished or fired (Namie, 2003, p.3).

Bullies can be put into four categories, the *Screaming Mimi*, *Constant Critic*, *Two-Headed Snake*, and the *Gatekeeper* (Namie, 2003, p.4). Though their names are amusing, their behaviours are less so. A *Screaming Mimi* is someone who sets the emotional mood of the room, deriving pleasure from public humiliation and using it to show what will happen if they're opposed (Namie, 2003, p.4). A *Constant Critic* is hyper-critical, constantly highlighting other people's perceived inabilities and flaws to distract people from noticing theirs (Namie, 2003, p.4). They invent errors to legitimise belittling others to keep them confused. They berate their targets privately, increasing their feelings of isolation (Namie, 2003, p.4). The *Two-Headed Snake* is a corporate climber, defaming those who block their path to promotion whilst ensuring that they're always believed by superiors (Namie, 2003, p.4). Finally, the *Gatekeeper*, obsessed with control, they manipulate variables to guarantee their target's failure to legitimise complaints they make against them (Namie, 2003, p.4).

It doesn't help that co-workers often don't support targeted colleagues either (Beng, 2010, p.64). This is known as 'bystander phenomenon', which is when people refrain from acting when they witness bullying, continuing as normal and inadvertently strengthening the bully (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020, p.400). Reasons for this include a lack of understanding about the bullying taking place, incidents seeming trivial in isolation, fear of the bully, being under the bully's sway, or actually agreeing with the bully (Beng, 2010, p.65).

On average targets are bullied for twenty-two months (Namie, 2003, p.3). Methods used for attack are varied but can be categorised into five types. Those which attack the target's self-expression, social relationships, reputation, professional life, and finally, their physical and mental health (Beng, 2010, p.62). This might be carried out using anything from snubbing, to constantly criticising the target, to sudden, violent verbal or physical attacks (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1211-1212). Over time, these attacks affect the target's physical and mental well-being, causing issues such as anxiety, depression, fatigue, insomnia, nausea, suicidal thoughts (Caponecchia et al., 2020, p.105), loss of concentration, post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), panic attacks (Namie, 2003, p.3), low self-esteem, stomach problems, back and headaches, anger, self-hatred (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002, p.397) and cardiovascular stress-related diseases (Namie, 2003, p.3). All of these cause the target to become unproductive and unsuccessful (Namie, 2003, p.3), reducing their motivation, creativity, and causing an increase in errors (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.158).

It also increases turnover. Sadly, it is the target, not the bully, who will likely lose their job, either voluntarily or through dismissal, a 70% chance (Namie, 2003, p.3). Turnover doesn't only affect targets but institutions, too. Other negative effects on institutions include reduced productivity, profit, increased absenteeism, and the loss of customers (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.157). Lost staff need replacing and new staff need training, along with legal fees and reputational damages if the bullying becomes public knowledge (Caponecchia et al., 2020, p.105).

So why do institutions allow bullying? For bullying to take place, institutions must allow or even encourage it (Einarsen, 1999, p.21). There are characteristics that workplaces with bullying tendencies share, including a focus on outcomes, promoting, and rewarding people with dominating personalities over emotionally intelligent ones, short-term planning, a code of conduct that doesn't prevent bullying behaviours, nepotism, cronyism, encouraging fear as the company culture, and finally, the misuse of performance reviews (Namie, 2003, p.4).

Academic writers have made recommendations with Namie (2003, p.5) creating a blueprint for employers, and Caponecchia, Branch and Murray (2020, p.104) creating a taxonomy of workplace intervention types. The former creating a new values-driven policy, credible enforcement procedures, restorative interventions, and training (Namie, 2003, p.5), and the later, a total of eleven intervention types (Caponecchia et al., 2020, p.104).

As mentioned, Namie's blueprint is a four-step plan for employers to follow. The first part is the creation of a *new values-driven policy* (2003, p.5). This involves making it clear that bullying is not part of the company culture, that all employees enjoy the same protections regardless of their protected class status, to clearly define what is considered bullying and to place bullying within the domain of health and safety, and finally to make sure people do not abuse the new protections with unnecessary complaints (Namie, 2003, p.5). The second part involves the implementation of third-party investigations, methods to change behaviour rather than zero tolerance and considering incidence of retaliation as separate to normal bullying (Namie, 2003, p.5). The third part includes offering coaching and counselling to perpetrators and victims, respectively (Namie, 2003, p.5). Finally, the fourth part recommends providing training and workshops on bullying to educate staff about appropriate behaviour (Namie, 2003, p.5).

Caponecchia's et al.'s (2020) eleven interventions came from analysing seventeen intervention types and evaluating which were most effective. The recommendations overlap considerably with Namie. The eleven recommended interventions were conducting investigations, providing codes of conducts, counselling, bullying awareness training, coaching, system-wide interventions, skills and training development, values statements, local resolution, and organizational redesign (p.121).

It's interesting that most of the suggestions from either academic wouldn't cause companies excessive amounts of time or money but when institutions aren't interested in implementing such ideas, how can bullying ever be tamed? That many workplaces seem to encourage this behaviour might explain why it remains so prevalent.

The literature on bullying is rich and I've only scratched the surface of areas relevant to my experience, so why write another paper at all? Truthfully, the literature helps us understand a great deal about bullying but it doesn't share the reality of a target's experience. We can read facts about bullying and what it does but that doesn't convey the emotional frustration or helplessness felt when it happens

to you. Targets are often represented in an objective and anonymised way, not as a living person.

3. This is the way

I don't want my experience to be cold and statistical, it needs to be personal, to engage emotionally. Autoethnography is the only method that invokes "the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy)" (Adams et al., 2015, p.46). It's a qualitative method of academic writing (Adams et al., 2015, p.22), which puts my experience at the centre of the investigation (Chang, 2008, p.62). The aim and benefit of using autoethnography is that it's constructed to produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research about issues and experiences that are not typically discussed (Ellis et al., 2011, p.274). It is its evocativeness that makes autoethnography unique in the way it incorporates subjectivity and emotionality, rather than the sterile delivery of numbers and statistics (Ellis et al., 2011, p.274).

Though I did find examples of autoethnographies about bullying in higher education workplaces, namely Zawadski and Jensen (2020), and Pheko (2018). Both papers used analytical autoethnography, which sees itself as a subgenre of realist ethnography (Anderson, 2006, p.378). Traditional, sometimes referred to as 'evocative' autoethnography, and analytic autoethnography vary in their approaches. Analytic autoethnography bases itself around five key features which are that you are a member of the researched group, you use analytic reflexivity, you are a visible and active researcher in the text, provide dialogue with informants, and demonstrate a commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006, p.378). The aim of analytic autoethnography is different to its evocative counterpart (Ellis et al., 2006, p.431), and, in my personal opinion, I think that causes it to lose its emotionality, which is what makes autoethnography stand out. It is because of this analytical approach that the stories from the aforementioned papers were personal but still made me feel like a "detached spectator" (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.431). Their writing still felt academic, trying to argue and persuade (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.441) when they could have conveyed their pain more fully.

In contrast, when I read Ronai's (1994-1995) reflections of the child sex abuse she suffered, I began to grasp an experience I could never otherwise understand, which saddened me and even made me feel sick to read. Gratefully, my own story is nowhere near as tragic, but that empathetic understanding and evocativeness is important.

And isn't autoethnography traditionally evocative? (Winkler, 2018, p.239) It's what makes it a distinct genre of writing (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.436) with more emphasis on "a plot, a moral and a point to the story" (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.438) than creating universal truths (Adams et al., 2015, p.9). An introspective journey with myself, the researcher as the researched (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009, p.29) may even prove to be therapeutic (Ellis et al., 2011, p.280).

This autoethnography is about a transformative experience that altered my life and, in many ways, my approach to life. In autoethnography, this is known as an epiphany (Adams et al., 2015, p.47). I'll use three sources of information to retell the events.

First are my personal memories and reflections of my time at both places. Memories are valued as a building block of autoethnography (Chang, 2008, p.71) and one that should be considered equally valuable to written notes (Winkler, 2018, p.238), though they can still prove to be unruly and unreliable (Winkler, 2018, p.238). If I rely on personal memory alone, it would be reasonable to question the reliability of my story, and there may have been events that I have forgotten or remembered differently in reflection. This is how the second source, textual artifacts, adds reliability. Texts I created or helped create preserve some of my thoughts and feelings at the time (Chang, 2008, p.107) such as emails, Facebook messages and even an English as a Foreign Language teachers' forum. Each an effective way to trigger memories and reimmerse myself in my situation at that time. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, through interviews, as a way to connect my experiences with others (Adams et al., 2015, p.55). By using interviews, I could confirm or reject my memories (Chang, 2008, p.107) by discussing them with impartial participants who might recall a situation differently or even remind me of factors I'd forgotten. To do this, I conducted the interviews in small groups to better generate a flow of information and interaction around the topic (Chang, 2008, p.107).

I started with "grand-tour" questions such as asking about the general work environment or opening questions about specific people or events before progressing to "mini-tour" questions which focused on more specific details such as discussing why we felt people behaved in certain ways or why certain events took place or were allowed to take place. This took the interviews from a general or more broad line of questioning to more specific questions on particular aspects about the workplaces whilst keeping the interview style casual (Chang, 2008, p.105).

The interviews also work as a "conceptual encounter". But I'm getting ahead of myself. Although autoethnography is my methodology of choice, I borrow two principles (or strategies) from a more established methodological tradition, phenomenology, to guide my inquiry.

Phenomenology is difficult to define (Qutoshi, 2018, p.216) but it's sometimes referred to as the "philosophy of the perpetual beginner" (Anton, 2016, p.3). A constructivist/interpretivist paradigm (Qutoshi, 2018, p.218) used to provide thick description (Anton, 2016, p.3) of lived experience, reflected upon, free from prejudice (van Manen, 2007, p.12). Due to these attributes, I felt that phenomenology connected well with autoethnography. The focus on thick description and the structure, that as you'll see, vignettes provide, offered me a frame on which to hang my work. The workplace bullying I'll describe took place over years in one case and many months in the other. Without the inclusion parts of phenomenology, it could have been easy to get lost in it all.

So, in order to guide me, there are two elements I borrowed: the first relates to the interviews and is known as a 'conceptual encounter'. Conceptual encounter is extremely flexible (De Rivera, 2006, p.232), working as a kind of co-reflection (Zawadski and Jensen, 2020, p.402) which allows me to "map my personal experience" (McLeod, 2001, p.46). As outlined above, I'll interview some former colleagues who were present during my experiences.

The second phenomenological aspect is structured vignettes. Structured vignettes, as I plan to use them, are divided into five parts, which are context, vignette, emotional response, reflexivity, and strategies developed (Pitard, 2016, p.15). My experiences cover long periods of time with almost daily occurrences of bullying. I can't describe everything that happened but hopefully by providing context and describing a few events or vignettes in each institution, I can still provide a taste of what I encountered (Humphreys, 2005, p.842).

Context will provide an overview of the research sites, which in this case were a university in South East Asia and a language school for adult learners in the UK to increase awareness of the work environments (Pitard, 2016, p.6). Context will also provide further information about myself, the researched, in my roles as a teacher and assistant director of studies in these institutions, respectfully, offering, a sense of my experiences. The vignettes are more in-depth stories about particular events and stand-out moments which stimulate emotion and understanding (Pitard, 2016,

p.6). The emotional response outlines my immediate feelings at the time (Pitard, 2016, p.7). Reflexivity is then used to expand my understanding of that time and the interactions (Pitard, 2016, p.8) using the literature I summarised as a guide. Finally, strategies developed are ways I changed to create more positive future experiences (Pitard, 2016, p.8).

I should get started but keeping in mind that other people are in my story (Chang, 2008, p.68) and, from an ethical and personal viewpoint, I don't want their assistance with this paper to cause them any harm, so I have protected their identities (Adams et al., 2015, p.57), as much as possible by keeping the names of the institutions and people involved anonymous using pseudonyms for people instead.

On the other side of this, despite my experiences of being bullied, I don't want this paper to cause either the institutions or bullies harm either. This may seem odd considering what you are about to read but, this paper, whilst truthful is also from my own perspective and doesn't allow for defence or rebuttal. We are all only human and the problem with written text is that once it's out, it doesn't allow those trapped within its pages to evolve or change in the mind of the reader.

4. Hammer

I was excited to join the university for two reasons. I'd wanted to work for a university for most of my career, and three months prior to starting, I was burgled while at home and was desperate to get away from the house and city it happened in. The job was a fresh start in a new place.

The university was in a new 'city' but really it was the countryside. It was just the university, the apartments the teachers lived in and some restaurants. It was a welcomed change, the air was clean and there was a park to run around, which was enough for me to be happy.

The hierarchy of our department was quite flat with the academic director at the top, followed by the assistant director, lead teachers, who ran each level from elementary to upper-intermediate, and the teachers at the bottom.

Work started well, my first observation by the assistant director was great, I was in the 'top' team and I made friends with other teachers. My students were amazing, friendly, receptive, and appreciative to learn English. But the honeymoon period came to an end.

It started with stories. The assistant director soon left with a few choice words about the academic director, who I'll refer to as hammer. Whilst this name is too cool for him, it suits him because he was blunt, obtuse, and used his power to make his impact felt.

When more teachers left, more stories came out about verbal assaults and one physical assault he'd committed on a teacher while drunk, ways he'd sabotaged teachers by withholding important documents when they quit or not renewing contracts because he didn't like the teacher, even ways he'd sabotaged the previous academic director to get his position. He wasn't interested in your expertise or abilities. His only interest was in your loyalty and respect to him. This was a problem for me, I'm neither a leader nor a follower, and my loyalty is earned not demanded.

This problem got me passed over for promotion at least twice by other teachers fractionally experienced and qualified. In fact, most of the lead teachers were the least experienced teachers who showed the most loyalty. Often, the person observing you knew far less about teaching than you did. Awkwardly listening to them fumble through feedback, their faces showed they knew they didn't know what to say. One lead teacher, who was not a bully, even apologised and was quite honest that he found it weird he was giving me feedback considering the gap in our experience and qualifications.

This disparity, as suggested from that interaction, was not lost on the leads, and I was often asked for help by other teachers which didn't go unnoticed either. Most of the leads were wannabe tough guys, except one token woman so nobody could argue misogyny. One lead was even a former bouncer, and hammer made it clear by his own behaviour that his managers were allowed to intimidate teachers if they wanted.

At one point some teachers wrote a letter of complaint about hammer, sending it to his bosses. The letter was sent back to him to deal with. This action meant he knew he could get away with almost anything. All complaints stopped with him and he got the names of the teachers who'd complained.

Some teachers, after leaving, started a forum discussion to warn others against joining the university. It turned into a war between those who had left and the leads. Complaints would be posted and then leads would respond by shouting down those complainers as bad teachers and idiots.

Over time, things would escalate and then calm down, people would lose their jobs for random reasons. Hammer even fired a teacher when he was caught having an affair with her.

So many incidents happened, exacerbated by the fact that we all lived together, so you couldn't go home and forget about it because when you stepped outside your building, you were going to find people sitting on the steps drinking that you probably wanted to avoid.

When I did finally leave, hammer tried to sabotage me too, but I was lucky and had outside help from a friend from that country, which is the only reason he failed.

4.1 The party

I sat across from hammer for the first year of my twenty-six months there. We were polite but he always made me feel uncomfortable. Being sat near him, I learned quickly that we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things, which wasn't good. Our only real run in, his attempted sabotage aside, was at a party he held. I didn't want to go but knew I had to. I had a few drinks, mingled, and then when most of the managers were intoxicated, I left, quietly. I pressed for the lift, waiting for its arrival when I heard a noise behind me. I turned to find hammer, drunkenly arm around shoulder with a lead teacher. Abuse followed along the lines of "yeah, you better leave" but less pleasant as they jeered and laughed. I didn't do anything, I just got in the elevator and left. What could I have done? What he said had surprised but didn't offend me. What concerned me was that his action meant it was okay to target me, and after that, I was.

4.2 Surprise attack

During my employment, especially once I'd shown that I was not hammer's type of person, I was moved around to different levels. At one point, I went to intermediate, whose lead I'll call tweezers. We had a complicated relationship, sometimes we were friendly and went running together. When he did bully me, it was like he did it just to conform. One day, he called me to his desk to ask me a question. After, he simply turned to me and said, "you're a bit of a cunt, aren't you?" There was no humour in his voice, no hint at a poor attempt at wit but no real malice either. He was simply stating, as a fact, that I was a cunt. There was nothing to say, no reply or retort I could make. The power only flowed one way.

4.3 Bloody sunday

One lead teacher took a dislike to me above all the others who I'll refer to as spanner, because, well, he was a bit of a spanner. While hammer made most of us feel uncomfortable, teachers spanner disliked were treated with aggression. He seemed to rationalise to himself why he targeted people. In my case, it was because I'm English. If you know me, you know that I'm far from patriotic but that didn't seem to matter. One incident that stayed with me for its bizarreness was when, during work, he accused me of committing the Bloody Sunday massacre. The accusation confused me as I didn't actually know anything about the event at the time. I would later learn that it took place eleven years before my birth.

4.4 Marvel

Spanner wasn't pleasant outside work either. One evening, when returning from watching the latest Marvel film, I found him sat on the steps of our apartment building, drunk. He asked me where I'd been so I told him. He started telling me how shit Marvel films are. I don't care if people like the same things as me, so when I said okay, he stood up to punch me. I wasn't worried, he was drunk and I was teaching karate to other teachers at the time. However, I knew that he could get away with punching me, defending myself would get me into trouble. Fortunately, his wife dragged him away before anything could happen.

4.5 Emotional response

By the end, I had a constant mix of emotions. There was the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty about what would happen each day at work and at night if I left my apartment. There was also frustration at myself, for not having seen things faster, and because under the right leadership, it could have been an amazing place. When an incident like the ones I described happened, my frustrations would increase further but there was nothing I could do about it, I just accepted them. I was lucky in that I put my feelings into my workouts. I always had enough anger to push myself in the gym. When I decided to leave, it was with a combination of fear and hope and when I did leave, it felt like a great weight had been lifted.

4.6 Reflection

Looking back, it's amazing and depressing to see how clearly the university fit into the literature as a stereotypical case of mobbing (Dereshiwsky, 2020, p.1212) where the managers took advantage of the power disparity (Aleassa

and Megdadi, 2014, p.160). Hammer was the definition of a *Screaming Mimi* (Namie, 2003, p.5) whose lead teachers followed his example to more or less to the same affect, often behaving in selfish and insensitive ways (Beng, 2010, p.63). Likewise, by deferring all complaints about hammer back to him, the university not only allowed but seemingly encouraged a bullying culture (Einarsen, 1999, p.21), leaving the targets of bullying with no recourse but to quit.

Similarly, I was, as the literature described, an overachiever, conscientious and naïve (Einarsen, 1999, p.19) and a member an out-group (Einarsen, 1999, p.21). I was competent, well-liked by other teachers, highly moral and resistant to dominance (Dereshiwsy, 2020, p.1214) which annoyed and made the managers feel threatened (Dereshiwsy, 2020, p.1212). As one interviewee put it, “there was a disparity in experience, possibly, you could say intelligence, between managers and other staff” which no doubt led to the managers feeling insecure and sensitive which could have played a key part in their behaviour becoming increasingly toxic, once again agreeing with the existing literature.

Looking back, the online forum argument was a perfect analogy of everything outlined above. On this forum, some former teachers wrote about a wide variety of events and did get a little personal, describing managers as inefficient, inexperienced, inept, and generally disinterested whilst the director of studies was accused of only being interested in staying in charge. The incidents themselves and, to be honest, even the personal remarks were valid. It didn’t take long for management to find the forum and to start responding. Instead of responding thoughtfully, a manager who referred to himself as ‘realteacher’ simply dismissed any complaints, stating that the teachers with legitimate concerns were failures and losers before talking about the financially package of working at the university as evidence why the complainers were wrong. He even emailed the forum to tell them to remove the complaints levied against the university, though the forum refused. Legitimate complaints being met with direct aggression and denial was the modus operandi of the university.

Ironically, as I was present at the university, I knew the identities of the managers who defended the university (and the complainers for that matter), ‘realteacher’ and his girlfriend, who was also a manager at that point, were fired because the academic manager grew concerned that they had become a threat to his position, an accusation ‘realteacher’ had said was not true of hammer.

It’s also true that, as the literature suggests, for each target, including myself, the attacks started slowly and

escalated with frequency and overtiness over time (Einarsen, 2020, p.392), as the managers became more confident and realized that there wouldn’t be any repercussions. This led to near constant feelings of anxiety, depression, and anger for me. In reflection, I withdrew myself from the situation as much as I could and often snuck around even after work and at the weekends to avoid confrontations, often flutily. It was a small place after all.

It didn’t help that some of the other teachers acted as bystanders, burying their heads in the sand while myself and others were targeted (Zawadski and Jensen, 2020, p.400). Perhaps it made it easier for them to deal with the place if they pretended everything was okay.

4.7 Strategies developed

I recovered from the experience, but it changed me. I shed some of my naivety, no longer believing that systems always worked. I learnt the signs. I knew what to watch out for when I joined a workplace, and I knew that my best course of action was to get out. At the university, some of us naively believed we could change it for the better if we stayed long enough but now, I knew better. However, it seems I didn’t learn well enough. I expected this kind of occurrence to happen in a country with lax laws and regulations but not in the UK. I was about to learn that I was very wrong.

5. Scalpel

After that place, I got a great job with an amazing mentor back in the city I’d left, but I grew tired of the country due to illness and so decided to leave. My parents’ 60th birthdays and 40th wedding anniversary were around the corner so it seemed like good timing to go. But when I arrived back in the UK, my dad told me they were separating. I only mention this because life doesn’t happen in isolation. Along with workplace bullying, during this time I will also have to help with my parents’ divorce, my wife will have to return to the USA because of visa restrictions, one of my dogs will get a double enucleation, I will have reverse culture shock because it was the first time I’d lived in the UK since finishing university over a decade earlier, and finally, I would realise that my salary doesn’t cover my basic cost of living.

I started my new job with nervous excitement. It was my first management level position. The work was interesting and varied. My day-to-day tasks included scheduling teachers’ and students’ and solving their problems. I would also teach, cover lessons, do teacher observations, provide

teacher training for teachers inside and outside the organisation. I also had regular contact with international sales offices about incoming students who I welcomed to the institution, giving inductions, and later, leaving speeches.

This time the honeymoon period was much shorter, my experience before meant I noticed the signs much sooner. Although it seemed welcoming at first, I became aware of the dog-eat-dog nature of the company. There was an expectation to learn quickly without training, including the company specific software. I also noticed that the institution's turnover was high. The director of studies, I'll call scalpel because she liked to make little cuts, saying things to make me feel uncomfortable or demoralized without being overt. She never chastised me publicly but had a manner that meant many some were afraid of her. She was the longest running member of staff and had been with the company for around twenty years, while most stayed for only around a year.

She saw everyone around her as stupid, criticising them all. Despite this, she seemed to struggle with the computer system that I'd taught myself to use. She seemed to do very little work as well. We worked different shifts, I would come in earlier to open the school and she would finish later and close the school. During the hours we worked together, she seemed to go for several cigarettes an hour with another manager she was friends with. While she seemed to be on a perpetual smoke break, I spent between nine to twelve hours a day (only eight of them paid) running around completing what seemed to be both our workloads. She seemed to have done almost nothing when I finished but when I would arrive the next morning, I would find random documents printed and placed on her desk as evidence of her work. The long hours were because the company expected us to start work before and finish after our contract hours with glances of disappointment or underhand comments sent our way if we kept to our proper schedule.

This time I knew better. I didn't think there was any point going over her head, no reason to believe anything would happen if I did. Plus, in the twenty years she had been there, I was told she had gotten rid of almost everyone else. I quietly found a new job and left.

5.1 Disliked

Scalpel had two consistent behaviours. The first was that she would be intentionally contrary about everything. If I stated an opinion on something, no matter how arbitrary, she would have the opposite opinion. For example, I was an IELTS examiner while she was a Cambridge Suites examiner.

This was something that seemed to bother her as she felt the need to frequently tell me what an inferior exam IELTS was. I didn't have strong feelings about either exam but she seemed to think it would provoke me into an argument and seemed annoyed when it didn't. The other thing she would do is to make comments that were intended to hurt, confuse, demoralise, or break my confidence. After I'd been there a while, teachers and students would come to me instead of her, only going to her if I couldn't help. I didn't think anything of it but she must have because one day she turned to me and told me that the teachers didn't like me. Apparently, they'd come to her to complain. This is despite the fact that I never saw any of them interact with her and even after she told me this, they still always came to me first anyway.

5.2 Halloween

Similarly, as part of a Halloween event, I helped some of the teachers make a short movie. It was pretty fun and I enjoyed the excuse to spend time with them as I was often too busy and my position could often make me feel isolated as I was neither a teacher nor upper management. The movie was a horror spoof and we joked around making it. When I got back to the office one day, scalpel told me that work was no place for a sense of humour and that a teacher had complained about our light-hearted antics.

After making critical comments like this, she would often 'buy' me a coffee to make it seem like she was just being a mentor. The thing was, she'd been there so long, she got free coffee anyway, so in reality, she let me pay for my coffee most of the time.

5.3 Probation

The probation period was long, around four or five months in the end but only because scalpel set the end of probation meeting late by two months. When we entered the meeting, she was concealing a smile. She told me that she wasn't going to fire me but thought I wasn't picking things up fast enough, so she wanted to extend my probation for another three months. One of the people I interviewed thought this was unfair to as say as while working there, I had taught myself the job, even ran the school for two weeks alone when she'd gone on holiday, receiving help from another senior manager as my attempts to get her support were often met with condescension. Another manager and I were surprised at her decision but we could make guesses why she decided to extend my probation. Many comments during the meeting were about my positiveness, which she didn't see as a valuable trait. Secondly, I had told her I was working on getting a visa to bring my wife back, we suspect-

ed she was pushing me to work even longer hours and cover more of her work. However, not wanting to get stuck like I was before, I'd already interviewed for my new job but I had to wait.

5.4 Final straw

A couple of days later, I was asked by the centre manager to go to another branch for extra training on short notice. Scalpel had obviously reported her probation findings, and he, being brand new to the centre, followed her guidance. It was only me at home now with our two dogs and nowhere to take them. On top of this, I was expected to pay for a hotel in London while away, and the low salary meant I had already used all of my savings and was getting further into debt. When I explained the situation, scalpel's suggestion was that I should get rid of my dogs. That night I got my new job and I quit the next morning. Scalpel was shocked, she didn't seem to think her behaviour would make me quit. My probation extension worked in my favour, I had to give almost no notice. A month later, I left the UK again. I didn't mind, the UK had felt like a foreign country to me anyway, and at least I got to be with my wife again. A few months later, a friend and one of the people I interviewed for this paper was let go after having a work related nervous breakdown. They are fine now but it made me realise how lucky I had been to leave when I did.

5.5 Emotional response

I didn't feel the same desperation as last time, just the dawning realisation that I'd made a mistake. I saw the signs quicker but I still needed to work. I'd spent everything I had getting set up and on my dog's operation. But this time I learned to play along, never letting her know that I knew she was trying to manipulate me for her own purposes. I pretended to be oblivious while planning my exit. It was frustrating, watching her try to mess with me, knowing I had no power to respond. It was another good place ruined by poor management, but I didn't lament it this time, there was no point. I focused on my goal, to get back to my wife and that's what I did.

5.6 Reflection

As with the university, the organisation enabled if not actively encouraged bullying due to its competitiveness (Namie, 2003, p.4). In this case, it was bullying rather than mobbing with scalpel being the definition of a *Constant Critic* (Namie, 2003, p.3). What was different though was her rationale. At the university, anyone more qualified than the managers were seen as a threat, not just me, but I was not a

threat to scalpel. She'd been there a long time. It didn't even seem to be that personal, except her dislike of my positivity (Namie, 2003, p.3). The interviewees seemed to think it was just who she was as a person.

This kind behaviour wasn't only aimed towards me. One interviewee described how scalpel had sent him an email about his leaving work five minutes early one day. Though he angrily replied and copied in a higher-level manager. The incident ended with scalpel being forced to apologise to him. Perhaps, in reflection, my experiences from the university where I had no legitimate way of solving these grievances had left me with the notion that it would be the same here. With that said, there were slight differences between our situations, I worked directly under scalpel whilst he worked separately and technically at the same level. They had very little in terms of a working relationship and so the dispute had little impact on either of them. Would the same have been true if I gone over her head or had I been too eager to run, afraid of being caught in a similar situation again?

5.7 Strategies developed

But as a result of working at this institution, I got even better at spotting the warning signs. Now I have a better idea of whether a workplace will encourage bullying without having to work there. A friend recently sent me a job advert I might have been interested in. I'd seen the university advertised quite often which meant a high turnover, which was a red flag. A review of the university confirmed it was a toxic workplace so I didn't apply.

On the other hand, it's also made me warier to take risks with jobs and less willing to fight for positive change, preferring to shut myself down and make my escape. It's taught me to compartmentalise my feelings and focus on what needs to be done instead often running instead of fighting.

6. Discussion and conclusion

There are realisations about my experiences that really struck me when I researched bullying and thought about my life at those times. Firstly, how both places fell into the troupes of workplaces that not only allowed but almost encouraged bullying behaviour, whether due to promoting the people who were the most dominant, the absence of a code of conduct, encouraging the use of fear, or allowing the misuse of performance reviews (Namie, 2003, p.4) both places did these things. Even the types of bullies are so well documented that my own fit perfectly into the *Screaming Mimi* and *Constant Critic* (Namie, 2003, p.3) descriptions.

Not to mention the parts that described my own nature in good and bad ways. I realize that I drew attention to myself because I had a passion for teaching that wasn't shared by those above, which pushed me into an out-group of like-minded and targeted people, and because I was conscientious and refused to be dominated (Einarsen, 1999, p.21).

Likewise, the bullies exhibited many of the traits from the literature. They were often selfish, manipulative, and dishonest (Beng, 2010, p.63) resorting to bullying to hide the fact they weren't very good at their jobs (Beng, 2010, p.63). They escalated their attacks in phases (Einarsen, 2020, p.392) and the outcomes were anxiety, depression, fatigue and more (Caponecchia et al., 2020, p.105), and amongst other things, a high turnover for both places (Aleassa and Megdadi, 2014, p.157).

And you know what? I checked when I was researching this, everyone I knew who was targeted left those places and nearly every manager who was a bully including hammer and scalpel are still in the same roles and it's been a long time since I worked at either place. This shows that the statistics on the targets being the ones who leave (Namie, 2003, p.3) and the bullies going unpunished are also true (Namie, 2003, p.3).

It is both staggering and depressing how accurately each facet of my experience matches the literature, except one. Going back through my memories, I remember the first time, how constantly frustrated I was, anxious and often depressed. I wanted to leave long before I ever got brave enough to do it. The second time the bullying gave me a sense of purpose instead. I knew what I had to do. I had a faster realisation of my situation with an immediate mission to get out of it. I kept my cards to my chest knowing they'd be used against me if I didn't, and in a quarter of the time, I was free.

I wanted to understand why this was and it led me to another effect of bullying which is barely covered in academic literature (van Heugten, 2012, p.292) which is resilience or antifragility. Resilience is the ability to adapt as a result of adversity, trauma, tragedy, or stress (Gattis, 2019, p.2) that softens the effects of bullying on our health (Meseguer-de-Pedro, 2019, p.180) whereas someone antifragile not only resists the trauma but gets better as a result, the challenge makes them learn, adapt, and grow (Tebeje, 2019, p.12).

I don't know if I would say I became antifragile from my experience but I became more resilient, able to recognise,

understand and respond (Annor and Ampsonsa-Tawiah, 2020, p.126) the second time in a way that improved my situation when I struggled so much the first.

It wasn't the revelation I expected to come to when I first started this autoethnography but it's something positive I can take away from experiences that weren't. I did say this might be therapeutic.

At the beginning of this autoethnography I said I had three purposes for writing it, to look back at my experiences of being bullied, to reflect on how I responded each time, and to understand how it changed me.

As unpleasant as it was looking back, what surprised me was not the negative aspects of the experience but how I changed as a person, stripped of naivety, and given resilience. Neither were great experiences or times in my life but nothing is fully bad if you learn from it.

Ending this autoethnography, I realise that so much of the literature limits its focus on the who, why and immediate effects of bullying but not what happens after? Do we all become resilient? This autoethnography answers this question for me personally, but there's an opportunity to research further if this is the common outcome.

In fact, there are so many directions for research into workplace bullying to go, moving away from cold statistics. Papers with other people and groups who have been targeted to learn how their experiences compare, papers that discuss bullying from the point-of-view of the bully, and as hinted above, research into the longer-term effects of workplace bullying, and resilience.

The limitation of this paper is that it's only taken from my own perspective with evidence that only supports my side of events. Whilst everything I wrote is true, there is no way to understand these scenarios from the other side of the aisle. But with that said, I feel that this paper, as best as I could, did convey the frustration and helplessness of being a target of workplace bullying and illustrated what it's like to be a human being going through this phenomenon rather than just another number.

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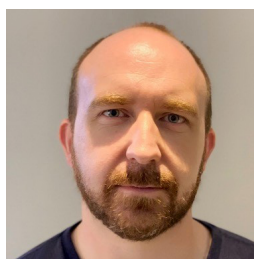
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Thirty-one and counting in the shadow: A teacher's autoethnography

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Abstract

In this autoethnography, I explore the ways in which my dual teacher identity, that of a Greek state school EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher and that of an EFL private tutor in the 'shadow education' sector, has impacted and shaped various aspects of my life throughout my career. To that end, I rely on data from my daily planners I have been using for three decades, as well as my own memory and recollections of events occurring in parallel with, or as a result of, my professional life. Moreover, treating the SE literature as another data source, I position myself within this educational framework, reflect on my actions and choices over the years and draw conclusions indicating that my private tutoring has consistently provided me with illegal income almost twice as high as my official salary, and has, thus, been a priority over my official teaching obligations; has offered me professional satisfaction deriving from my students' success; and has fatigued me physically, mentally and emotionally over time. Any ethical concerns have been pushed aside in view of the financial gain and the idiosyncratic nature of the Greek educational context where fee-charging tutoring appears culturally and socially accepted.

Opposite, Argolida, like a relief map, indented, edged by small bays with pink-orange cliffs and further inland, dark green pine-woods. (...) All the colours are vivid, but soft, pastel without being furry, aquarelle yet solid. To the right, over the bay of Nauplia, the big mountains of the Central Peloponnesus - snow-covered, like pink clouds low on the horizon, glittering faintly in the oblique sunlight.

- John Fowles, *Behind The Magus*

1. Introduction

I have been a state school EFL teacher in Greece since October 1990. At around the same time (and, not so systematically, some time earlier) I started teaching English to learners of all ages on a one-to-one basis - and have been doing so to this day. Hence the *Thirty-One* in my paper's title. But what about the *Shadow*? Officially speaking, what I have been doing for the past thirty-plus years is illegal (because I am paid tax evading money for my private tuition), oath-breaking (because, upon my appointment as a permanent state teacher in September 1995, I swore that I would honestly and conscientiously carry out my duties obeying the Greek Constitution and the laws of the state), and immoral / unethical as I have repeatedly tutored privately learners from my regular school classes¹. The *Shadow*², therefore, is what Bray (2006, p. 515) describes as the "shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring in academic subjects beyond the hours of mainstream formal schooling".

Following Adams *et al*'s advice on designing autoethnographic projects (2015), I connect my personal long-term experience with, and first-hand knowledge of, private one-to-one teaching of English as a Foreign Language, performed by me, a state school teacher in Greece, to the broader educational, sociocultural, political and economic context of this country. In the hope that I, as an autoethnographic writer, can achieve that connection between my story (*auto*) and the wider cultural point (*ethno*) "that shifts a story from just interesting, to research" (Emerald & Carpenter, 2017,

p.27), positively answer Adams *et al*'s call to narrative and storytelling.

But where is this present study situated in the relevant literature? According to Bray and Lykins (2012, p.1), "the period since the turn of the century has seen considerable expansion of what is widely called the shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring". They add: "Now the shadow sector is strongly visible throughout Asia as well as in other world regions." However, "prior to the present century it [SE] attracted very little professional discussion or academic research" (Bray *et al*, 2013, p. 1). In Greece, research has concentrated on private supplementary tutoring offered at secondary education level, and particularly to high school students wishing to continue their studies in higher education (Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013). In this paper I focus on the type of SE which takes the form of English private lessons illegally delivered by appointed permanent state schoolteachers in Greece – an unresearched field, to the best of my knowledge. I am going to concentrate on the variety of multifaceted lived experiences in the course of a thirty-year spanning career of such a teacher, i.e. myself. From a methodological point of view, therefore, this study adopts an autoethnographic approach, whose scarcity in the Greek context has been pointed out by Sergis (2018, p. 696), who acknowledges that "Autoethnography is an uncharted issue in Greece" and presents eight cases of (non-Greek) autoethnographic studies in his work. Even rarer is research into shadow education adopting an autoethnographic approach from the perspective of the teacher as provider of shadow education. I have been able to spot an autoethnography of a private English tutor (Yung, 2019) for whom, however, there was no ethical conflict involved as he was not a schoolteacher at the same time. The only autoethnographies by Greek educators that came up during my literature search were two music teachers' personal stories (Stamou, 2016; Kontovourki, 2019) an adult educator's narrative (Strikka, 2019), and a primary teacher's "critical self-ethnography" (Tympa, 2018) – all written in Greek. Autoethnography appears to be a terra incognita for researchers in Greece in general, let alone the more specialized issue of shadow EFL education which this paper attempts to tackle.

Following Creswell's recommendation (2009) on using literature in qualitative studies, instead of including a separate section on literature review, I have incorporated the related literature in the narrative sections of this study, where it is compared and contrasted with the themes and categories as they emerge from the analysis.

1 According to Law 1566/198, art. 13, par. 9 (Government Gazette No. 167 of 30 September 1985), state school teachers in Greece are not allowed to deliver private tuition.

2 When I first researched SE, I thought the *shadow* implied illegal practices and transactions hidden in the shadows, away from official monitoring. Later, I read Bray (2013, p. 83) and realized SE "is described as a shadow because it mimics the school system. When the curriculum in the school system changes, so does the curriculum in the shadow; and, when the school system grows, so does the shadow".

2. Research questions

In my autoethnographic study, I endeavour to answer the following research questions:

- RQ.1 What are my teaching practices in general?
 - a. What are my “legitimate” practice duties and obligations as a state EFL school teacher?
 - b. What constitutes my “illegitimate” practice as a private EFL teacher and what are its benefits?
 - c. What is the mutual relationship between the two practices?
- RQ.2 How has the interplay between my “illegitimate” and “legitimate” teaching practices impacted on me and shaped me as an individual psychologically, emotionally, professionally and financially?

3. Research methodology

March 2020³. An acceptance letter (Figure 1) from a university I have applied to for a PhD arrives in my inbox, filling me with joy, expectations, awe, and concern – all feelings rolled up into one, and robbing me of that night’s sleep.

Summer 2020. The ‘cannot-wait-to-start’ PhD student has eagerly searched the university’s website for modules, tutors and their publications six months before the commencement of his doctoral course. First things first and the first module tutor’s first article I come across gets downloaded and printed out: “Autoethnography as an Authentic Learning Activity in Online Doctoral Education ...” by K. Lee. ‘Autoethnography’ being a Greek word is instantly recognizable to me as such, but what does it actually mean? The meticulous student googles the term, makes do with a Wikipedia definition, and annotates its meaning on paper (Figure 2).

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

But why do autoethnography? This question is posed by both Muncey (2010) and Adams *et al* (2015). According to Lee (2020, pp. 578-579), for a doctoral student like my self, AE can serve as an authentic learning activity situated

Figure 1. Accepted!

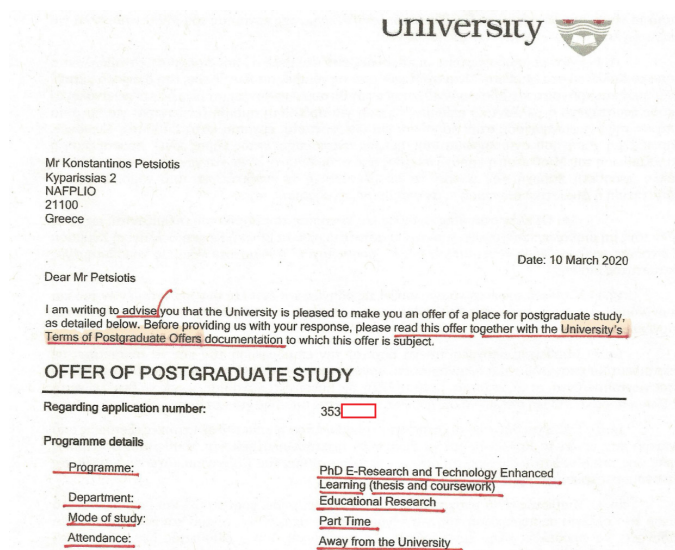
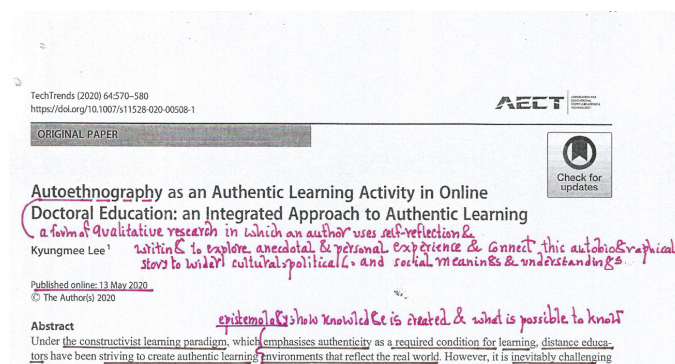


Figure 2. First encounter with AE



in a personal context, and enabling me to identify my “own meaningful problem”.

Turning to Adams *et al*’s reasons for doing autoethnographic research (2015, p. 36), and sifting through them, I come across one or two reasons that I believe apply to my paper – some humble or bland ones like making contributions to, and/or extend existing research and theory, some more ambitious like disrupting the taboo of SE in my professional field. But, put more simply, and in line with Muncey (2010), as I have first-hand experience of the concept I am studying, I simply want to write myself into the study and make myself the focus of the study.

Cohen *et al* (2017, p. 29) warn us that “planning and conducting educational research cannot follow simple recipes”. In my autoethnography, I adopt a hermeneutic phenomenological approach so that I can focus on my lived

³ Throughout this paper, italicized writing indicates a narrative.

experience of a phenomenon (private tutoring versus / in parallel with schoolteaching) as well as on my cultural (professional) location as a state schoolteacher, and my subcultural one as a private tutor of English within the Greek educational sociocultural context. I go beyond describing this phenomenon and, following Bynum & Varpio, I explore and convey its meaning in the context of my everyday life. Bynum & Varpio (2018, p. 252) point out that this approach includes the researcher's experience in the process of data collection and analysis and allows the "dynamic, thoughtful process of reflecting and writing that guides data analysis". Following Grix's account of grounded theory (2010), I therefore do not start out with any hypotheses; rather, I seek relationships between concepts among the data I have collected and code them accordingly. I (the researcher) am the lens through which the data are viewed and subsequently interpreted in their social and cultural context.

The use described above of two qualitative methods, i.e., hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory, in one study has been discussed and endorsed by Annells (2006).

4. The data

The data I draw upon in order to find answers to the research questions come from two sources. First, from the 32 organizers / planners / diaries I have been using in the course of three decades (1990-2021) to jot down my school timetable, schedule my private lessons and keep a record of financial transactions, and, occasionally, note down important events, appointments or assignments. As discussed by Chang (2008), these textual data chronicle my past and serve as an autobiographical timeline listing events in a chronological order (which I do not always adopt in my narrative). Secondly, I rely on my recollections and memories of my own private learners and teaching instances, "personal memory data" as Chang calls them. She points out that "[p]ersonal memory is a building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past as a primary source of information" (2008, p. 71). Instead of merely describing what happened in my life, I endeavour to string together these fragments of memories and analyze and interpret these bits of autobiographical data into a culturally meaningful and sensible text.

Moreover, to answer the research questions, I employ my own experiences and contrast them with literature pertinent to the field. Muncey (2010, p. 2) strongly supports the idea that "individual experiences are a legitimate source of data". In addition, in their discussion of grounded theory (see my

section on Research methodology), Birks & Mills (2011, p. 80) endorse and legitimate the use of literature as a source of data when quoting Glaser (2008): "Published literature and existing theory [...] are data and should be treated the same as data from any other source ...".

5. Ethical considerations

By definition, writing autoethnography entails focusing on the self, but, as Chang, (2008, p. 68) notes, it also involves other people, "either as active participants in the story or as associates in the background". In my AE, some people are "mentioned in passing", while my own English teacher is "more intimately interwoven" into my story (Chang, 2008, p. 68). Thus, I decided to anonymize him by using the initial letter of his first name only. As for the self, "doing autoethnography can create personal and professional risks and vulnerabilities" (Adams *et al*, 2015, p. 63). In my case, I, as the autoethnographer, am readily identifiable in my paper, and confessing my law-breaking educational practice can theoretically even incur penal sanctions in my country. In reality, however, this is highly unlikely in a country where the Minister of Education himself admits that the state "cannot police private tutoring" or "trace the black money", rationalizing those appointed teachers'/tutors' practice as "they don't make a fortune out of this – they merely augment their salary"⁴.

6. Narratives, discussion, and findings

Art Bochner: Why don't you try to show what autoethnography is in a story, much like you did in *The Ethnographic I*?"

Carolyn Ellis: I'll try, though I'm not sure I can do that in this context.

- Ellis & Bochner, *Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography*

I would have liked to have written this paper in a pure narrative fashion in the way Ellis does in her storytelling, but, as a novice autoethnographer, I will make do with a hybrid approach that blurs evocative Ellis & Bochner-style autoethnography (2006) and analytic Anderson-like autoethnography (2006): each textual snapshot of my epiphanies (or more mundane moments - everyday experiences that may not be epiphanical [Adams *et al*, 2015]) will be linked

⁴From a radio interview with Greece's Minister of Education K. Gavroglou, on ERT Proto Programma (March 21, 2019).

in a more analytic fashion to the relevant literature. After all, “[s]ome autoethnographers ... [use] the language and formatting conventions of traditional social-scientific forms of writing—that is, structuring a work using a literature review, research questions, methods, data, and findings format” (Adams *et al.*, 2015, p. 37).

6.1 Mentor

In her discussion of collecting personal memory data for doing autoethnography, Chang (2008, p. 76) proposes five thematic categories as a starter, one of which is mentors. My memory goes like this:

I remember myself at around the age of 10 being taught English (but not learning much) at a small foreign language cram school in the old part of the town where I live. I cannot recall much from those early learning days, only my plastic briefcase (but not the textbooks inside it), our teacher, a well – dressed, chic Greek female, and her fragrance. Then, in my first year in high school, I and a schoolmate, Andreas start private English lessons – I suppose it was our mothers’ decision, predominantly a financial one, to share the cost of the tutor. Our private tutor is Mr. S, who instantly concludes that Andreas and I have made a false start in English and, as if in a board game, we land on square one, back to the basics. For some unexplained reason, I am starting to become brilliant at English – so much so, indeed, that Mr. S proposes that I start individual lessons with him since Andrew cannot catch up with me anymore. For the next five years I speak, write and think in English as much as I do in Greek. My university entrance exam grades in Ancient Greek, Latin, History, Essay Writing and English easily secure me a place at the Department of English Language and Literature in Athens.

I remember Mr. S arriving in his 1976 red Ford Fiesta for our lesson. As my mother has remarked, he actually looks English with his fair hair, green eyes and pale complexion. He is passionate about teaching and soon builds himself a name in our small-town circles of English private tutoring. He attended the same university school as me and was tenured as a teacher of English at a state secondary school. Soon, however, he quit as he could not stand the students’ indifference towards the subject. Presumably, he felt confident enough that he would survive in the free market of private tutoring. As a matter of fact, he thrived in it and for about three decades, he charged the highest prices in the area; at my pre-economic crisis peak as an established teacher/tutor with two master’s degrees, I charge less than him. However, when I saw

him a few years ago, overcome by his own and family members’ health problems, he was rather regretful about his early career decision and, I gathered, he would have cherished the relevant safety of a state pension.

According to Chang’s (2008, p. 79) definition of the term, a mentor is someone “from whom you have learned new knowledge, skills, principles, wisdom, or perspectives that have made an impact on your life.” I suppose it is fair to acknowledge that my private tutor of English has shaped me into the professional I am today.

6.2 Into the deep end

To answer the first research question and associated subquestions, I delve into the literature on the state of things as regards EFL teaching and the status of the EFL teacher in Greece today, a “messy and ill-defined term” (Lykoudi, 2016, p. 27), and contrast it with my own life history, situation and circumstances.

April 1985, my junior year at university, savouring student life – academia can wait. In his inaugural presidential address, the then President of the Greek Republic⁵ controversially declares that the Greeks are a ‘brotherless nation’ (Özkirimli & Sofos, 2008, p. 122) - with a ‘brotherless’ language, one can presume.

Indeed, Sifakis (2009, p. 233) remarks that Modern Greek is not widely spoken outside Greece, therefore foreign language learning is deemed necessary in a country which heavily depends on the tourist industry. Unsurprisingly, English is the most popular choice and, as shown by Eurostat statistics (2021, pp. 3, 7), in 2018, nine out of every 10 primary and secondary schoolgoers in Greece learnt English.

Flashback. 1979, I have a summer job on a campground in a seaside village not far away from my hometown. The campground actually provides the perfect breeding ground for me to deploy my fast-developing English language skills: holidaymakers from across Western Europe come and go and I enthusiastically strike up conversations – and later correspond by mail - with whoever I meet, be they native speakers of English or users of it as a lingua franca.

Flashforward. September 1991. I have started teaching English on Tuesdays and Fridays at a foreign language school (frontistirio, singular for frontistiria, in Greek) in a

⁵ Christos Sartzetakis (b. 1929), President of the Greek Republic from 1985 to 1990.

| village 10 kilometres away from my home.

In Greece, English is taught on three different fronts - first, in primary, junior and senior high state schools by teachers who hold a four-year university degree in English studies, or by substitute teachers hired at the beginning of the school year. However, prompted by the value Greek society places on English language learning and certification, parents also enroll their children in English courses offered by foreign language schools, the abovementioned 'frontistiria' (Tsagari, 2006, p.2), where - they believe - foreign languages are taught and learnt more effectively. As parents tend to think 'the earlier the better', they send their children to frontistiria before their school English language learning begins so that they are 'done with their English' "by the age of sixteen, as after that age their time is entirely taken up by their preparation for the general university entrance examinations" (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003, p. 8). Finally, many parents also have their children attend one-to-one English classes. Since private one-to-one teaching takes place in a free market, practically anyone can provide their services.

Back to my (hi)story: I have earned my BA degree in English Language and Literature in April 1991, with a four-year delay (I entered university in October 1982) due to an 11-month paternal illness and untimely death, a one-year military service and a huge amount of time spent for the sake of spending it. Within a week of my baptism of fire at the frontistirio I mentioned before, I am also called in by the Ministry of Education to teach as a substitute teacher at two schools, one primary and one secondary, located in two villages around 20 kilometres away from my hometown. In the meantime, I have also started delivering private lessons in English and, at the same time taking driving lessons. My mother has just bought me my first brand new car but I cannot drive it yet without a driving license. For the first weeks, I am chauffeured to work in my own car by my cousin, or catch the bus. Only a few weeks earlier I was lazing jobless on the beach in my hometown, and now I was in full swing teaching on three fronts, one legal practice and two (literally) illegal ones. So, this was it - thrown in at the deep end, it all happened so quickly there was no time to think about ethical considerations, moral obligations, or legal complications; and there was me - initially wearing three hats (those of a frontistirio, state school, and private one-to-one teacher), later in the dual conflicting role of state tenured school teacher and private tutor.

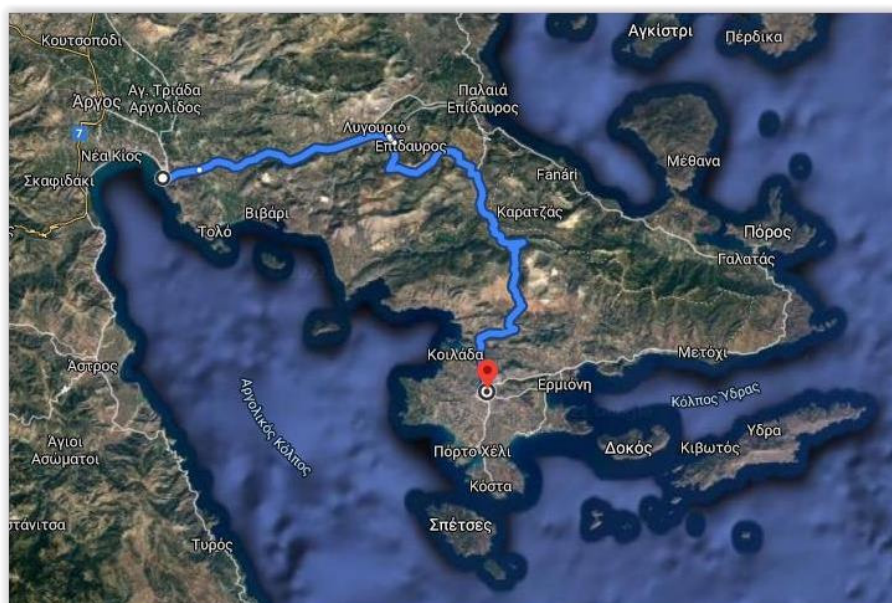
According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018, p. 28), the education system in Greece is highly centralized, allowing little room for teacher autonomy. In this "lethargic state sector" (Tsagari & Sifakis, 2014, p. 213), therefore, I do not have to make any choices regarding curriculum, textbooks, assessment, etc., as these are prescribed by the Ministry of Education and must be adhered to. In my public workplace, "the pressure to prepare candidates for exams is non-existent" (Sifakis, 2009, p. 233) and I 'enjoy' one of the lightest teaching loads in the OECD countries (OECD, 2018, p. 46). When I started my career, I taught 24 hours per week, and at present, 21. This state of things affords me the much needed time I can devote to private teaching - but comes with a cost: demotivated learners, negative attitudes towards English classes at school (treated as a pleasant break from official and demanding EFL learning at private language institutes [Lykoudi, 2016, p. 41]), and undisciplined behavior, which affect teachers' motivation, quality of work and performance (Karavas, 2010, p. 69).

6.3 A long day's journey into work

Some important life decisions have been taken solely through the prism of my private tutoring enterprise and the ensuing financial profit.

October 1995. Summers where I live are extra-long, rainless and arid. The first autumn drizzles turn the dust-covered poorly macadamed country roads into a slippery ice rink. I drive to work, two primary schools - my first permanent teaching appointment - in a small town 70 kilometres away from home. Due to the stunningly beautiful but driver-unfriendly topography of the area (see the Epigraph and Figure 3), I literally drive up and down a mountain before I reach my destination. In mid-journey, I take a bend faster than I should and my second-hand infamous rear wheel drive BMW gently skids off the road and into a nearby field. Some time later, a farmer's tractor tows her back to the road, car unharmed, my driving confidence shattered for the rest of the school year. Like I said, 1995, it is my first tenured teaching position after one year as a substitute teacher and another three years at a private secondary school. I have been building myself a good reputation in the private tutoring sector for about five years and have amassed a large pool of clientele. I get up at 6 am every day to be in time for school at 8am, then drive back home and start my private lessons. This 'long day's journey into work' (and back) entails covering 140 kilometres five days a week for ten months. I could have opted to live in the small town where the two schools

Figure 3. 1995-96 daily commuting



are located for one year; I check my organizer for back then: this would have meant quitting private tutoring in my hometown and, upon my return a year later, starting almost from scratch to build a new pool of students.

I now turn to the psychological and physical imprint which my combined teacher identities have left on me.

6.4 Crack under pressure

October 2011. The first two months of my teaching year are always hectic and frantic. I'm desperately struggling to initially work out and subsequently adapt to the new timetable, new private learners, new classes at school. It's Monday afternoon and I'm teaching two young teen girls, Melina and Anna, when, all of a sudden, my voice refuses to come out, I feel paralyzed and let out a faint sigh "Sir?!" Surprised, the two girls watch me sink into the chair, short of breath, unable to speak, and helpless. A few minutes later Melina's father drives me to my father-in-law's medical office—I don't know why but I suppose I must have asked him to do so. My father-in-law is an old-school cardiologist who runs an electrocardiograph on me and declares me healthy. Some time later and two floors up (the surgery and my in-laws' residence are in the same block of flats) my mother-in-law concludes that I am overworked and underfed and fries me two eggs so that I can stand on my feet again. I do stand on my feet, and the incident goes unnoticed and untreated, but I am carrying it around like a time bomb in me. The bomb ex-

plodes a year later (November 2012) while I'm teaching at school, in the middle of a lesson. This time I'm taken to hospital in an ambulance – with all the symptoms of a massive anxiety attack.

As Kokkinos (2007) points out, teaching is a highly stressful occupation and teacher burnout can occur as a result of chronic work stress. After 20 years (in 2011, when the first anxiety attack incident occurred) of practically working two jobs, I might be right in thinking that professional burnout could have ensued twice as early or perhaps twice as severe. Managing student misbehavior has always been a major stress factor throughout my teaching career; this, coupled with time constraints imposed by overlaid work schedules may have taken their toll on my emotional and physical health. In Kokkinos' study (2007), involving 447 primary school teachers in Cyprus, both of the aforementioned stressors predicted burnout. It needs to be stressed here that, according to Kokkinos *et al* (2005, p.79), work overload may render teachers less tolerant of "challenging and aversive" student behavior, thus inflating its significance as a stress factor. In addition to work-related stressors, the teacher's personality was indicated by Kokkinos (2007) to also be associated with burnout. Based on Costa & McCrae's five-factor model of personality (1992), Kokkinos (2007, p. 230) defines conscientiousness as "the tendency towards persistence, industriousness and organization", all of which attributes have characterized my teaching practices. According to the same model, neuroticism - identified by Kokkinos (2007) as a predictor of burnout - is exhibited as,

among other manifestations, the susceptibility to psychological distress and inability to cope with stress – both of which I have experienced over the years.

As regards Greek EFL teachers in particular, Karavas (2010, p. 69) attributes the high levels of stress and burnout expressed by the teachers in her study to learners' lack of motivation for, and interest in, learning English and to the ensuing discipline problems. She notes that students' lack of motivation has been a perennial problem especially for the Greek public school EFL teacher and a source of great stress and a powerful demotivating factor for them.

I am inclined to believe that my own personality characteristics, the status of the EFL teacher and their subject in the Greek educational system, and physical and mental fatigue amassed over time because of my afternoon tutoring, have weakened me emotionally and psychologically.

6.5 The tricks of the trade

"Situating outside regulations, taxation and monitoring by the government, private tutoring in Georgia is part of the informal economy" (Kobakhidze, 2018, p. 7) - just substitute 'Greece' for 'Georgia' and one is afforded an accurate picture of *parapaideia*^{6,7} in this country. In her study on SE in Georgia, Kobakhidze (2018, p. 3) pinpoints the lack of attention in research paid to teachers' views, their rationalization for involvement in tutoring and the market dynamics (decision making, price setting, emotions management and challenges).

I am briefly dealing with each of these aspects as I believe that, combined, they piece together my private tutoring profile.

6.5.1 Finances: Do the math!

I check my organizer for 2010, when I have reached an all-time private tutoring income peak. By my poor maths, I calculate I earn twice as much from private teaching as from my official profession – and this earning pattern continues more or less unchanged to the present. Ironically, my private tutoring income is supplemented by my regular salary rather than vice versa (Figure 4), thus rationalizing away "any

moral qualms, such as guilt, regarding the [SE] market activities" (Kobakhidze, 2018, p. 15). I do acknowledge, though, that my private tutoring can have a social impact in that it "maintains or exacerbates social and economic inequalities" (Bray, 2009, p. 32), since high-income households can afford it and low-income households are less likely to do so.

I admit that the first and foremost reason why I have been involved in SE is financial, as has also been found in Polychronaki's study (2002) involving Greek high school teachers who viewed private tutoring as a supplement to their low salaries. These salaries have actually been decreased by 30 to 40% during the Greek financial crisis (Kalyva, 2013, p. 106). Far from being a shrewd professional, I developed my price setting strategies by starting with relatively low tutoring fees to establish a clientele, then gradually raised the fees as I built a reputation on the market, reaching a point where my fees were fixed and

Figure 4. My Scrooge-like financial records: first row - fluctuating tutoring income, second row - more or less steady salary

April 2009	2.564.0 + 2.031.0	4.595.0
May 2009	2.518.0 + 703.8	3.221.8
June 2009	1.588.0 + 3697.34	5.079.34
July 2009	940.0 + 2.066.0	2.806.0
August 2009	423.0 + 1544.0	2.216.0
September 2009	7.553.0 + 7544.0	5.100.0
October 2009	4.293.0 + 1544.0	5.840.0
November 2009	3.939.0 + 1544.0	5.286.0
December 2009	2.993.0 + 2.559.0	5.552.0
2009	32.150 + 21.847.1	52.997.14
January 2010	3.220.0 + 1544.0	4.764.0
February 2010	3.011.0 + 1544.0	4.558.0
March 2010	3.830.0 + 1448.0	5.278.0
April 2010	3.248.0 + 1412.0	4.660.0
May 2010	2.286.0 + 1449.0	4.735.0
June 2010	2.038.0 + 1444.0	3.482.0
July 2010	400.0 + 1652.0	2.052.0
August 2010	668.0 + 1581.57	2.249.57
September 2010	3.687.0 + 1567.0	5.242.0
October 2010	4.671.0 + 1649.95	6.320.95
November 2010	4569.0 + 1567.0	6.128.0
December 2010	3.208.5 + 1449.0	5.187.5
2010	35.648.5 + 19.163.52	54.812.02
January 2011	372.0.5 + 1567.0	4.087.5
February 2011	3.276.5 + 1567.0	4.843.5
March 2011	3.422.0 + 1567.0	4.989.0
April 2011	3.229.0 + 1442.87	4.671.87
May 2011	3.070.0 + 1567.08	4.637.08
June 2011	1.499.0 + 1469.81	2.968.81
July 2011	782.0 + 3244.91	4.026.91
August 2011	216.0 + 1567.08	1.783.08
September 2011	2.647.0 + 1428.12	4.075.12
October 2011	3.331.0 + 1204.22	4.535.22
November 2011	3.698.0 + 1204.22	4.902.22
December 2011	2.659.0 + 1250.91	3.909.91
2011	30.224.0 + 20.078.24	50.302.24

6 The submerged economy in the educational system in Greece is so widespread that it has a name of its own: *parapaideia* (Kieselbach et al, 2001, p. 262).

7 According to the Annual Report on Education by the Centre for Development of Educational Policy (2020, p. 852), in 2018, Greek households spent 1,178.7 million euros on SE.

non-negotiable, with the exception of siblings or pairs of learners being charged proportionally lower fees. During the economic crisis, however, I had to readjust my fees accordingly.

6.5.2 Job satisfaction: From ABC to C2

I leaf through the pages of my thirty-odd organizers I have been stashing away in my bookcase closets for years⁸; my wife says this is a disorder called ‘hoarding’ or maybe I have an unhealthy attachment to the past, and suggests I throw them all away. Hundreds of students’ first names, often with surname initial to distinguish namesakes, all bringing memories – some vivid ones, some others faded or fading (Figure 5a).

I look at all those learners’ names. So many kids (my two sons included) I started tutoring as early as their second year in primary school and then all the way through to their highest language certification – tangible evidence of my direct impact on them - seven to eight years later (Figure 5b). Beyond finances, therefore, individual tutoring has been for me a source of professional satisfaction and fulfillment away from the pressure, constraints and “uninspiring work experienced in formal education settings” (Soldo & Jokić, 2013, p. 154).

6.5.3 The measure of success

Logged in on the platforms of the examination boards I register my students with (Figure 6), I scroll up and down the pages with their personal details and exam scores as if I’m looking at my trophy case full of my tutees’ certificates. By 2009 I have earned two MAs, one in Applied Linguistic, one in TESOL, and I do know all about ‘teaching, not testing’, the washback effect of testing on teaching (Alderson & Wall, 1993), and so on - yet I am willing to cynically adopt a strict exam-oriented curriculum and the role of an exam coach.

My success as a tutor is not measured so much by whether my students actually learn English but more by whether they pass or fail their exams. Success breeds success: my learners’ achievements in their language certification exams help build myself a good name in the black market of private tutoring, which results in more parents asking for my services.

⁸ This reminds me of Ragan Fox’s ‘auto-archaeology’ (2010, p. 122), although I am aware that he refers to institutional artifacts, not personal ones.

Figure 5. From ‘Charoulis’ (diminutive), a beginner learner in September 2013, to ‘Charalampos’ (formal name), a Proficiency holder six years later

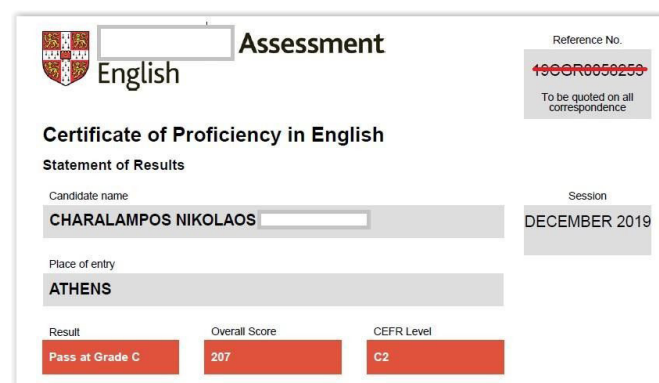


Figure 6. Some of my students on an American EFL examination board online registration platform

EXAMS					
	Home	Why Exams?	About the exams	Exam Preparation	News FAQ Contact
Oct 27, 2018	14966	IRAKLIS VASILEIOS	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 21, 2018	14723	ANGELIKI MARIA	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Oct 18, 2018	14482	STYLIANOS MARIOS	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 15, 2018	14110	KONSTANTINOS	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 8, 2018	13784	KALLIOPI	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Feb 22, 2018	9472	FOIVOS	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Feb 11, 2018	9138	DIMITRIOS EVGENIA	Completed	320,00 €	View order
Oct 15, 2017	6758	STERGIOS	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 15, 2017	6720	GEORGIOS	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Oct 14, 2017	6658	NIKOLAOS	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 11, 2017	6495	IOANNA	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 9, 2017	6314	ANASTASIA	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Oct 9, 2017	6313	NIKOLETA	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Mar 2, 2017	3244	IRAKLIS VASILEIOS	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Feb 24, 2017	2830	KALLIOPI	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Feb 22, 2017	2730	KONSTANTINOS	Completed	145,00 €	View order
Feb 20, 2017	2625	NIKOLETA	Completed	160,00 €	View order
Feb 20, 2017	2624	THEODORA	Completed	160,00 €	View order

6.5.4 Performance and ethics

Silova *et al* (2006) consider private tutoring to be closely linked to unethical behavior by educators, and for Bray (2013, p. 83), one-to-one fee-charging tutoring provided by teachers in regular schools “is the type most vulnerable to corruption, because teachers are tempted to reduce efforts during normal hours in order to promote demand for their private classes.” From a professional standpoint, I plead guilty to the occasionally ‘reduced performance’ part, but it has not been intentional. Rather, I often inadvertently resort to “energy saving mode” (Kobakhidze, 2018, p. 132) for my afternoon classes. Even with the latter, however, there are times (early or later in the afternoon, depending on the time of year) when my biorhythms are at their lowest ebb and I am fighting sleep, all this showing up “in my speech fluency, mixing up words, forgetting a line of thought ...”, like the subjects in Amschler & McKenzie’s study (2010, p. 106) on teachers’ sleep deprivation. On a saving grace note, I have never seen the classroom as a recruiting ground for private students, as has been the case mainly for high-stake university exam preparation, nor have I practiced what Kobakhidze (2018, p. 155) terms ‘coercive tutoring’, whereby teachers pressure students into tutoring through persuasion or otherwise. Rarely, however, have I declined a request to tutor a learner from a class I teach (Figure 5), and certainly not out of ethical considerations.

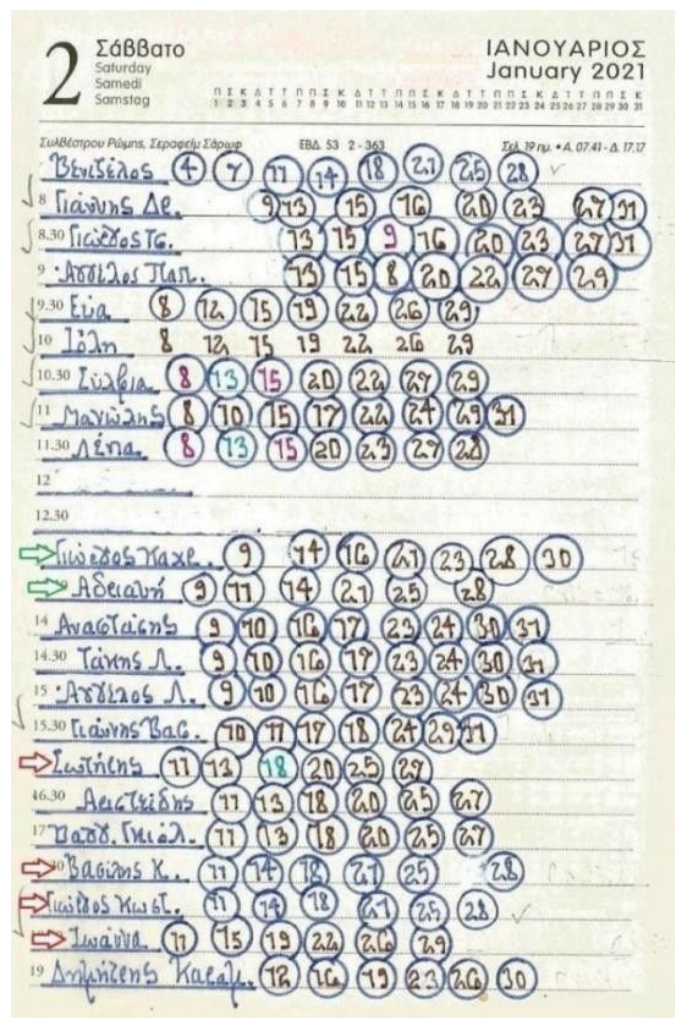
An unfair advantage of the schoolteacher/private tutor over the self-employed freelance teacher is that the former can easily market and sell themselves to learners and their parents in the school environment - a privilege I have been enjoying over the years as, with the exception of one school term, I have not had to teach away from my hometown. However, having your private afternoon tutees in your regular morning classes can be awkward, especially when students have advertised the fact among peers (Kobakhidze, 2018, p. 160), and the teacher-student relationship unavoidably takes on a different form.

Another ethically debatable issue is my being paid directly by my students’ parents, thus creating a supplier-customer relationship, which renders me accountable toward them. This feeling of answerability was also expressed by Georgian teachers in Kobakhidze’s study (2018, p. 116).

7. Validation

In order to validate the accuracy of the findings of my study, I employed an external audit, as proposed by Creswell (2014, p. 284). This person, long-time colleague Anastasia

Figure 7. Tutoring my own students: Four learners currently (red arrows) and two from school year 2018/19 (green arrows)



– with whom we have worked together at one state and one private school, and have co-operated in private tutoring through the ‘referral system’ (recommending each other for private teaching, Kobakhidze, 2014, p. 466) - is a very experienced EFL teacher who has followed the same professional route as me, i.e. being both a state teacher and private tutor. I contacted her on completion of this paper (See Appendix) and asked her to review and evaluate my study not only as an auditor but also as a critical friend.

In her written evaluation (See Appendix A), Anastasia notes that her experience corroborates with my own assessment of SE on EFL teaching in the Greek public school sector. The early enrollment of students in English courses outside the official school environment and the emphasis on certification renders the subject of secondary importance as

early as the primary school level. Students arrive in the EFL classroom with previous knowledge of the subject in varying degrees, and this affords them a certain learning arrogance.

Anastasia also remarks that I focused on two main reasons for continuing private tutoring despite the toll it has taken on my physical and mental well being: financial gain and ongoing job satisfaction. For her, it was the latter that kept her teaching beyond the legitimate parameters of school. Given the cursory approach to teaching English at school - anything other than exam oriented methodology is regarded as superfluous - and the perfunctory attitude of students (and colleagues!)[exclamation mark in her original message], private teaching not only provides her (like me) with personal satisfaction but also with acknowledgement of competence from both students and parents.

8. Conclusion

This autoethnographic journey helped me locate my split-self as an EFL state school teacher and a private tutor within a socio-economic educational context whose shared norms and values permit private tutoring (including that by state school teachers) to be a culturally accepted, systematically resorted to, practice. This study also allowed me, for the first time after all those years, to pause and reflect on my legitimate and illegitimate teaching practices, and identify and describe the feelings and emotions I have experienced over the years. In a country whose context “shapes ethically acceptable and unacceptable practices based on cultural constructs and assumptions” (cf. Kobakhidze’s description of the situation in Georgia, 2018, p. 453), I followed a dual professional path: a lawful one and its unlawful counterpart. Looking back, aided by my memory and my obsessive inventorying of my private learners, I now see how the two paths converged and diverged, and where they have led me. The deeply ingrained, long-established practice of private tuition in Greece (Kassotakis and Verdis, 2013), the importance assigned to EFL qualifications⁹, the fact that EFL certification is not provided for by the Greek state school, and the relatively small number of my school teaching hours, have laid the ground for me to practise private tuition in parallel with public teaching since day one in my career. Emotionally, my main guilt has not merely been the “imbalance between academic and other sides of life” (Bray *et al*, 2013, p. 2)”, but all this family time unspent, being “[b]usy with kids of others, while having no time for my own.” (Tsiala, a teacher in Kobakhidze’s study [2018, p. 135]). From a financial

aspect, my ‘illegal’ activity has been providing me with money without which my life (and my family’s) would have been considerably different, while my ‘legal’ one secures me a low but steady salary and a forthcoming pension. All in all, had I been obliged to choose between the two, I would have opted for the private enterprise over public teacher tenure, both out of financial motives and out of recognition for my work, but if one is able to physically and emotionally afford to do both, why not take advantage?

As this paper is just a teacher’s autoethnographic soul-searching journey, I cannot claim it to be a ground-breaking or seminal work. As Méndez (2013, p. 282) puts it simply, “by subscribing analysis to a personal narrative, the research is also limited in its conclusions.” A further limitation lies in the data being based on my own memory, and “[m]emory is not always a friend to autoethnography; it is sometimes a foe” (Chang, 2008, p. 72).

All in all, there appears to be a gap in the literature on autoethnographic work on such “a widespread phenomenon across the world” as shadow education (Parreira do Amaral & Fossum, 2021, p. 305) – a topic that lends itself to the personal, often discomfiting, confessional nature that characterizes AE. The gap is greater in the Greek context (as pointed out in the Introduction), where the private tutoring industry thrives, and even more so in the field of ‘dual’ (public and private) EFL teaching identity. In this respect, therefore, this paper aspires to contribute to, and fill a gap in, the relevant literature.

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⁹What Prodromou (1988, p. 77) calls “the great Greek paperchase for qualifications”.

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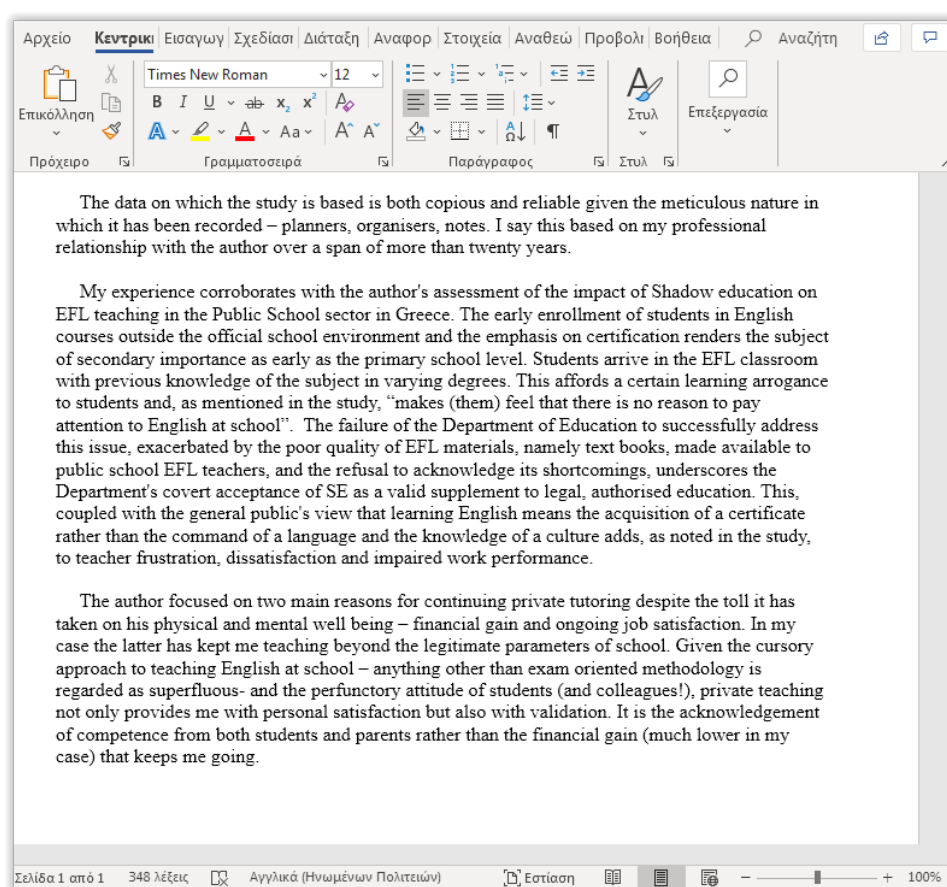
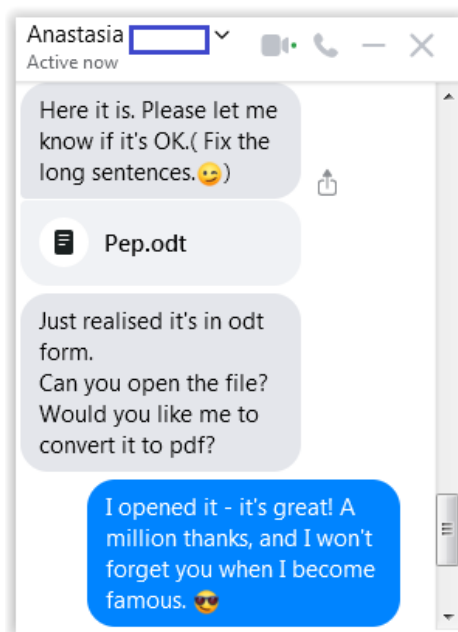
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Appendix A: Personal communication and auditor's evaluation



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Discrimination and native-speakerism in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

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native-speakerism; EAP; English for Academic Purposes; discrimination; UK higher education

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Abstract

Native-speakerism and discrimination are two major issues in English Language Education (Holliday, 2006). This paper aims to explore these issues in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and try to reflect on the experiences of three European EAP tutors. Using autoethnography as the main research methodology, the researcher conducted 2 interviews and by describing her own feelings and experiences gives an insight to the current situation in the EAP field. How native-speakerism and discrimination have shaped the professional and personal lives of the people included in this research are examined with one common theme revealed, which is the lack of transparency within the employment practices of the EAP field, especially after BREXIT and the pandemic.

1. Introduction

It was 10th July 2009 when I received my exam results and found out I was accepted at the English Language department of the University of Athens. Back then, I was just an 18-year-old young adult living in a small resort town in the Peloponnese region in Greece. I was full of dreams, but none of those dreams included leaving my country and teach English abroad. This aspiration was born when I was about to

graduate in 2013. Greece's economic recession was raging, and my career prospects seemed relatively limited. So first, I decided to study abroad to improve my knowledge in the field and improve my prospects. However, after graduating from the University of Birmingham in 2014 with an MA in Applied Linguistics, my desire to stay abroad and teach English became even greater. That was my first encounter with "native-speakerism" and "discrimination" when I had to label myself in my CV as a non-native speaker of English.'

Native-speakerism can be defined as this pervasive ideology within ELT (English Language Teaching), which considers native speakers of the English language as the only accurate representation, not only of the language itself but also of the Western civilization in general (Holliday, 2006). This belief divides English language teachers into two categories and has a considerably negative impact on non-native speakers both in employment practices and language presentation (Holliday, 2006).

This paper intends to explore native-speakerism and discrimination in a specific subcategory of ELT, which is called English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This professional field refers to a particular type of English that someone needs when they prepare to study or conduct research in an institution, where the English language is the primary medium of instruction. EAP courses are broadly associated with undergraduate students, pre-masters, and pre-sessional courses for students who have not achieved their preferred level in IELTS or in-sessional courses, which offer extra support during their studies (Jordan & Jordan, 1997). EAP as a field has been expanding for the last 20 years. Since then, no specific set of qualifications determines who is supposed to teach EAP. The main professional organisation of EAP lecturers, BALEAP, has not made significant progress (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Compared to ELT, there is no specific literature that has focused on discrimination or native-speakerism mainly because of two reasons. First, until BREXIT, European nationals used to teach at summer pre-sessional programs and therefore moved to the UK for a short period. Most of these programs were an additional income in tandem with professional development. Now, most UK institutions demand that you need to be based in the UK to work, and it is something stated in relevant job posts (BALEAP Jobs. ac.uk, 2020).

Apart from that, COVID19 has made it somewhat challenging to travel and move to another country. The short-term work visa scheme has made it even more difficult than before to work at pre-sessional programs if you are a European based in a different country rather than the UK. Additionally, EAP has expanded outside of the UK, and it is

prevalent in countries such as China, South Korea, and others. These nations have implemented new visa regulations, which mandate that if you do not have a passport from an English-speaking country, you cannot teach EAP regardless of your experience and qualifications (ELGAZETTE, 2019). For example, in 2006, 150,000 native English tutors were working in China, and this number was growing significantly back then (Joan & Lee, 2006). Each province tends to have its regulations, varying from hiring qualified native speakers to having the native status as the only qualification (Niu & Wolff, 2003). For these reasons, I would like to explore these issues in EAP because the new geopolitical situation and the pandemic have worked against non-native speakers who used to move to EAP for more well-compensated jobs, and the fact that native-speakerism and discrimination were less profound (Ding, 2019).

The leading professional organisation of EAP Lecturers is BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes). It has been claimed to be too UK-centric and not very effective in showing that EAP lecturers do something different than ELT, and therefore, the native speaker status is not significant in our field (Ding & Bruce, 2017). In the last few years, EAP lecturers, myself included, have been exposed to discrimination because of the new visa regulations worldwide. Especially, the UK favours native speakers and passport holders from inner-circle countries (such as the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia). This paper aims to highlight those issues that may not have been covered by the literature extensively and show how these may affect someone's professional journey.

Autoethnography is this qualitative research method that attempts to collect stories about oneself and understand what these stories mean for culture and other social phenomena that may need to change (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography is going to be the primary methodology in this paper. It can be defined as a different approach to research and writing that aims to describe and deeply understand personal experiences and feelings to raise awareness and eventually change cultural norms and phenomena that may negatively affect certain groups of people (Ellis, Adam & Bochner, 2011). Therefore, using autoethnography as a vehicle, the researcher will be placed into the spotlight, highlighting her experiences, and exploring her professional path as a non-native EAP tutor working in higher education institutions in the UK and the rest of the world. The main argument of this paper is that recent political developments such as BREXIT and the pandemic have shaped a rather different situation for non-native EAP tutors who have faced more difficulty in finding a position in the UK and elsewhere. More specifically, this paper is going to focus on

European EAP tutors and how potential discrimination and native-speakerism have shaped their careers so far, and how the new world stage can further influence their professional journeys in the future.

2. Research questions

My research questions aim to answer pressing questions related to native-speakerism and racial discrimination across the EAP sector in the UK Higher Education and explore how these practices can affect someone's professional life. Using myself and two other colleagues' experiences, I aim to answer the following research questions.

1. What the incidents of native-speakerism and discrimination I have directly and indirectly experienced in the EAP field?
2. How can those experiences shape and influence someone's professional opportunities and career development?
3. How can these experiences affect their self-confidence and professional identity?

3. Literature review

In this section, the researcher aims to review the relevant research conducted about native-speakerism and discrimination in higher education around the world. The first part is dedicated to job advertisements and how discrimination can be spotted in them. These papers were chosen not only because they constitute a large part of the research on discrimination, but usually, they represent the first stage of discrimination and native-speakerism. The second part of the literature review will focus on several ethnographic studies about these issues, revealing overarching themes that will influence this paper as well. Next, this section will focus on students' perceptions of non-native teachers and reveal whether their attitudes are either positive or negative. Finally, this section will highlight the gaps in the literature and how this paper aims to address those.

3.1 Favouritism in job ads

There has been a substantial amount of research on job advertisements worldwide, which reveals favouritism and discrimination against non-native teachers. Alshammari (2020) investigated 26 job ads of universities based in the Middle East looking for English teachers and concluded that most universities are willing to employ native teachers without qualifications instead of non-natives with quali-

cations and work experience. The same was found by Selvi (2010), who analysed 249 online ads in the same part of the world and found unethical and undemocratic employment practices. Ngoc (2016) researched job ads in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam) and found that discrimination is deep-rooted even for expatriate non-native teachers who return to their country to teach. He also mentioned that even teachers from Singapore, where English is the official language, will face discrimination. This proves that employers seem to favour native teachers who come from inner-circle countries, such as the UK, the USA, and Australia (Ngoc, 2016). Canagarajah (1999) claimed that almost 80% of English teachers in the world are non-native. This fact shows that this distinction between natives and non-natives does not reflect the reality and the market needs. Cheung and Braine (2007) found the same research results in Hong Kong, where both native and non-native teachers co-exist. However, in Hong Kong, only locals who become English teachers can teach legally. If you come from an outer circle country, the government does not issue working visas. Finally, Ruecker and Ives (2015) investigated job ads in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand and found that only natives from the then inner circle were employed.

3.2 Ethnographic studies in native-speakerism and discrimination

Lowe and Kiczowski (2016) conducted ethnographic research on how native speakerism has affected their careers. The first is a native speaker of English, and the 2nd is Polish and non-native. Both shared experiences that these practices have affected their career and confidence. In Japan, for example, Lowe felt disposable, and that students and employers did not take him seriously because he was a native backpacker teacher. He is suitable only for speaking and nothing else. Kiczowski, on the other hand, has been turned down from numerous positions just because he is Polish, something that urged him to become an advocate for non-native teachers' rights and against native-speakerism. The main conclusion of their research was to avoid victimising teachers and bear in mind that everyone is affected by these practices. Finally, another influential paper comes from Canagarajah (2012), who attempted through an "ethnographic self-construction" to describe his experiences when he was a university tutor and trained by American native trainers and when he moved to the USA to work at universities there. His description and the recount of his feelings shed light on the discrimination of what non-native English teachers do, how these tutors can relate to their students, and the amount of effort they have to invest to be accepted as equal members in their institutions. He also highlighted the amount of effort he had to invest to be accepted by his

colleagues and how his teaching methods are effective and generally prove his worth as a non-native teacher of English. Impostor syndrome and a constant effort to be accepted and validated were also mentioned in this paper.

3.3 Students' perceptions toward NETS and NNETS

Several stakeholders in the language industry claim that students prefer teachers who are native speakers of English (Braine, 2010). This section will explore several studies on students' perceptions toward native and non-native teachers of English and shed some light on what students think. Kelch and Santanna-Williamson (2002) explored how students respond to different accents and how this affects their attitude toward their teachers. Their study revealed that ESL students could not differentiate between native and non-native accents accurately. This may not be true for more mature students in EAP, for example, and perhaps a similar study in this field could reveal different results. Cheung (2002) conducted a study on Hong Kong universities, revealing that university students have a positive attitude toward their non-native teachers. They claimed that these teachers use different teaching methods, have more patience, and are more focused during the lessons. Another study by Benke and Mendgyes (2005) looked into Hungarian students' positive perceptions.

A more recent study from Wang and Fang (2020) investigated Chinese universities, and the results were mixed. More specifically, they looked into students' feelings and the number of teachers who teach in each university. Some students prefer natives; some do not. This stems from the fact that students can relate to the non-native teacher, who has a similar background and has faced similar difficulties. Also, the high demand for English teachers in Chinese universities requires the employment of non-native speakers; otherwise, it is impossible to cover all the needs of natives. Finally, Mahboob (2003) conducted a similar study in the USA, and he reported a surprising finding. Most of the students distinguish between native and non-native speakers, categorising all Caucasian teachers as natives even if they come from Germany or Sweden. This reveals the issue of race, which is not the main issue in this paper, but it could be further explored in a future study.

3.4 Gaps in the literature

This literature review revealed a gap regarding EAP tutors. Some studies regarding university students in Hong Kong mostly, but these may take a different approach toward language education and focus mainly on general English rather than academic (Cheung, 2002). This research

gap could be explained by the lack of EAP tutors who are willing to conduct research or are unable to do so due to the precarious employment status that underpins the field and prevents them from engaging in professional development opportunities (Ding & Bruce, 2017).

4. Theoretical framework

The main theoretical background of this research stems from the ideology of linguistic imperialism and the characterisation of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). This term refers to any communication in English between speakers who have different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005). The way English has spread worldwide, and its characterisation as a lingua franca would urge someone to assume that being a native or a non-native speaker would no longer matter in a globalised world. However, these discriminatory assumptions and ideologies still exist.

Linguistic imperialism could be defined as this ideology that aims to exploit and place those who belong to the dominant language into a higher social position and tends to stigmatise those who do not belong to the same group (Phillipson, 2018). Linguistic imperialism has its origins in the existence of colonies during the 19th century and had a significant impact on the formation of a particular dichotomy; western countries where the culture and the language are of greater importance than the colonised nations (e.g., English in India) (Macedo et al., 2015). The recent globalisation of the English language has not eliminated this dichotomy and its subsequent problems (e.g., native-speakerism and discrimination), but it has intensified it in some instances.

Pennycook (2017), for example, explains in detail how the British Council has helped the globalisation of the English language and shaped it as an essential language in every economic and political activity around the world. This organisation turned the English language from an exchange of language and culture and a deeper understanding of the British culture into a commodity, which, to be successful, needed to be sold by certain representatives, such as native speakers (Pennycook, 2017). The same has been claimed by Phillipson (2018), who maintains that the British Council has consistently depicted a particular image of the English language and those who are supposed to represent it. Subsequently, the English Language classroom has been turned into a site of cultural politics, which shows how the world is supposed to be instead of how it is (Pennycook, 2017). To be more specific, this ideology suggests that an English language classroom should be full of students coming from different backgrounds and countries, and the teacher should

come from an English-speaking country because they are the only credible representatives and accurate models of the English language and culture (Graddol, 1997 cited in Modiano, 2001). The obsession for near-native proficiency requiring a native speaker as a teacher approaches the English language not as a lingua franca but as a cultural indoctrination (Modiano, 2001).

The dichotomy that was mentioned above, which is closely related to cultural indoctrination, is essential to understanding the origins and the effects of linguistic imperialism. The world is divided into “us” and “them”; we are the native speakers, and they are non-native speakers. Any resistance to this division and any effort to cultural integration is considered as backward and against progress (Said, 1978). To be more specific, English is associated with something modern and contemporary. In contrast, any other language or education system (e.g., the Chinese) is considered traditional, backward, and against the progress that comes with financial progress (Pennycook, 2017).

These notions have influenced this paper as well. More specifically, the interview questions explore how these tutors categorise themselves and how this distinction between native and non-native speakers has influenced their teacher identity. Linguistic imperialism influences how these non-native teachers perceive themselves as this distinction into “us” and “them” that was mentioned above could lead many tutors to believe that they are not worthy of their positions and careers, having the so-called “impostor syndrome”. This pervasive ideology permeates cultural perceptions, and no matter how good or educated you are, someone cannot simply change the country they were born. Through the interviews and the themes that will emerge, the researcher of the present paper will explore how this theory has influenced their professional identity and how it has impacted the countries and the institutions they live in and work in..

5. Methodology and methods

This paper is based on qualitative research, where human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions are placed at a prominent level (Adams et al., 2014). The main purpose of this paper is to explore personal experiences and stories and determine how native-speakerism can shape someone’s career. When the research paradigm employs personal stories or memory recollections, few methodologies can interpret them at a deeper level. Autoethnography is one of these methodologies, which will be the primary research methodology of this paper. This qualitative methodology enables the researcher to place oneself at the centre of the

research and offer a complex and intimate recollection of someone’s experiences, relationships, and feelings (Adams et al., 2014).

Autoethnography can be divided into evocative and analytic autoethnography, according to Anderson (2006). Evocative autoethnography aims for more emotion and self-reflexivity in social sciences. This type of autoethnography is called “emotional autoethnography” revealing the prominent place of feelings and emotions in this type of narrative research (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). In this paper, analytic autoethnography seems a more appropriate choice because it values the researcher’s personal experiences and feelings. However, it also employs other research methods, such as interviews, to validate and confirm the researcher’s experiences to inform and influence social change (Anderson, 2006).

Anderson (2006) suggests that analytic autoethnography has five key features: complete member researcher status (CMR), which means that the researcher is a member of the community. The second feature is analytic reflexivity, where ethnographers influence the data, and the data shapes them back as well. The third one is narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, meaning that the researcher should acknowledge in the text that she/he was part of the community. The next one is expanding the dialogue with informants beyond the self, which means that the auto ethnographer should consider experiences and feelings coming from other people in the same community. Finally, the last feature is the commitment to theoretic analysis, which aims to combine personal data with empirical data to shed light on broader social phenomena and ultimately change them.

5.1 Data collection

After defining analytic autoethnography, referring to the various methods used in this research is essential. According to Chang (2008), collecting personal memory data is a research method usually used in ethnography. The main difference between ethnography and autoethnography is how these two paradigms interpret and handle memories. Ethnography uses “recalling” of the researcher’s memories while she/he was doing fieldwork, while autoethnography values personal memory and openly acknowledge personal memory as the primary source of data (Chang, 2008). In this paper, I will use an autobiographical timeline of a specific part of my career, roughly from 2016 until 2020, describing and reflecting on my experiences working in UK Higher Education institutions based in the UK.

Another method used in this paper is semi-structured interviews. In autoethnography, interviews provide more context and information on the researcher's primary data, and confirm, complement, and validate any claims or generalisations made (Chang, 2008). This research will present and analyse the findings of two interviews via Teams and lasted approximately an hour. The first interviewee used to be my colleague at a university in the UK and was one of the people who inspired me for this paper. We kept in touch via LinkedIn, and I invited her to participate in this project. She is European, working in UK Higher Education as an EAP tutor, and for this paper, we will refer to her with an imaginary name (Sophia). The second interviewee comes from Greece (like me), and he is currently based in the UK, working in a higher education institution as an EAP tutor. I met him accidentally in a webinar organised by BALEAP. Something he said about native-speakerism triggered my interest in getting to know him better and interviewing him for this project. His interview was online via Zoom, and it lasted about 2 hours. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to him with an imaginary name as well (Panos). At this point, I would like to clarify that the interviews took place online because I am based in China, where I relocated recently, working in a Sino-foreign (UK) institution.

5.2 Data analysis

The data of this paper can be divided into two parts. The primary source of data includes my collection of personal memory data. The acknowledgement of personal memories as the primary vehicle of this research is a right given by autoethnography, according to Chang (2008). However, personal memories often reveal partial truth, and they can be unreliable at times, which is why I have included two interviews as a secondary source of data. As a research method in autoethnography, interviews provide external data that can confirm, validate, complement, or even reject what personal memory has distorted (Chang, 2008).

I reflected and analysed the autobiographical timeline I created about my professional and personal life. Later, after conducting the interviews, I added all three sources of data in Atlas.ti and tried to find common themes that described experiences that shaped all the participants in this research. These themes have been influenced by the theoretical background of this paper and the literature was explored previously. Some of these themes include impostor syndrome, validation of practice, effort to be accepted in the professional community, distorted professional identity due to linguistic imperialism and finally, increased effort to obtain qualifications from the inner-circle countries, which

are perceived as the best possible way to mitigate the effect of being a non-native teacher.

6. Findings

This section is divided into four parts. The first part describes the researcher's experiences, while the other two sections reveal the stories of our participants. The final part of this section analyses the themes that emerged from the three stories and how these resonate with the literature presented above and the theoretical background as well.

6.1 My personal experience

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, when I graduated in 2014 from the University of Birmingham, I aspired to stay in the UK or a different country and pursue a career abroad. In the beginning, I did not realise the issue, and it became visible to me when I was rejected or unable to apply for a position asking for a native speaker. I have found myself lying about my family and making up the existence of a native speaker of English as a close relative of mine. I did that to justify my choice to become an English teacher and that I learned English from a very early age. Fortunately, I worked in the EFL sector for a few months only, and when I moved into EAP in 2016, this discrimination was less visible depending on the country and the institutions I used to work. However, I always find myself in the minority in any of the three UK institutions I have worked. Looking at the people in my office and nearby offices, I am the only one among two or three more people not originally from the UK, USA, or Canada. Despite my career progression, I have witnessed other incidents where my non-native colleagues have been discriminated especially during the recruitment process in various UK institutions.

It was my last summer in the UK in 2019 before I moved to China and started working for Nottingham University. The top-tier university I was teaching in London announced three permanent positions, and as you can imagine, all my colleagues rushed to apply. Except for me. I had secured a position in China, and I was ready to move. Everyone was asking why I did not apply. The reason was my decision to come to China and the fact that I had applied for more than 20 permanent positions in the UK in a time frame of 3 years, and I was not even progressed to the interview stage. I do not know if it was a matter of native-speakerism only, but I was never given any feedback or advice regarding these rejections, even though I had all the qualifications they needed on paper. The reason I claim that the employment practices of that top tier university were unfair will be justified by my

memory recollection and Sophia's interview. The university had created a last-minute rule; any candidates who do not have DELTA will not proceed to the interview stage. The main question that arises is what DELTA is and why it is so important.

DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is an 8-week professional development course which is divided into three parts; the first part requires exams to test basic understanding of second language learning theories. The second includes teaching observations, and the third part is a course design assignment of 4,000 words based on an ELT context, such as exam preparation (Cambridge Assessment, 2020). Having completed DELTA quite recently, I can validate that it is most relevant to ELT teachers. Teaching observations and all the criteria that need to underpin your teaching do not reflect how an EAP classroom should run. It has limited relevance to EAP, and teachers can obtain that qualification without having a BA or MA. It was challenging for me to complete the teaching observations in the EAP classroom because most of the DELTA criteria could not be fulfilled. For example, grammar is not explicitly taught, only a few concepts, such as the passive voice and therefore, my teaching observation had to take place only in passive voice. Another example is that vocabulary is also not explicitly taught in an EAP lesson, and only with writing or speaking, I had some flexibility to plan my lessons.

Going back to what happened that summer, I witnessed colleagues with PhDs in Applied Linguistics and some modules from DELTA were excluded from the employment process. Although a colleague had both a Master's in Applied Linguistics and a DELTA, she was working for them for multiple years in their longer pre-session courses. Although it seemed she had everything required, her only disadvantage was that she was European. She went to the interview, but she was not successful. That candidate was Sophia, the first interviewee in this paper. Instead, they hired another person with a PhD in Physics and another with no master's degree. The only language teaching qualification both have is a DELTA. Also, both were British and white.

Even though I was not directly affected, I was deeply disappointed. I had saved myself from another humiliation, another disappointment. UK universities have created this "new rule" of DELTA just because they want to open the door to native speakers of English who do not have other academic qualifications. DELTA is not a master's degree, and it is a professional development course for ELT teachers who want to become Directors of Studies in a language school or teacher trainers. This is the end of the high quality of teaching within the EAP field and the start of de-profession-

alisation. The fact that I had secured a position in China did not stop me from thinking that my qualifications and work experience did not matter, but only my country of origin. People can change their education and work experience, but they do not have the power to change the country they were born in or change their family who gave them their mother tongue. After arriving in China, I found out that the visa regulations had changed, and I managed to find and secure that position merely because of luck. If I were late for a few months only, I would not have this job, and most probably, I would leave EAP and return to my home country. This reveals the hostile environment created in EAP not only in the UK but also in the rest of the world. I am currently in China, working for a Sino Foreign university. If circumstances change in my life, I will be unable to find another position in China or another Asian country because of the new visa restrictions. Therefore, the next logical step is to leave employment for some time or expedite my PhD studies, which will give me a way out of this situation.

6.2 Sophia's experience

The first person I interviewed was Sophia, the colleague that inspired this research; my European colleague from that UK based university where the incident above actually took place. Her contribution to this research is very crucial because she was the person that experienced the actual event, and she can validate and complement the events that took place during that period.

Sophia was born in a European country, and her mother tongue is not English. Her undergraduate studies were in Business Management, and her master's degree was also related to Business. Both degrees were completed outside the UK, but her postgraduate degree was in an English medium university. She came to this profession a bit later, but she completed her education with a DELTA and a master's degree in Applied Linguistics completed in the UK. She worked in that UK based university for almost three years, in their summer pre-session and another program during winter. It has to be noted that she completed her DELTA at the same university and conducted some staff development sessions. So when the university advertised that they were going to hire three people on a more permanent basis, she was excited and applied right away.

At this point, I would like to mention that she completed essential parts of the story I knew nothing about because I was not involved in the employment process, not even as a candidate. Sophia reported that the management team did not give the candidates a pre-interview task before the interview, which was standard for being hired for the

pre-sessional courses. In addition, she mentioned that the interview structure was not apparent beforehand, and she had limited information about the process. During the actual interview, she reported that the questions were a bit generic and without any specific logic. The management team justified that by claiming that it was a busy period for everyone, and they did not want to burden the candidates with preparation for the interview.

Sophia, however, felt that this lack of structure undermined her effort and possibly affected the result. Also, when the position was advertised, there was no job description attached without showing the essential and the desired qualifications.

This lack of transparency in the employment process led to a discriminatory result. She thinks that perhaps the management team did not intend to be discriminatory, but the result of the whole process signalled native-speakerism. After this incident, she found herself without a job and plan b. Eventually, after a couple of years, she secured a permanent position at a different university. However, this experience has left a scar, as she told me during the interview.

6.3 Panos's experience

I interviewed the second person, Panos, a Greek man working permanently in a UK-based institution. He identifies himself as a non-native speaker who has completed all his qualifications in the UK starting from his BA. To be more specific, he has a BA in Linguistics, an MA in English Language Teaching and all the relevant TESOL qualifications needed in our profession. Panos described his path as very difficult, being a non-native EAP tutor in the UK. His vivid descriptions revealed the negative emotions he has faced so far to secure permanent employment in the UK. He reported that he had applied for more than 30 positions, and after almost eight years, he managed to secure a permanent position. According to his opinion and experiences, he thinks native-speakerism is present in the UK and institutions outside of the country. His experience in Saudi Arabia validated his opinion that non-native English teachers find a job merely because of luck. That is the word he used to describe his achievements; "everything happened because of luck". Panos believes that UK institutions do not explicitly state they will hire only native speakers, but this is what they aim for. The fact that universities hire many teachers during the summer pre-sessional courses stems from the fact that there is much demand that cannot be covered by natives only. That is why we encounter the phenomenon "you are good for the summer, but not for the rest of the year". He reported blatant discriminatory employment practices during

the interview process for an EAP tutor position in the UK and aggressive behaviour from one of his colleagues in a different university based in the UK. Those behaviours were targeted at his linguistic competence and whether he has the required level for this field.

He is the only non-native EAP tutor among twelve native tutors and the rest of the department in his current position. In addition, Panos is responsible for home students (UK nationals) who need academic skills courses during their studies. This makes him feel somewhat uncomfortable as his students are native speakers and may face some criticism or doubt regarding his teaching skills. Finally, he believes that BREXIT will intensify the phenomenon and possibly UK institutions will lower the quality of the people they hire to cover the urgent needs during the summer. The main reason is that people outside the UK cannot move to the country only for the summer due to visa restrictions. Panos has described his professional journey and the sacrifices he has made to stay in the EAP field. He describes the moment when they offered him a permanent position as a godsent gift which unfortunately led him to abandon his PhD for a more secure future for himself and his family.

6.4 Emerging themes

The above section was dedicated to the researcher of the present paper and the interviewees. Each individual was given their own space to provide more context and perspective to the topic. The overarching theme in the interviews and my recount was the lack of transparency and the constant change in the qualifications that are needed in our profession. Ding (2019) has highlighted that this lack of a clear set of qualifications that could confirm that someone is an EAP tutor harms the field and downgrades it in the academic world. This lack of transparency is also evident in the job ads, where nowadays, it is not mentioned clearly which countries (or passports) are accepted. As we can see from Figure 1, only a vague note is included where the university mentions the government regulations without giving any detail to the prospective candidates. Panos highlighted the discrimination he felt during his recruitment process in the Middle East, which has been validated by Selvi (2010) and Alshammari (2020).

Another theme was the struggle to be accepted in the professional community and how this can lead to the so-called "qualification-mania". The DELTA rule affected all the participants in this study in different ways. For example, Panos and I do not have DELTA (or all the modules), and therefore we have been excluded from numerous positions, and Sofia felt that all her effort to complete this qualification

Figure 1. Job post for a Sino-British University in China

Teach Undergraduate Level EFL, EAP & Academic Skills in Beijing, China

A Sino-British University Programme in Beijing, China is seeking an experienced English Language Tutor to join our team delivering UK university modules (NQF Level 3 & 4), starting from February (preferred) or September 2022.

Keele University is renowned for its exciting approach to higher education, beautiful campus, strong community spirit and excellent student experience. With a total staff of approximately 2000, the University provides high quality teaching across a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. Further information can be found at <http://www.keele.ac.uk> and <https://www.keele.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/undergraduatecourses/internationalgovernanceandpublicpolicy/>

Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) is a prestigious Chinese University under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Education and is one of China's top Universities listed under the Project 211 and Innovation Platform of Project 985. Further information can be found at <http://global.bfsu.edu.cn/en>.

The universities are collaborating to offer a Chinese Ministry of Education approved, dual degree programme of study towards a BA in International Governance and Public Policy from Keele University and a BA in Diplomacy from BFSU. We attract high achieving students who continue their Level 5 studies at Keele before returning to Beijing to complete the undergraduate programme.

You will be expected to deliver support undergraduate subjects such as General English, Academic Skills, Academic English Proficiency or Academic English for International Governance. Candidates with a proven record of successful English language skills teaching are encouraged to apply.

We require a post graduate degree and a CELTA (or equivalent) qualification plus three years' experience. Evidence of a reflective approach to teaching will be demonstrated in any application for this position. Experience of the UK higher education system and of working in, or with, students from the Chinese tertiary education sector will be an advantage.

In order to fulfil the requirements for a Chinese work visa, applicants must hold a passport from a recognised English-speaking country. You will be employed by Overseas Education Investment Management, a professional education services company with a strong track record of delivering UK TNE in China.

Lecturer in English

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was not enough to be employed on a more permanent basis. This effort to be included and struggle to get more educated in order to fit in was also mentioned by Canagarajah (1999, 2012), who had to support every decision he was making in his classes with academic papers after facing criticism during class observations.

Finally, I would like to mention a theme that did not emerge from the interviews but was included in the literature review. The participants in this paper did not mention any discrimination on behalf of their students, only the fear of being discriminated against. The main argument against non-native teachers from the students' perspective is the use of L1. In our case, this is difficult to take place, as most of our students are Chinese. Therefore, the use of L1 in our lessons cannot occur between the teacher and students, only among the students. We do not encourage the use of L1 to maximize their speaking practice.

7. Discussion

Both interviews were compelling, and I found myself resonating with both stories, but more with Panos's experiences.

Our first research question was about the incidents we faced and constituted discrimination and native-speakerism. All the three people who contributed to this paper have faced discrimination, either direct or indirect. Lack of transparency in employment, inability to secure stable employment even if on paper we seem eligible, and finally, the urgent needs of the summer that somehow do not translate to a more stable position during winter were common concerns and thoughts. Unstable employment in EAP has been a constant theme for many years, where zero-hour and temporary contracts tend to be the norm (Ding & Campion, 2017). These concerns and feelings have not been communicated only among our small group of people. However, I was recently involved in a mail thread within our professional organisation, BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers for English for Academic Purposes). This theme of lack of transparency is a constant concern within our field. Native and non-native tutors find themselves applying for the same summer or winter jobs every year, and then they find themselves rejected without any feedback or advice. Also, in this changing world of BREXIT, many European colleagues find themselves rejected by UK universities, although having worked for them for more than five consecutive summers or subject to additional visa procedures that did not exist before BREXIT. Therefore,

employment practices in our field are not improving but deteriorating rapidly. During the last few years, especially before the pandemic, there was a constant effort to mitigate the dichotomy that Macedo et al. (2015) claimed between native and non-native speakers, which is imposed by linguistic imperialism. However, after the pandemic, the world seems to have moved backwards, and this dichotomy is intensified more than ever. A recent blog article from EDDi (September 2021) highlighted how the recent changes in visa regulations have affected non-native speakers and how stakeholders and governments around the world justify their employment practices using the pandemic as an excuse.

The second research question was about how this potential discrimination could shape someone's career. Sophia and Panos are based in the UK, and therefore their positions are relatively secure. However, they both stressed the struggle and the effort they had to make to secure those positions in UK universities, a path that was not offered easily. As for myself, I have realised that my choices are limited, and for the first time, I feel that the wiggle room I have is minimal. Leaving my current position would mean that no other province in China or university in the UK would accept me to work based on my passport. This makes me feel that I have spent almost ten years in a field that soon will close its door on me. My journey is very similar to Kiczowski (2016), who also reported this deep feeling of rejection that both me and Panos have felt so strongly. Spending years of studying and obtaining qualifications and gaining work experience cannot guarantee unlimited options worldwide. However, in this changing world globalisation seems to fade and give its place to increased inequality and lack of diversity.

Finally, the impact on our self-confidence and professional identity is more profound. I started doing my PhD to find another job someday and stop having this concern and fear about visa regulations and my non-native status. Both Sophia and Panos have suffered crises in their confidence and a constant threat to their professional identity. Currently, there is no specific set of qualifications required to become an EAP tutor. However, the increased needs of the field have created blurred lines and a lack of transparency that allow universities to change rules according to their preferences. I believe I was lucky that I was at the right time in the right place. I have suffered many disappointments, but my resilience and the ability to adapt to any situation led me to where I am today. Unfortunately, I had to leave the UK to find my desired position, something I could not achieve there.

Our profession's essential is our enthusiasm for teaching, which is something familiar among us. Yamamoto and

Gardos (2016) conducted a study at the University of Bristol and found that for students, the most important factor is enthusiasm in teaching, not being a native speaker, showing that students need good teachers and not necessarily native speakers. Being a native speaker should not be a prerequisite for teaching EAP, simply because we do not teach anyone how to speak English. We primarily teach skills and coach them to perform certain activities in English, such as seminar discussions (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Therefore, teaching qualifications and experience should matter in our profession and not the country of origin.

8. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how potential discrimination and native-speakerism can affect EAP employment practices. Additionally, by using autoethnography as a vehicle, this paper attempted to shed light on European tutors' experiences finding stable employment in the UK and around the world. Their recounts revealed that the lack of transparency in employment practices and the lack of a specific framework could lead to discrimination. Constant effort to obtain more qualifications to be accepted within the inner circle of the profession was also an overarching theme that stems from insecurity and the linguistic imperialism that still influences EAP, which has not stopped being a subcategory of ELT in general.

One of the recommendations of this paper is that professional organisations, such as BALEAR, could help in dealing with potential discriminatory employment practices by establishing a clear set of qualifications that could validate someone as an EAP tutor. This topic could be further explored by researching the experiences of more individuals, especially after the pandemic and BREXIT. However, more time is needed to determine the damage these two events have caused in the EAP field.

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Panagiota (Penny) Tzanni is a PhD student in e-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning at Lancaster University, UK.

Panagiota's research interests include online professional development and how it can be designed and implemented in order to reach its full potential. In addition, Panagiota is very interested in those constraints and barriers that do not allow faculty members to use learning technologies in higher education. For example, several institutions around the world have initiated digital transformation projects and faculty members are required to include learning technologies or teach online. This new reality seems challenging for some of them, and I am interested in finding out these types of professional development or training that will help them in their new roles. Finally, I am also interested in developing digital skills for higher education learners, especially in contexts with low resources or learning cultures that do not support the use of learning technologies.

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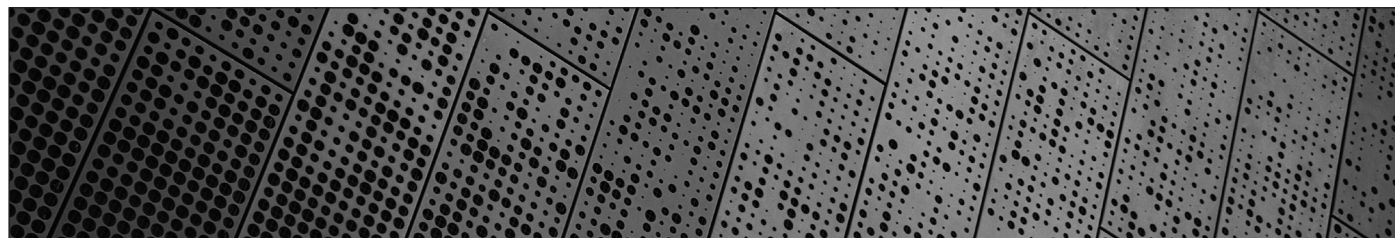
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Learning to “see” again: Overcoming challenges while teaching English to visually-impaired students

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Keywords

blindness; visually-impaired students; pedagogical challenge; emotional challenge; teaching strategies; affective scaffolding; sociocultural theory; critical disability theory

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the pedagogical and emotional challenges and the teaching strategies implemented in face-to-face complementary tutorial sessions requested by visually-impaired students (VIS) learning English as a foreign language in a virtual undergraduate course whose graphic nature diminishes their opportunities. The research methodology selected for this purpose is an evocative autoethnography in which self-observation, self-reflection, and field notes were used for the data collection needed. Transcripts were analysed using qualitative codes for this collection under three main themes: pedagogical and emotional challenges and teaching strategies. The findings revealed how pedagogical challenges derived from emotional challenges, a great sense of affective scaffolding to respond to neglected VIS' needs and concerns attached to materials adaptation, web accessibility issues, and a redefinition of inclusion policies in higher education. A final reflection on the implications of current language teaching that might work for VIS and teacher's training is made in addition to the limitations encountered.

1. Introduction

As an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher in virtual undergraduate course contexts in Colombia, I implement diverse teaching strategies and materials for different types of students depending on the content, learning styles, and purposes. I faced an unexpected challenge regarding teaching English since I was required to give face-to-face tutorial sessions to 2 visually-impaired students (VIS) who had difficulties with online activities. My main concern was that I had no previous training. Therefore, I was not sure about what to do first.

I then decided to think about some methods and theories that could lead me to meet the blind students’ needs in the face-to-face tutorial sessions and reflect on the accessibility needed for certain digital materials. After covering the review of Sharma (2019) and Brown (2003), I selected the most suitable ones based on the idea that a single method cannot satisfy all the needs of the second language learner of English, and an eclectic approach might work.

I noticed that the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching emphasize initially spoken language teaching, and materials are taught orally as well before presenting written forms. Students learn through repetition and inductively. They rely on situations and are expected to listen and repeat what the instructor says (Khalilova, 2021). The Audio-Lingual Method asks the learner to repeat patterns until producing them spontaneously. Here, conversations provide learners with materials and context, and through them, they can obtain proper phonetic knowledge (Mei, 2018). Total Physical Response (TPR) begins by placing primary importance on listening comprehension and coordinating speech and physical actions (Intarapanich, 2013). In fact, in Colombia, in the last decade, some researchers have tested the Total Physical Response and Natural approach as language teaching methods to facilitate the language learning process and guarantee the adaptability and motivation of blind students (Torres, 2016). These methods argue that “learning a foreign language mainly relies on the hearing sense” (Jedynak, 2018, p. 201). It is, in fact, the central means that VIS uses to acquire information.

Then, the day of the first meeting with my blind students arrived. I decided that talking and listening to them was a good start. No flashcards, no markers, no papers were going to be the main characters this time. We had a normal conversation. I noticed almost immediately their different skills. One of them was a Braille instructor who disliked technologies such as YouTube, computers, and podcasts. The other

one worked in a restaurant, and he was a technology lover who enjoyed keyboards shortcuts, using screen readers and typing in forums. I knew after this meeting that technology could not be out of our sessions, but I also realized how the lack of accessibility was chasing us.

From this experience, I started wondering what roles I would be performing here: facilitator, translator, reader, among others. Were they strategies or roles? I asked myself. I needed to know more. I did not want to give them a low-quality class. Then, I explored the university’s options for students with special needs, and I realized that policies were unclear. I felt that the university was ignoring them, and they were forced to use the virtual course exclusively designed for sighted people.

As we know, technology has brought empowerment and entitlement to many communities worldwide, but it has also left behind those who suffer from a lack of accessibility (Ullah, 2020). A clear example of that is what happens to VIS in academic contexts. Accessibility and effective teaching strategies for different groups of students with diverse forms of disabilities in the EFL context represent a significant concern since regulations, and authoritarian policies can be somewhat limiting and dangerous than empowering and enabling students to participate actively in virtual environments. Creating and adapting materials became an arduous task since the course, books, and resources available are primarily visual. Additionally, the complex relations between educational experiences in Colombia affected by centralism, different forms of violence, and discrimination influence the access and equity to educate blind and visually-impaired students.

This study is autoethnography, which corresponds to the practice of critical analysis perspective on self “as an object of inquiry and the sense in which selfhood is a social construction” (Denzin, 20014, p.28). Through this, I attempt to vividly illustrate what challenges I have faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher and what strategies I have developed to address these challenges. It started as a frustrating, demanding process, and self-reflection of what I do to teach them constantly emerged while searching for a way to become a better English teacher who was swimming in the field of special education and is trying to raise the voices of the marginalized students.

2. Literature Review

Different challenges identified in special education for the VIS and the initial strategies applied in the past will be

described to illustrate what research has defined and the evolution it has had to contextualize the problem stated.

Historically, protecting the rights of people with disabilities has been a slow process. The more significant judicial consideration must defeat stigma and perceptions (Waterstone, 2014). As education is a fundamental right for all granted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the laws must help deal with the dominant problem in the disability field I am addressing, the lack of access to language learning that blind people suffer? First, I will expose the early schools, methods, and strategies used to teach VIS. Secondly, I will get closer to the first attempts to teach languages to blind people, and finally, I will explore how technology is responding to the current needs of VIS. I found this historical review relevant to understand where we are in terms of special needs pedagogies and avoid omitting previous research works that might construct my selfhood.

2.1 Exploring initial efforts to teach blind people

Among the first efforts to offer primary education to sensory disabled people, I encountered oralism and sign language as ways to teach them (Rotatori, Bakken & Obiakor, 2011). In 1784, the Institute for Blind Youth in Paris was the first school created explicitly for blind people. By 1829, three critical events co-occurred, and the New England Asylum was built for the Blind in The US (Rotatori, Bakken & Obiakor, 2011), Louis Braille created his reading-writing method with dots. The Coventry University in the UK became a pioneer in special education by providing tutors with a Disability Office and the Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) (Orsini-Jones, M., 2009). Consequently, some skills in terms of language teaching started to be considered, such as the reading skills issues which were solved by using Braille; writing tasks receive time adjustment, and speaking and listening were re-thought when they were focused on visual aids.

At this point, I explored what Cox & Dykes (2001) argued that the limited nature of visual associations for students with visual impairments has academic and classroom implications. Subsequently, they indicate that the physical orientation of students is a good start, as well as appropriate activities to recognize objects, locations, and partners. My main concern was that language teaching has been primarily visual. I realized that a general tutor who has visually-impaired students in the classroom must collaborate with vision specialists to determine the best strategies. One of these could be the support of sound and voice recording.

In the last half of the twentieth century, significant progress for visually-impaired people was the invention of sound reproduction (Stuckey, 1993). The telephone became more accessible for ordinary people, and other methods (records, cassette recordings, and radio) expanded the access to information in the classroom. In this way, oralism, Braille, physical orientation, and audio have evolved to start systematizing education for blind people and have a considerable influence in the EFL field eventually.

2.2 Teaching English to blind students

In the case of foreign language teaching, helping visually-impaired students to learn them has been addressed in different studies abroad. In England, for instance, “most lecturers agreed that the discipline required for the advanced preparation of the teaching materials for students with special educational needs also benefited other students” (Orsini-Jones, M., 2009, p.3). However, I reflected that the challenge was behind adapting specific resources, a subject that demands time and requires orientation from specialized instructors and centers.

Then, I explored the first official English courses for blind people. I discovered that one of the first programs for teaching English was developed by the Catholic Guild for the blind in New York City in 1968. The focus was on the principles of modern linguistic science and included aural-oral method or training through the ear, adaptation of materials, and later introduction of graphic symbols (Snyder & Kesselman, 1972). In the late '80s, Nikolic (1987) suggests that visually-impaired learners can speak another language if their strengths are capitalized. Here I noticed that the author underlines the pedagogical challenges related to selecting activities that foster their memory and good hearing.

Later, I found how Aikin (2003) developed didactic materials for visually-impaired students in Spain, based on her consideration that these students will learn different languages if they have access to activities in which communicative functions are more important than the linguistic code. That was a reason that led her to work with tactile materials visually attractive to sighted students and helpful for the ones that are not. In this way, I started to understand that students who have access to flexible materials that include sighted and visually-impaired students in the same classroom can also promote school integration.

Other authors, such as Hanzálková (2006) and Coşkun (2013), have focused on materials, equipment, and procedures available for teaching English to blind students. Coşkun introduces his research on the use of T3 or talking

tactile, a specially made Braille-free tactile diagram that is placed on a pressure-sensitive surface. It uses a combination of touch, sound, and learning systems called audio-haptic pedagogy by creating tactile diagrams carrying layers of information that can be vocal, musical, or other audio sounds (Coşkun, 2013).

2.3 New technologies, new challenges

In terms of accessibility, I can recognize that smart-phone-based assistive technologies are an emerging trend for blind people. The accessibility services such as “talking back, haptic feedback, screen magnifier, large text, color contrast, shortcuts, among others, are facilitating blind and visually-impaired people in performing several operations” (Khan, Khusro & Alam, 2018, p.2775). These services allow users to have an assistant while taking notes or finding locations, increasing the size of text or graphs when there is a low vision condition, avoiding colour confusion for colour blindness, and having easy access to icons.

Today, experts even talk about the Universal learner who has emerged then as an online integrated learning module that incorporates accessible technology and universal design for learning to improve online education for VIS (Sapp, 2009). Most applications of universal design in such materials have focused on providing access through design features that work with adaptive software, such as screen readers, or additional options, such as captioning (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

While implementing all these new materials and adjustments, overcoming several issues emerge in online, blended, and traditional scenarios. In Asia, for example, some works have been done to reveal the instructions modifications and the unique ways that blind students might learn English (Melie et al., 2020; Olivares, 2020; Setyawati et al., 2018). One of these projects developed by Susanto & Nanda (2018) specifies the needs of the students and the general implications of their visual impairments, such as difficulties with Non-Visual Desktop Access and reading Braille materials.

Other challenges both blind students and teachers faced were discussed by Kocyigit & Artar (2015). These authors could group under two main headings these challenges: emotional and pedagogical. The emotional part was related to the number of negative feelings they might encounter, and the pedagogical challenges were connected to the barriers and problems while teaching. For Lund & Chemi (2015), emotions can influence the ways students interact with the world, and they can model the way teachers reflect and develop their pedagogical strategies. In this part, my research work matches the same concerns toward these

types of challenges, especially the emotional part behind every pedagogical action performed in class in which I am attempting to teach English to blind individuals either while using online materials or adapted ones.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

These previous studies have shown the evolution of the materials and strategies implemented by teachers. This literature review also illustrates that several pedagogical and emotional challenges remain the same as the population’s needs evolve. They are simply translated to other scenarios such as virtual environments.

This autoethnography attempts to address the gap between what is known about language teaching strategies and the emotional and pedagogical challenges implied in teaching EFL to VIS. The idea is to itemize aspects to guide teachers when the integration of special education and language learning meets and offer opportunities to become more visible in this field.

3. Theoretical Framework

After reviewing different challenges while teaching blind students and the efforts made toward them through history, it is essential to support how theories have responded to sketch special education before interwoven it with foreign language learning.

3.1 Sociocultural theory

From the interpretive perspective, it was essential to understand the social substance and dynamic of the organic impairment to find the most effective psychological compensation (Vygotsky, 1983). Then, the social/cultural implication of disability and Vygotsky’s paradigm for special education was suitable in this qualitative study.

Special education was the primary domain used by Vygotsky to obtain data to support his general theoretical conceptions (Gindis, 1990). These studies helped modify the purpose of special education from giving supervisory care to educating students. These ground-breaking and even revolutionary educational studies also established the benefits of early intervention and helped create the commitment to the development of the field of special education.

I selected Vygotsky because he asserts that impairment leads to a restructuring of social relationships and a displacement of all behavior systems. The primary problem of

disability is not the impairment itself but its social implications (Gindis, 1990). He promoted an exceptional education model called inclusion based on positive differentiation in which education starts from the individual's strengths instead of the weaknesses.

According to a social constructivist perspective, the "disabled identity results from social, cultural, environmental and/or political factors such as social discrimination and power relationships" (Abeelee, de Cock, & Roe, 2012, p. 130). Other authors consider that the group of practices and actions that affect people's lives is what makes them disabled (Moser, 2006).

Based on the definitions above, my blind students may experience problems with access to certain activities and gaining reception within the community. Therefore, two essential aspects emerged to solve this: "understanding the opportunities and challenges of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for people with disability, give us a broader understanding of the possible impact virtual worlds may have on people with disability" (Stendal, 2012, p.2) and scaffolding defined as "providing contextual supports for meaning by using simplified language, teacher modeling, cooperative learning and hands-on learning" (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 345).

What I can reflect from this is that the ICT might work as an efficient mediation for the challenges if it is adapted and the human support recognized as scaffolding could turn to me into an effective one since I was trying to overcome possible emotional challenges because of the vulnerable nature of disability in Colombia and the evident lack of web accessibility in my virtual English course.

Authors such as Porayska-Pomsta & Pain recognize that providing students with cognitive and affective support is equally vital to their fruitful learning (2004). This concept was underlined in this autoethnographic project since the analysis of sets of human-human tutorial and classroom dialogues was being made. There are tremendous amounts of linguistic politeness to be central to successful communication due to the particular circumstances surrounding a tutorial session with two blind students looking for comprehensive support after being segregated from their virtual environments.

3.2 Critical disability theory and accessibility

As I could understand from sociocultural theory, the challenge behind disability is the marginalization of the

individuals in terms of power and domination and the failure of society to accommodate such

Differences. This is how the critical social theory emerges as an emancipatory dialogue thinking from the diversity in which gender and disability are ways of signifying relationships of power (Garland-Thomson, 1996).

A tentacle from this critical social theory is called the critical disability theory, "a diverse set of approaches that essentially seek to theorize disability as a cultural, political, and social phenomenon, rather than an individualized, medical matter attached to the body" (Hall, 2019). Consequently, I selected this critical disability theory as a manner to find a solution that could respond to the inclusion of blind students in the EFL classroom and as a way to get attached to a deeper philosophical view of it through Habermas's approach looking toward the universality as the real power of the web (Adam & Kreps, 2006).

In this concept of universality, I found the feeling of inclusion in the air. However, the graphical nature of the standard interface is still the main concern I have in terms of accessibility. People with low vision or visual acuity loss (Leat, Legge & Bullimore, 1999) can play with specialized monitors or size adjustments, others with colour blindness usually deal with high contrasts and images, but those considered legally blind and completely sightless represent a considerable challenge since they face images, tables, frames, and charts without description (Paciello, 2000).

In this way, accessibility should be considered a combination of web accessibility guidelines, standards, and coding to deal with disabilities and extend the opportunity to navigate, identify and interact with them (Rutter et al., 2007). Since this is a demanding process, I started to understand that there is no single formula for accessibility, and it entails more than one solution and sometimes complex alternatives.

Most approaches are aimed at facilitating the access of blind users to computers through alternative sensory channels such as the auditory channel and tactile devices (Harper & Yesilada, 2008). Universal design features are intended to increase access to educational materials presented only visually by making the learning goals achievable by individuals with vast differences in their abilities (Saap, 2009). These last concepts gave me some ideas about dealing with the materials. The last missing aspect was regarding the teaching strategies that I could implement in EFL teaching while taking care of my student's unique needs.

4. Research design

4.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography encompasses an array of different ethnographic techniques that in some way embrace the “self” or “I” of research (Ellis, 2004 ;) and “lets you use yourself to get to the culture” (Pelias, 2003, p. 372). Therefore, it is an excellent way to get closer to what personal experience can explore in a particular case, such as teaching visually-impaired students in EFL. While autoethnography is an emergent form of research, some studies have been conducted on ESL students and EFL teachers in which topics such as identity, EFL textbooks, immigration, and ESL writing have been discussed (Lapidus et al., 2013; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2001).

Regarding the type of autoethnography, as Norman Denzin (1997, 228) claims: evocative auto ethnographers “bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other.” Using the examples of real-life experiences while teaching visually-impaired people is poorly developed and researched, and it is interesting to discover the emotions behind it. In fact, through evocative autoethnography, substantive contribution to social understanding is underlined, and space for reflexivity, emotional impact (Lake, 2015), and the description of reality by the researcher involved is a valuable feature to the way pedagogy emerges in special needs context. Since the main focus of this work was to describe the emotional and pedagogical challenges faced as an English teacher who is struggling with VIS for the very first time, an autoethnography was selected due to its methodological principle of focusing on one specific aspect of being and how it was internalized by interacting with others and exploring one’s “learning experience, struggles, solutions, failures and successes” (Kaveh, 2012, p.7). Autoethnography can also “provide a medium for an evocative story, compel emotional responses and activate a critical analysis of her own lived experiences” (Hagan, 2005, p. 401).

For this research, the common purpose of selecting autoethnography also has to do with the disregarded voices of tutors and instructors who day after day try to work in favor of inclusion even if the institution or government is not guiding the process. It also favors the individuals to become part of the transformation of education and become visible among the others.

4.2 Research questions

- RQ1. What challenges have I faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher?
- RQ2. What strategies have I developed to address these challenges?

To answer the questions, I collected data from my field notes, self-observation, and self-reflection made for one month and memories I had from previous semesters before the pandemic. I could have in situ sessions, make questions in real-time, and observe their behavior, gestures, and even their tone. Since auto ethnographies allow me to write about remembered moments selectively perceived to have a significant influence (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), I collected eleven self-observation pages analysed by coding what events were pedagogical challenges and which were emotional. I maintained a sequential order of my self-reflection in the tutorial sessions with the blind students by adding a reflection paragraph for each self-observation page. I categorized the pedagogical challenges every time I encountered a difficulty connected to the university, lesson planning, material accessibility, and lack of training. I decided to focus on the feelings I had every time I faced a pedagogical challenge for the emotional ones. For instance, self-questioning my decisions as a teacher, controlling the frustration, dealing with fears, or simply looking for support.

I relied upon the self-observation and a few field notes taken simultaneously while having the face-to-face sessions because I wanted to evoke in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike. Collecting the information directly from the participants, who became a valuable source of continuous evaluation and self-analysis, was also a way to show coherence to make my VIS more visible.

For each session, I included a classification of the teaching strategies I applied to name my actions and describe how this implementation helped me overcome the challenges. Finally, field notes were shorter since only four sessions included them, but they were helpful to focus on the materials used and describe how VIS manipulated them.

4.3 Ethics and quality

To assure the quality or trustworthiness of this study, actual blind students are part of the interaction with me, transcripts of the recorded classes are available to check the reliability of the data collected and the software at last. It is helping me organize the information so I can have a clear picture of the challenges mentioned and the recurrent teaching strategies. People involved in the field notes and

my story also provided consent to allow me to use their opinions and perceptions of the class and their personal experiences as learners. This process was developed as part of understanding the ethical issues that come with autoethnography. I find my monologic voice and dialogic and multiplicity of other voices reported through my internal speech (Roth, 2009).

5. Results

This autoethnography exposes a closer view of the challenges I have faced as an EFL teacher for blind students and the teaching strategies implemented to overcome them initially.

From the list in Figure 1, the significant pedagogical challenges were about the following three aspects: First, lack of institutional support (when I searched for the institutional guidelines, I found unclear inclusion policies). Secondly, lack of training in this field and a lack of knowledge regarding Braille and inclusive lesson planning. The first two challenges made me feel that things were beyond my control because there were no institutional documents to read and people in charge. Working alone did not offer solid support, and hence I decided to focus on the third most significant challenge that seemed more manageable to me. Braille gave the impression to be the first resource my blind student's trust; I felt frustrated for not having the ability to communicate by using this code or incorporating it into our sessions. My initial attempts to learn it was also useless since I felt I had no talent, and my learning process was too slow.

Right after this initial experience, three essential incidents emerged:

1. There were Braille printers that I could use without learning Braille previously.
2. The Braille code in English was different from Spanish, and it was not a universal code.
3. I explored two web pages that were the pioneers of visually-impaired learning and instruction: The Perkins School for the blind and the Hadley School for the blind in The United States.

These two sites offered general guidelines, valuable courses and, materials. At that moment, I felt that I was not the only teacher under the same circumstances, and I felt encouraged to conduct more research.

The fourth and the fifth most common challenges were adapting materials for VIS and redesigning lesson

plans. In writing, I observed that the blind students needed to participate in a collaborative asynchronous forum that was open for almost a month. In the registered virtual course, they have a different tutor assigned. I felt that the university's dynamic was to encourage blind students to work in Moodle by receiving my assistance (which is unfair for them). I decided then to inform the virtual tutor about the students' situation, and he allowed them to prepare an oral presentation using the same topic from the writing section.

Nonetheless, I was concerned about it because it is frustrating not developing the activity as their partners do. Additionally, they were interested in learning about the way English is written, so I brought the alphabet made of foamy to maintain the interest they had in a friendly manner and explain spelling easily. Figure 1 indicates what pedagogical challenges were more common and least evident in the self-observation description and field notes.

6. Findings

Through this autoethnography, a closer view of the challenges I have faced as an EFL teacher for blind students and the teaching strategies implemented to initially overcome them are exposed.

6.1 Pedagogical challenges

From the list in Figure 1, the major pedagogical challenges were about the following three aspects: First, lack of institutional support (when I searched for the institutional guidelines, I found unclear inclusion policies). Secondly, lack of training in this field and lack of knowledge regarding Braille and inclusive lesson planning. The first two challenges made me feel that things were beyond my control because there were no institutional documents to read and people in charge. Working alone did not offer actual support and hence I decided to focus on the third biggest challenge that seemed more manageable to me. Braille gave the impression to be the first resource my blind students trust, I felt frustrated for not having the ability to communicate by using this code or incorporating it into our sessions. My initial attempts to learn it were also useless since I felt I had no talent for it and my learning process was too slow.

Right after this initial experience, three important incidents emerged. First, there were Braille printers that I could use without learning Braille previously. Second, Braille code in English was different from Spanish, it was not a universal code. Thirdly, I explored two web pages that were the

pioneers of visually-impaired learning and instruction: The Perkins School for the blind and the Hadley school for the blind in The United States. These two sites offered general guidelines, useful courses and, materials. In that moment, I felt that I was not the only teacher under the same circumstances, and I felt encouraged to conduct more research.

The fourth and the fifth most common challenges were adapting materials for VIS and redesigning lesson plans. I could observe that in writing, it was mandatory for the blind students to participate in a collaborative asynchronous forum that is opened for almost a month. In the registered virtual course, they have a different tutor assigned and I felt that the dynamic of the university was to encourage the blind student to work in Moodle by receiving my assistance (which is unfair for them) I decided then to inform the virtual tutor about the students’ situation and he allowed them to prepare an oral presentation using the same topic from the writing section. Nonetheless, I was concerned about it because it is frustrating the fact of not developing the activity as their partners do. Additionally, they had interest in learning about the way English is written, so I brought the alphabet made of foamy to maintain the interest they had in a friendly manner and explain spelling easily. Figure 1 indicates what pedagogical challenges were more common and least evident in the self-observation description and field notes.

6.2 Emotional challenges

While the pedagogical challenges were related to the interaction with the English course, the emotional challenges

were a response to these pedagogical problems that made me initially feel helpless. Then, a big question I asked myself when I started this process, Am I currently prepared to teach blind people?

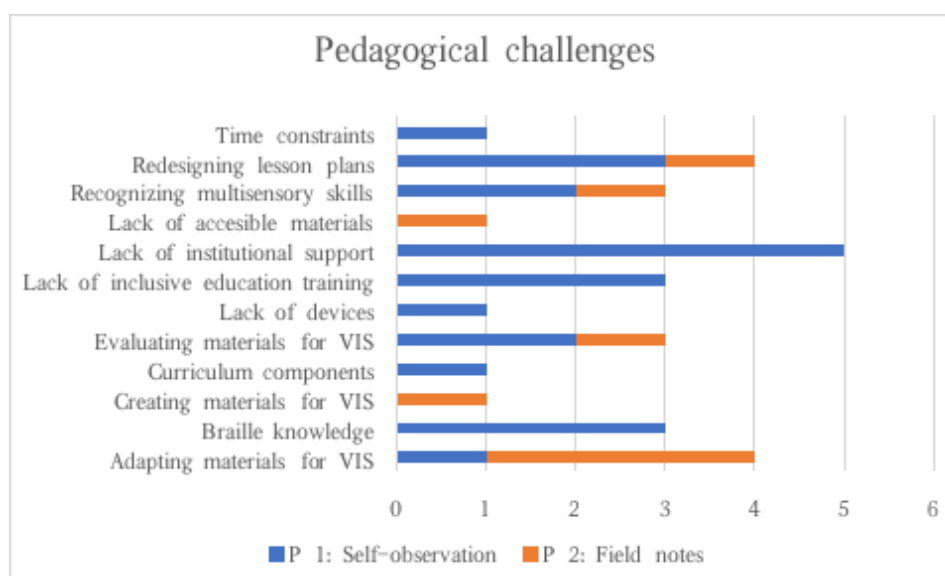
A massive wave of negative thoughts covered my head nonstop. Reflecting on every decision made and every action taken during my sessions with the blind students became my daily routine. It was like a metacognitive strategy that I was using to monitor what I was doing wrong or not. I categorized it then as impotence and was the most common emotional challenge since, through it, I realized I could not solve all the pedagogical challenges immediately. I constantly wrote impressions and thoughts, and my inner voice was active daily, looking for my constant improvement but affected by a feeling of powerlessness. This led me to the second most relevant emotional challenge that reduced my levels of anguish due to the crisis I had at the beginning.

One of the most vivid examples of this was when I went to the ICT leader office to request some assistance in terms of accessibility, and he replied:

You must be very careful with these blind people because of their condition. They become manipulators. A braille printer needs an expert, and we do not have any.

I was in shock. The level of prejudices was high, and he simply did not care. I felt he despised my students, but his attitude encouraged me to continue looking for options to start reducing my distressful feelings. I did not want to be

Figure 1. Pedagogical challenges recurrence in tutorial sessions with visually impaired students



like him, which convinced me to become part of the solution. Consequently, I decided to request the braille printer from my boss. Still, she said that I had to wait for permission from the central office (Colombia is a centralist country and depends on the decisions made in the capital city). I formally understood that I needed to create my materials and lessons to continue supporting them without any institutional help.

The last two challenges encountered were related to my fear of failing since I wanted to give hope to these students while learning English. Simultaneously, I did not want to discriminate them unconsciously with language, behavior, or suppositions that could increase their frustration toward the course.

As it is seen in Figure 2, 5 main emotional challenges recurrence can be analysed. In Table 1, each emotional challenge contains a type of pedagogical challenge that is connected to its origin.

6.3 Scaffolding and teaching strategies

The emotional process behind the pedagogical challenges encountered in the tutorial sessions revealed several feelings that led to my selection of strategies. I felt the necessity to implement techniques from the literature review, such as the principles behind the oral and audio-lingual methods and the practical scaffolding suggestions. At this level, I felt that my level of empathy was directly affecting my performance as an English teacher. Grading became less critical, a desire to create materials emerged and feelings of anger toward the government obliged me to assume this challenge to protest.

I think this is the reason why effective scaffolding was the main character. I opted to use strategies that could guarantee the motivation and support that were missing from the institutions in charge and the willingness to communicate. Since they could not see what was presented on the screen, I incorporated specific affective scaffolding here to guarantee the acceptance of the materials adopted and avoid blocking and lack of confidence. Therefore, in these sessions, I did not use expressions such as Do not say it, you are entirely wrong, I cannot understand you.

In contrast, I included expressions related to the encouragement of interest, such as your attempt are great, or I trust your memory. I felt aware of the necessity of using different types of scaffolding to accomplish the lesson's objectives and deal with the unique needs of these students. Certain opinions expressed by the students were related to how helpful my modeling might be to one of them. For instance, the following extract is shared:

Ahh, now that you say it, what helps me the most is when your intonation sounds like a question or a surprise? Your voice is sweet and happy. For example, you told me the expression the other day: Of course, I did not know the meaning, but I associate it with Claro in Spanish. (Interview # 2)

I could infer that the student prefers my effective scaffolding to face records on his own because, at the level at which he is now, he feels more comfortable if I gradually provide the input. Simultaneously, I feel that I am controlling his frustration by using politeness in some way.

Figure 2. Emotional challenges recurrence in tutorial sessions with visually impaired students

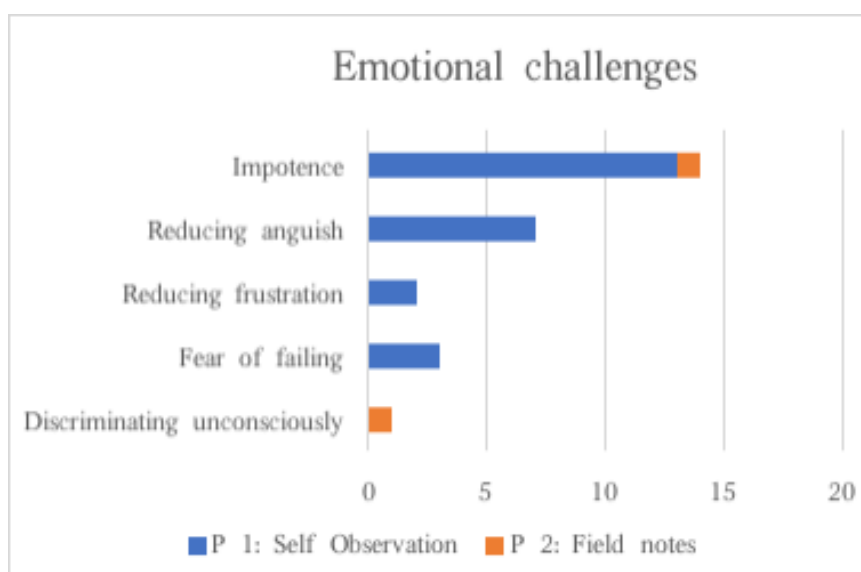


Table 1. Emotional Challenges Generated by Pedagogical Challenges

Impotence	Reducing anguish	Reducing frustration	Fear of failing	Discriminating unconsciously
Lack of institutional support	Redesigning lesson plans	Evaluating materials for VIS	Braille knowledge	Recognizing multi-sensory skills
Lack of devices	Adapting materials for VIS	Creating materials for VIS		Lack of inclusive education training
Time constraints				
Lack of accessible materials				
Curriculum components				

Moreover, by questioning the students, I could promote their leading role in their learning process and learn from them while maintaining dialogues. Another conclusion from the endless questions I addressed was that one tutorial session per week was not enough to help my blind students. I planned to work with him every Thursday for 2 hours to use the Moodle platform exercises as well. To guarantee time efficiency, I selected the following strategies based on the answers given by the blind students: translating instructions from Moodle to L1 and describing each virtual environment in detail (screen description) would be helpful for them. Finally, listing the steps to follow and eliciting from their visual residue (trusting what they remember when they could see before losing their sight) helped me to contextualize them quickly and give meaningful examples of the lessons or tasks given.

In this figure, it is appreciated the number of teaching strategies implemented and the frequency of use.

Figure 4 shows the strategies implemented to counteract some examples of both types of challenges at the same time. It also shows examples of pedagogical challenges that originate emotional challenge directly.

7. Discussion

The findings revealed how pedagogical challenges derived emotional challenges and how they are interrelated to the teaching strategies applied to cope with them. The first research question demands determining the challenges faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher. In this

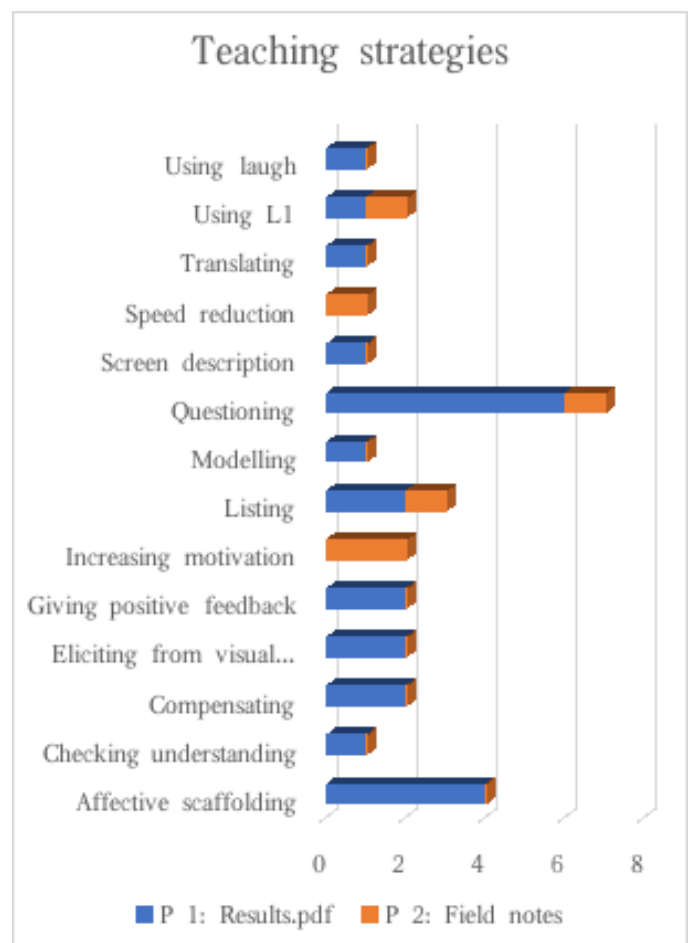
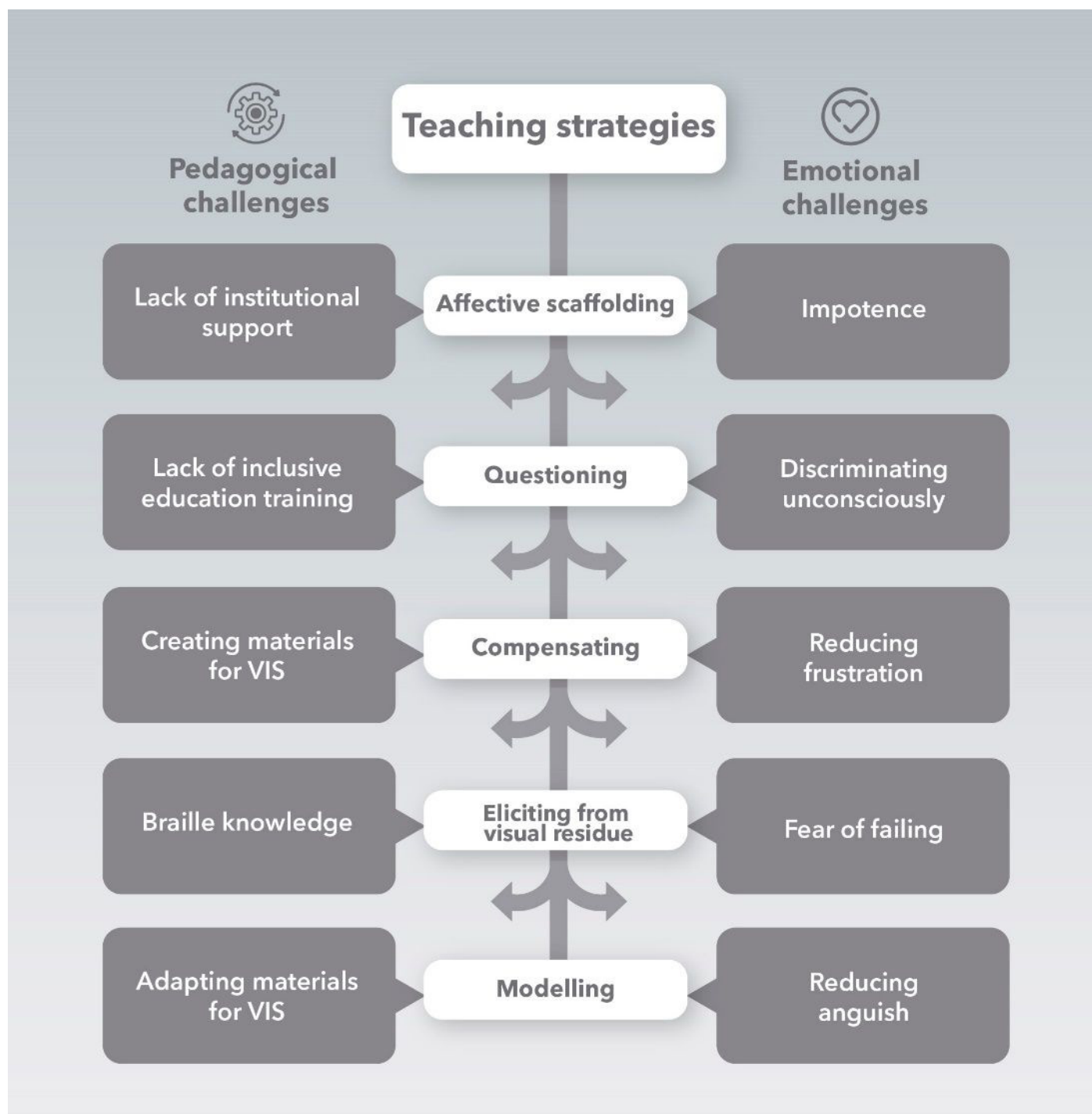
Figure 3. Teaching strategies implemented in tutorial sessions with visually-impaired students


Figure 4. Teaching strategies interrelated to pedagogical and emotional challenges



autoethnography, there were five main pedagogical challenges out of twelve:

- Lack of institutional support
- Lack of training in special education
- Lack of Braille knowledge
- Adapting materials for VIS
- Redesigning lesson plans

The first three challenges exposed the fact that actions that affect people’s lives make them disabled, as Moser mentioned (2006). The sociocultural approach clarifies the errors made by institutions while offering a diminished version of the curriculum and education and ignoring the inclusion plan. Here, the university was ignoring this critical aspect, and the VIS should not be forced to use a virtual course that is inaccessible. This approach indicates the misconceptions toward disability as a simple medical problem because it outlines how the person deals with the restrictions of their environment regarding the disability itself.

The last two challenges revealed what Carter, Nunan & Credo claimed about material design. In materials development, should materials be driven by theory or practice, or should syllabus needs drive them? Learner needs? or market needs? (2011). These unresolved issues affected the blind students’ rights since the online materials were not accessible. The alternative sensory channels such as the auditory channel and tactile devices suggested by Harper & Yesilada (2008) were not available either. This situation reveals that other interests, such as political ones, were over the VIS needs.

There were five emotional challenges encountered: impotence, reducing anguish, reducing frustration, fear of failing, and discriminating unconsciously. From this group, the most common ones were the feelings of impotence and attempted to reduce the anguish. One factor that could have increased the levels of anguish and impotence were the social implications of sensory disabilities since barriers from the negative imaginaries and the biomedical view that endure in society cause exclusion (Oviedo et al., 2021) that even might directly affect teachers and instructors around them who found themselves trapped.

The fear of failing and discriminating against VIS unconsciously were also relevant findings since these are initial misconceptions to blind people that any instructor might face, such as the ones Monbeck refers to as idealized views and wrong impressions such as helpless, maladjusted, or rejected people (1996). These emotions were normal and

could be overcome by questioning students to learn from them and increase self-reflection toward them.

However, previous studies that are focused on the techniques and materials EFL teachers use to teach VIS, body movement experience, and language learning in VIS and the challenges both blind students and teachers faced in their learning or teaching processes (Başaran, 2012; Kashdan & Barnes, 2002; Kocyigit & Artar, 2015), have not determined yet to what degree the challenges and restrictions met can affect the VIS learning experience. This could be considered a limitation of the study and lead other researchers to explore this issue deeply.

Regarding the second research question, fourteen teaching strategies were applied. The questioning was the most used strategy since there was a necessity to understand what the VIS wanted, their previous experiences, and learning styles. Additionally, for redesigning the lesson plans, adapting the materials, or simply creating new ones, a dialogic exercise with VIS was appropriate to listen and understand what fits their demands. From this exercise of questioning VIS, it could be inferred that differentiated instructional strategies are a way to respond to the variance among learners. Teaching EFL 4 macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) appear to require some degree of differentiated instruction (Lewin-Jones & Hodgson, 2004). As such, content must be carefully selected, and a social component is mandatory since UDL involves:

- Action and expression for demonstrating what VIS knows.
- Engagement.
- Interaction with other members of the group.

Suppose the course fails at it, as Bohman claims. In that case, it is necessary to incorporate standards into a social debate to describe changes (2005) that can eventually incorporate social and cultural aspects of language learning into the English course. According to the answers given, VIS finds listening and writing less interactive and demands little social interaction due to phonics and spelling recognition difficulties and forum collaboratively work (overwhelmed by visuals without descriptions). Therefore, exploring the principles of universal learning design would eventually shape the way English is taught to VIS. It allows students with disabilities to access courses without adaptation. It allows the coursework to be available in various formats for the non-disabled, making it easier for everyone to access. It is an approach that recognizes many instructional pedagogies that facilitate accessibility for diverse learners (Burgstahler, 2009).

Effective scaffolding was also one of the main features in this process since this strategy guarantees encouraging students to advance to the next step in learning a language and avoid negative emotions that can hinder their learning (Boekaerts, 2007). This offers more confidence and sets the affective scenario for self-improvement as an EFL teacher under a humanistic perspective.

Several other teaching strategies were influenced by the affective and polite character mentioned from this selected strategy. For instance, the way modeling was shared through the incorporation of laugh, positive feedback, and motivation enhancement guided the learning process to meet the VIS needs. With the growth of undergraduate students with disabilities, teachers need to be confident in their communication tactics by incorporating politeness and face-negotiation theories (Myers et al., 2012). Perhaps, the selection of strategies has had another component equally relevant to the research. The necessity of compensation and minimizing both types of challenges require teachers to cover socio-affective, cognitive, and context-based or emerging strategies to respond to the situation.

8. Conclusion

The lack of guidelines and institutional support represents a significant concern beyond teachers' performance. From the autoethnographic perspective, I evaluated what I could determine as challenges and teaching strategies, but the implications that remain external and directly affect my work were approached rapidly. However, the impact of what the government and universities do about inclusion and web accessibility meaningfully modifies the situation. The sense of frustration and abandonment established in the emotional challenges list could gradually be modified with more support. Finally, it would be another topic for research to understand the critical situation of inclusion in South American countries that will help us have a clear picture of the relationships of dominance that do not contribute to the optimal participation of disabled learners.

Colombia has started the inclusion journey by not denying access to education to blind people and those with any visual impairment. Nevertheless, it is still far from including them and supporting them appropriately in public higher education institutions. English as a subject could be that flexible field in which the first steps could be given due to language and the skills implied, which are not necessarily attached to visual aids or the graphic nature of virtual environments.

The journey toward universalization of virtual courses has started, and I feel encouraged by what web accessibility could eventually bring to the field of special education and the opportunities that could bring to blind learners. There must be a balance of teamwork between web designers and instructors who have the responsibility to translate scaffolding to the digital area.

I could recognize through this experience that what I needed to do was far beyond that, and I needed to look for more options to expand my new portfolio of redesigned learning activities based on their particular needs. Then, my self-reflection went over the adaptation of materials and the recognition of multisensory skills in the way that the theory behind universalization and accessibility indicated. Subsequently, I started evaluating what web accessibility meant and how the creation of my materials could compensate for that. Finally, what blind students are doing, in general, is looking for comprehensive support after being segregated from their virtual environments. Then, recognizing this is the starting point of a humanistic virtual course design for them.

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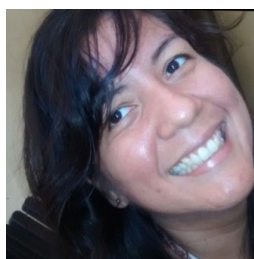
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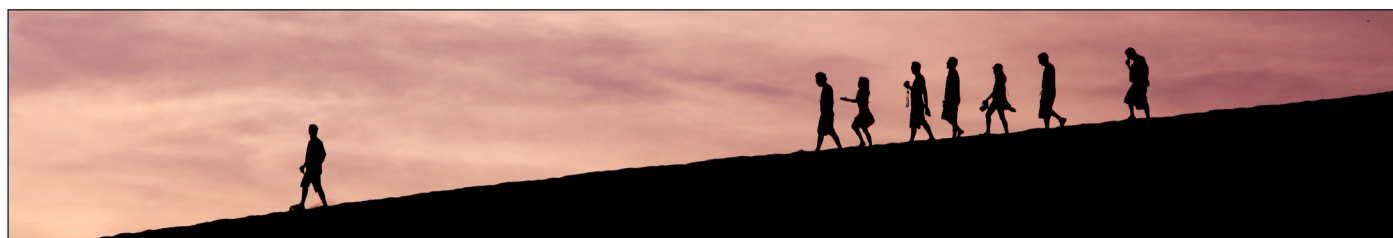
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Barriers about utilizing technological tools and the role of a principal: Autoethnography

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Keywords

CALL (computer-assisted language learning); principal's attitudes; change; resistance; school leadership; culture; autoethnography

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Abstract

This study uses autoethnography as a research design, exploring my role of principalship toward technology integration in the language classroom and the EFL teachers' resistance to using computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Such resistance has created severe stress and an emotional threat to my well-being. Therefore, this tension between resisting EFL teachers and me has affected my administration skills, roles, and the relationship with the EFL teachers. Being both the research subject and the researcher in the authentic social context of a language school has provided me with a meaningful opportunity to investigate the tension in this autoethnographic study. The main data used for this study are my own memories and reflective analysis. In addition, semi-structured interviews were employed to assess how I created the culture of encouraging technology integration in my language institution. Findings have revealed my positive attitude toward technology integration and a range of problems encountered by EFL teachers that may have created tension between EFL teachers and me. In addition, this self-study has revealed other associated issues such as autocratic response, time constraints, a lack of experimentation, and the need for peer observation of CALL activities—further helped me develop a better perception of CALL resistance and different barriers impede its integration.

1. Introduction

This qualitative research utilized autoethnography to investigate a problem in endeavouring to integrate technology in learning and teaching. More specifically, apart from using coursebooks, language skills would be taught by using technological tools, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and e-content. Being the principal, I have often experienced EFL teachers' resistance to the use of technology in learning and teaching. Teachers' resistance created several problems and placed me under a great deal of stress. Tensions created between EFL educators and me created frustration for me and, therefore, affected my relationship with EFL teachers and learners, as well as my performance at work and my well-being. This was ensured sometimes by low self-esteem to lead the technology integration and foster the culture of using e-content. From the very beginning, I was faced with the problem, and I believed - that this was only happening to me, however, after discussing it with the other principals, the same problem was happening to them as well. Moreover, the literature provides evidence that technological tools are not accepted in learning and teaching by most of the teachers (Bullock, 2004; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Scrimshaw, 2018).

The rapid development of technological tools utilized in learning and teaching provides opportunities to improve education and the teaching environment with the use of Web 2.0 technologies, such as social media which increases students' interaction and enhances their writing skills, as well as with CALL programs students can practice language learning through motivating activities (Flemmer, 2015). Therefore, there is a need for an instructional design method that utilizes these tools to facilitate both learning and teaching. I am designing this study to measure my perceptions of the use of technology in practice based on my experience. In addition, how I reacted toward EFL teachers' resistance to use technological tools and CALL programs. Moreover, this research intends to understand better how I create the culture of technology in learning and teaching. What factors and decisions facilitate this integration into a classroom, and as a result, promote a culture of technology use. Using my beliefs about CALL, my memories, reflections, and data collected from semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers, I hope to find answers to all these challenges.

I strongly believe that teachers and learners are the main drivers within the language learning process and the mediators of the effectiveness of classroom technology. Their educational beliefs play an indispensable role, in the way they perceive, and use technology in classrooms (Zhao,

2005, p. 454). Hence, researchers need to investigate the psychological, social, cognitive, and organizational factors that affect teachers' willingness to integrate technology in their classroom environment. Therefore, this study hopes to provide evidence-based on these factors. In addition, uncovering foreign language teachers' beliefs about technology can enable administration, professional development, and pre-service teachers' programs to make changes, to better suit the needs of foreign language educators.

Research has proven that the administration helps predict the teachers' abilities to integrate technology in the classroom. Numerous factors have been identified as essential for technology integration: a supportive school system, adequate resources, and professional development (Corey, 2016; Zhao, 2005). Nevertheless, the factors aforementioned do not provide a holistic picture of administration and principality and suggest the need to expand further the factors. These factors must be based on a new pedagogy which resonates with the needs of today's education. In addition, the literature discussion cannot provide evidence regarding the purposes of using technological tools in learning and teaching. Moreover, which factors force principals to build curricula around technology and how they mingle e-content with traditional settings environments? The administration at each setting and level plays a pivotal role in establishing the educational climate against technology innovation within the educational systems (Vanetta & Fordham, 2004). Therefore, this study can contribute to and identify the purposes of incorporating technology in curriculum design by principals.

Finally, to expand the current literature, this paper using autoethnography aimed to capture the ways, I experienced trying to implement technology in learning and teaching. Moreover, the findings of this self-study will help me to have a greater understanding of managing different contradictions and conflicts that arose between me and EFL teachers' resistance. In addition, I want to understand the factors that impede technology use and find ways to overcome them.

This paper hopes to make a quintessential contribution to the field of educational leadership, by providing valuable clues about principals' role in supporting EFL teachers using technological tools. Additionally, this self-study using autoethnography as a research design can be used by language school principals and administrators that are facing resistance from educators to implement technology successfully.

2. Literature review

To support this personalized study, in which the author is both the subject and the researcher, previous literature, which is in line with this study, will be examined. Therefore, I have selected to examine studies that have explored the use of technology in language learning and teaching and support my research and the chosen methodology.

Examining the relevant literature aided me to shape and build my personal experiences. Telling my own story, related to the EFL teachers' resistance to technology in the language classroom, as well as my role as a principal. Therefore, I am focused on two main concepts of the literature to construct the foundation of this research: First, I examine technology use and teachers' attitude, and next, I discuss principals' roles in technology integration.

2.1 Technology use and teachers' attitude

It is widely accepted that one of the fundamental roles that a teacher should perform is to organize and select the appropriate content and available tools which facilitate the learning process. Research has demonstrated that the success of technology in teaching depends on the teachers' attitudes (Bullock, 2004). Moreover, Bullock (2004) asserts that educators who have positive perceptions and beliefs toward technology use tend to feel more comfortable and incorporate technological tools in their teaching. Therefore, attitudes are quintessential in deciding humans' reactions to a specific situation. It is assumed that technological tools provide a different environment and aim to improve teaching and learning. However, it is not clear that technology improves teaching and learning because a certain amount of teachers seem to be resistant to its use in their classroom environment (Bullock 2004). At the same time, we should not take it for granted that its use improves the ultimate acquisition process. Moreover, teachers are unaware of the importance of utilizing technological tools in teaching (Aydin, 2007). Bates (2005) states that educators do not consider technological tools as part of their curriculum design. Nonetheless, I do not agree with the above statement because teachers seem to value the use of technological tools in learning and teaching and their views are that technology can be used as supplementary outside and inside the classroom settings. In addition, Anderson & Stillman, (2011) state that educators require a clear understanding of technology use and its outcome on learning. To some extent, I agree with the particular view, but I would add to the aforementioned view that educators need to be aware of technology content pedagogy. Therefore, examining

EFL teachers' attitudes about the use of technology might provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between attitudes and pedagogy and provide some useful insights to principals toward teachers' technology resistance.

While there are many potential benefits from the employment of technologies in language learning and teaching, over the past years, researchers have explored the various uses of technology in teaching and learning. For instance, they have explored if learning is enhanced and other variables such as motivational levels, perceptions, and contradictions using technology. They found that optimal use of ICT in instructional delivery is rare or when used, it is often not truly integrated with the curriculum. For instance, the study of Wozney, Venkatesh, and Abrami (2006) provided evidence that teachers' use of computer technologies was predominantly for 'informative' and 'expressive' purposes. On the other hand, Bauer, and Kenton's (2005) study showed that language educators were well equipped with technological skills, innovative and adept at overcoming obstacles, however, they did not integrate technology consistently as a pedagogical tool. Whereas the study conducted by Oda (2011) discovered that teachers' beliefs are greatly impacted by past experiences both as teachers and learners in the classroom. In another study carried out by Zhong and Shen (2017) revealed that though new technologies were used in instruction, they were utilized as teaching accessories to support a predominantly teacher-driven class with minimum interaction between learners. Moreover, research studies have demonstrated that teachers' attitudes play a focal role in influencing their tendency to be in favour or against employing any form of technology in teaching (Cavas, et al., 2002; Kreijn et al. 2016). Kreijn et al. (2012) study investigated Dutch teachers to find out their usage of digital learning materials (DLM). The results demonstrated that attitude was the one variable with the strongest predicting factors for the teachers' intention to use DLM.

In short, the studies discussed above manifested that learners' motivation was increased, and students' ultimate acquisition process to some extent was improved. However, they explored their attitudes toward technology in teaching and not the factors which hinder the integration process. Therefore, it clearly shows a gap in the literature, which requires exploration, and this study addressed the particular gap.

2.2 The role of a principal

The principal role is to create effective strategies and vision to support learning and teaching (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The school environment consists of a combination

of a school's vision, teachers, learners, as well as resources – and principals have control over them. According to Kurland, Peretz and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2010), a principal's vision has an essential effect on the school's organizational learning. More specifically, Kurland et al., (2010) state that the principal's attitude might be only a piece together with the opinions of the community. Principals' duty and autonomy vary from school to school, however, most of them are responsible to set their objectives and creating a plan for their staff to ensue. Kurland et al., (2010) state that principals who developed a school vision for effective technology integration were found to be the most effective. Hence, principals' perceptions toward technology use in the school are affected by their vision regarding technology. To some extent, I agree with the aforementioned point of view, nevertheless, I would like to add that principals except the strategies and visionary leadership are required to bring digital age learning and model the use of technology in teaching and learning. Moreover, before they proceed to the integration process, it is very important to explore principals' attitudes towards technology use in teaching and learning. For instance, what factors motivated me as the principal of a language school to integrate technological tools and e-content in learning and teaching?

It is believed that the role of the principal plays a focal role in technology integration (Hallinger, 2011). However, to achieve and meet this integration, they need to change the school culture. In addition, something that is considered essential is the discussion between principals and teachers regarding the use of technology in learning and teaching. This creates a positive influence, which-in-turn influence learners' attitude (Hallinger, 2011). In addition, the role of the principal consists of thinking and considering all the compartments of a school, and the people who foster learners' learning and outcomes (Senge, 2015, p.6). To put it differently, it includes various departments and subject matters, named: teachers, learners, administrators, and parents. Therefore, in order to achieve this complex task and foster technology use in the classroom, principals need to communicate the value of technology among teachers, learners, and parents because they contribute to the ultimate use of technology in teaching and create the appropriate environment for successful implementation in the long run (Senge, 2015, p.6). Thus, principals can attain change and foster the culture of technology. Earl (2002) states that technology integration is complex and requires systems thinking, and I agree with this, however, it requires the appropriate pedagogy and methodology from the very beginning.

Anderson and Dexter (2015) pointed out, that principals' leadership plays an essential role in technology usage. In

their study, they provided evidence that when technological tools are spread throughout the school environment, it is due to the principal's role. They concluded that in the particular schools the role of the principal had changed from a 'facilitator' to an 'initiator'. Nevertheless, I think that the principal's role changes when there is a combination of a successful integration process, and it reflects the teachers' role as well. In addition, their study could not provide evidence regarding principals' initial attitudes towards technology use, such as CALL and technological tools. Therefore, based on the aforementioned point of view, this study aims to investigate my initial attitudes on technology use.

2.3 Technological barriers and principal's actions

Literature provides evidence that principals' actions and decisions play a fundamental role in addressing obstacles related to technology integration (Draper, 2013). There are two kinds of obstacles: First barriers are to some extent external to educators, and this requires passing the appropriate knowledge and skills to teachers by training them. In addition, providing suitable materials and resources, such as software and basic equipment (Ertmer, 1999). The second obstacles are mainly internal, and as postulated by Ertmer (1999), they are the most difficult to overcome and change. Therefore, these obstacles seem to provide challenges to EFL teachers' and learners' attitudes toward technology, which forms the cognitive process and increases self-confidence use of technology inside and outside the classroom settings.

The study carried out by O'Dwyer et al. (2005) investigated the three factors: use, effect, and support of instructional technology research with a hierarchical lens. Their participants were secondary school principals and teachers from different districts. The study aimed to understand administrative organizations regarding the increased use of technology. They compared educators in a single building and found that teachers had similar survey responses. On the other hand, when comparing different schools in a single district, the variability was greater. They concluded that, albeit all the principals had access to the same software, principals provide varying technology-related resources to teachers.

Another qualitative study carried out by Venezky (2014), sought to explore the effects of instructional technology. More specifically, the study observed the approaches and strategies employed by principals toward technology improvement. The findings provided evidence that principals' management capacity which contained the appropriate knowledge and had a clear pedagogy, was more successful. Moreover, they showed using several strategies to facilitate

technology integration. Subjects of the study believed that this attainment was due to the principals' ability to provide professional development. I would say that this study missed the chance to reveal deeper perspectives. On the other hand, the purpose of this study is to present my perceptions and responses to EFL teachers' resistance to employ technology and fostering the culture of technology through the collection of qualitative data.

It becomes clear that the literature indicates several barriers, however, the most difficult obstacles include teacher beliefs regarding technology use and teacher technological skills. Moreover, the interplay of first-order barriers with each other, and with the second-order barriers seems to be complex. I would state based on my observations that EFL teachers who have more access to technology and are more experienced with technological tools seem to be more comfortable and less reluctant to use digital learning resources in their teaching than novice educators.

Many experimental studies have investigated principals' role in technology integration in language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, there are several problems and gaps which have not been addressed by the previous experimental studies, and are presented as follows: To begin with, various studies have attended to find out teachers' perceptions of technology in higher education (Smith, 2012). However, rarely are questions raised about principals' language school attitudes towards CALL and factors which impede technology integration regarding EFL teachers' resistance. Secondly, many experimental studies have provided evidence that principals have shown to be critical of technology integration (Fisher, 2013), however, they have not explored and explained how principals create the culture of technology integration, in our case CALL. Finally, these studies have not used autoethnography as a research methodology. Therefore, based on the gaps mentioned above, this study utilizes my experiences as primary data, aiming to provide answers to the literature gaps, and therefore, helping myself and the other principals to solve their contradictions.

3. Theoretical framework

Tate (2007) points out that a researcher aims to produce events of a community by observing their nature. Therefore, the way how the researcher delineates and observes social events entirely depends upon the approaches the researcher uses and the focus of the story. Therefore, this study hopes to provide different notions and stories about EFL teachers' perceptions of CALL employment and their resistance to technology integration. To attain this, the conceptual frame-

work that makes up this study is Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

To have a better understanding of the use of technology in learning and teaching TAM was useful to explain EFL teachers' resistance to CALL and perceptions towards technology employment. TAM attempts to explain how educators come to accept and use technological tools in their teaching and learning. The model has developed since it was presented by Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw (1989) and has incorporated several variables and factors. The original model consists of four compartments named as follows: Perceived usefulness, followed by perceived ease of use, the third one is the attitude toward using technology, and finally, behavioural intention to use (see figure 1). Figure 1 shows that the actual system employment is affected by behavioural intention. The particular model is based upon two focal factors: perceived usefulness in addition to perceived ease of use to predict someone's beliefs in addition to attitude toward computer technology approval (Davis et al., 1989). Nevertheless, TAM was criticized because were several limitations. For instance, Surendran (1999) mentioned its inadequacy to pay attention to external factors and its poor variance of studies.

After the limitations mentioned above, Venkatesh and Davis (2000) expanded the initial TAM in response to the aforementioned problems and they deemed it quintessential that the other features must be included to better determine factors of perceived usefulness. Therefore, the expanded model contains the social influence processing variable (see figure 2). Although the expansion comprises more elements and especially the factors that impact the perceived usefulness, it was considered incomplete since it does not include the elements that relate to the perceived ease of use.

Therefore, Venkatesh and Davis (2000) expanded the TAM further which is known as the TAM3. The main objective of this development focused on the perceived ease of use (see figure 3). The elements added were called by Venkatesh and David (2000) the "anchors" because when the facts regarding the systems of use are deficient, someone tends to develop on general information (Venkatesh & David, 2000).

However, for this paper, the last version of TAM was used because it contains the comprehensive concepts related to the study. More specifically, the TAM3 model is useful for the study because it tries to explain the factors which influence an individual to adapt and accept a new technological item. Whereas the original model as discussed above was considered incomplete because it does not include the external

Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989)

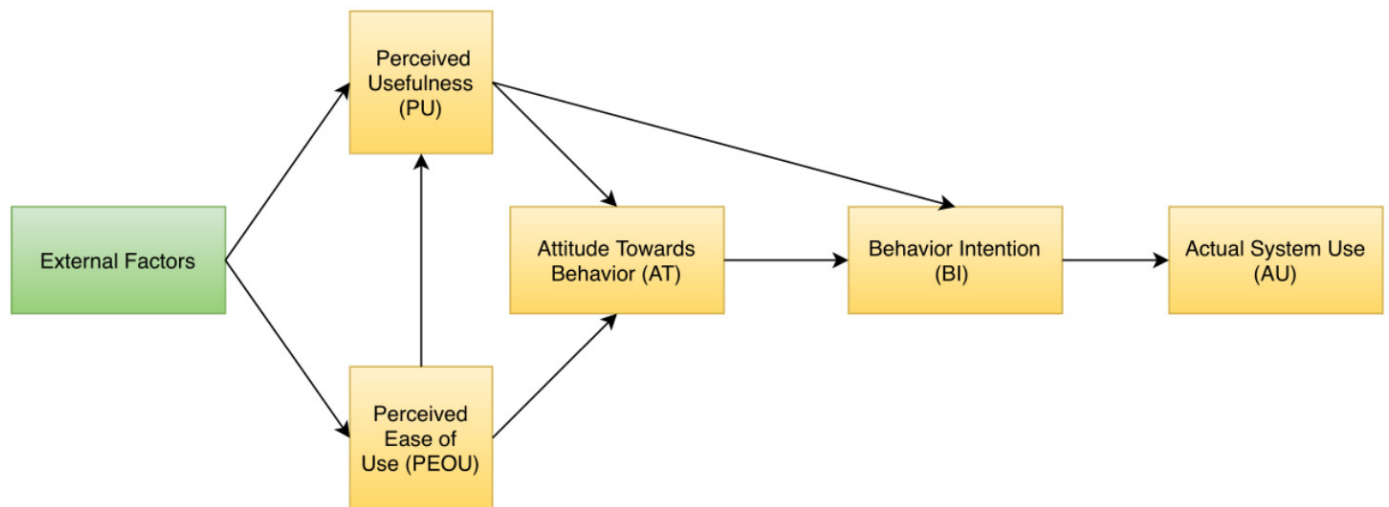
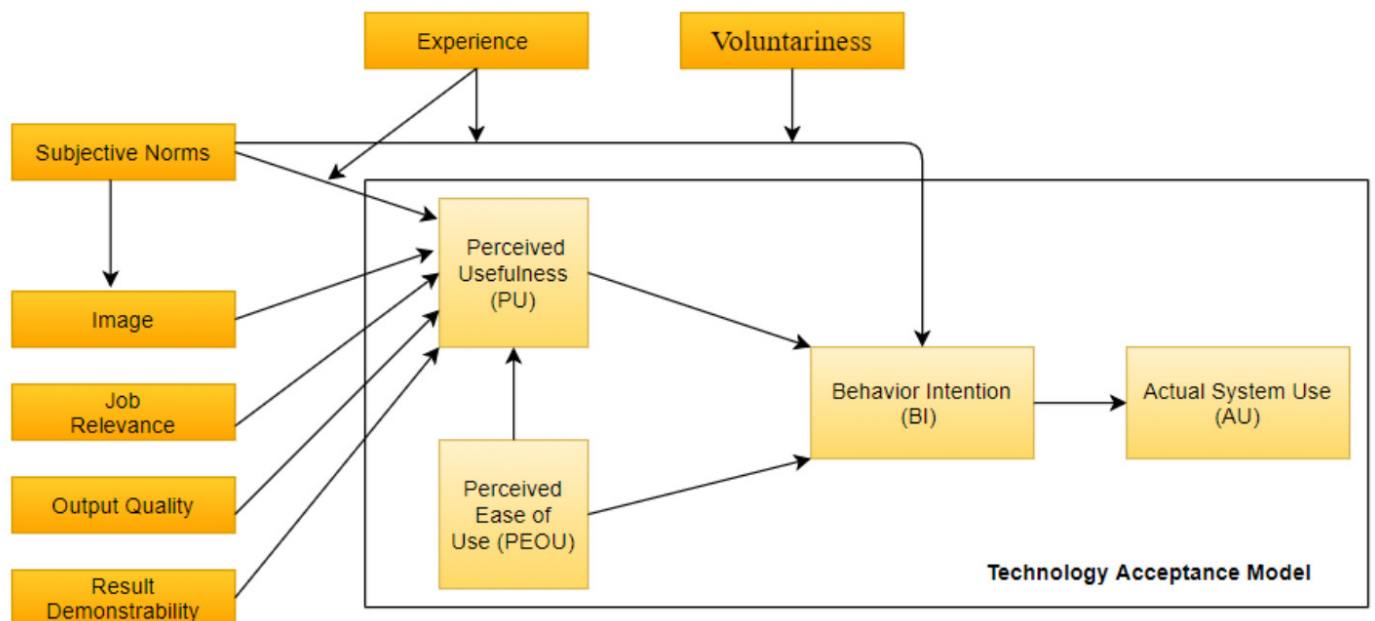


Figure 2. TAM2 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000)

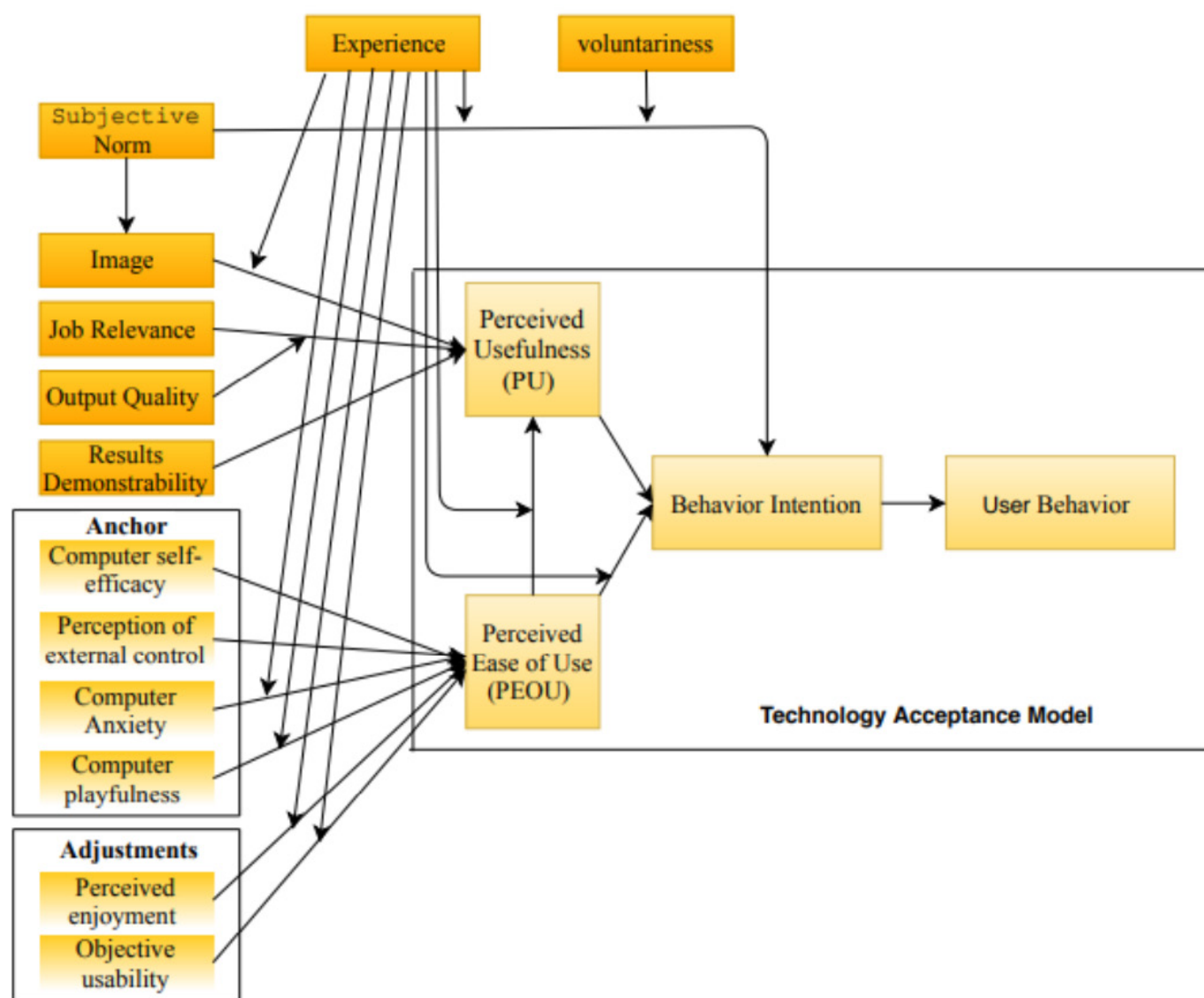


factors. Thus, for this study, the two important constructs of the TAM were used: ‘*perceived usefulness*’ and ‘*perceived ease of use*’. They were employed because they are the most important factors of the TAM model and are further discussed below to gain a better understanding of what they refer to.

Perceived usefulness obtains that educators’ or in general users’ acceptance toward utilizing one tool should be quintessential for them and must believe that this item will improve their performances. Therefore, being aware of the

benefits and pros of the tool, which they are employing. Having clear notions and believing that technology can be useful for their teaching and learning, as well as perceiving that their performance is enhanced, educators will use it. From the learning and teaching context, a teacher might consider important technology and might feel the need to use it because they believe that teaching and learning might be improved. This can arouse teachers’ and learners’ motivation to accept utilizing technology in their classroom environment (David et al., 1989).

Figure 3. TAM3 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000)



Lederer et al., (2000) postulate that the “perceived ease of use” leads to the amount to which the users expect the target system to be of effort. We can find in literature the difficulties to utilize a specific item might result from a myriad of reasons, which include technical and non-technical things. The technical things that teachers might face can be regarding lack of resources, equipment, internet connection, and a plethora of other factors which shape these difficulties. In addition, they might also feel unwilling to employ technological tools, and this is related to their lack of appropriate knowledge to use technology. Another factor which might contribute to their reluctance is the classroom management, or they feel that this approach to teaching and learning does not reflect their pedagogy in learning and teaching. Being

under these circumstances makes teachers doubt and dispute technology because it requires tremendous effort, and as a result, this contributes to teachers’ decline of motivation toward its implementation (Davis et al., 1989).

4. Research methods and design

The qualitative research methodology chosen for this study is autoethnography. The best way to define this research paradigm is by analyzing the three compartments of autoethnography. To begin with, auto: This kind of research is conducted and represented from the point of view of the self. Secondly, ethno: the focus and this research

aims to explore how culture shapes and is constructed by an individual. Finally, graphy: This states that writing is not only the means of disseminating someone's experiences, but it contains and puts emphasis on the creativeness of writing, especially, narrative, for producing and recording data that can be analyzed (Chang, 2008 p. 43).

Therefore, this self-study focuses on my perspective as the principal of a language school, taking into consideration my challenges, and a myriad of memories that will aid me to construct my own experience. All interpretations and meanings that I create are negotiated with human data sources, and interactions that I have faced as part of the culture. Based on Cunningham's (2000) point of view as a principal myself. I am always interested in learning and hearing the voices, interpretations, and experiences of colleagues and constituents, and to recognize patterns in their perceptions. Therefore, I aim to take these voices, perceptions about technology integration, interpretations, and experiences of technology resistance, and put them all together to portray my principalship.

Autoethnography has its limitations and is not clearly defined. According to Chang (2008), it is a "war" between two kinds. More specifically, evocative, and analytical autoethnography. On the other hand, Anderson (2006) puts it in another way, namely a "methodological fence sitter". In addition, there is too much argument because autoethnography as a method is questioned whether it contains scientific research. Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that a story might be taken into consideration as a scholarly if it makes someone or the reader believe the story is authentic, reliable, as well as credible. In a world where empirical studies dominate, producing narratives is not an easy endeavour. Therefore, this study will take into consideration the benefits and challenges of studying culture through my lenses of me.

4.1 Research questions

My ethnographical analysis of the use of technology will particularly examine the following questions and issues:

- **RQ1:** How do I perceive the use of CALL in learning and teaching?
- **RQ2:** How did I react towards EFL teachers' resistance to using CALL?
- **RQ3:** What have I done to cultivate the culture of EFL teachers toward the use of CALL activities?

4.2 Data collection

This self-study research aims to produce literary representations. Therefore, having this in mind, the main data collection tool was writing self-narratives and my objective was to gain insights into CALL employment regarding EFL teachers' resistance to using technological tools in learning and teaching. More specifically, we sought to gain experience in how I dealt with teachers' resistance. Therefore, I used my memories to reflect on the emotions and occurrences of all these years. So, I used descriptive lexis that would remind me of quintessential issues, I needed to cope with EFL language teachers. Sometimes, I utilized my notes from the past meetings which provided reflections, constructing, and interpreting the meaning of those meetings, and their topics throughout these years. More specifically, to inform RQ1 and RQ2, I employed a useful strategy proposed by Chang, which suggests recalling data on a specific topic by discussing it with myself (2008, p.90). This technique is useful to discover my reactions to EFL teachers' resistance.

To have a holistic picture and increase the credibility and validity of the study, and inform RQ3, I collected data through semi-structured interview questions with five EFL language school teachers teaching in our language school. A semi-structured interview consists of a set of questions, which provide a participant with the opportunity to bring other topics or focus his/her thoughts deeper into a topic. Purposeful sampling was employed to attain different views on the problem (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, Since the objective was to collect rich data from different perspectives of the particular problem, selecting participants randomly was not allowed because the study required subjects that use technological tools in their teaching. Thus, participants were first asked in person to check for their availability and willingness to take part. Therefore, before proceeding to semi-structured interview questions, the researcher sent the consent forms and information sheets to the participants by email. So, before starting the interviews, I explained to the EFL teachers, the purpose of the study, by introducing a brief explanation of the literature. Then, the interview started, and the duration of each interview varied from (35 to 40 mins) and took place in our language school. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. These research tools were useful and allowed the design of the study to be fluid in its construction, presenting the researcher with the opportunity to have a better understanding of EFL teachers' resistance to the use of technology.

4.3 Data analysis

From the moment we have collected the data, the objective is to proceed to the analysis of this information. Having autoethnography as a research design suggests that the procedure of data is a continuing process. Therefore, by recalling my memories, re-reading my reflexive notes, and with deeper introspection and self-analysis, the research is believed to be enhanced. Data collection and analysis ensure each other, and throughout this process, different themes and patterns are produced during the study.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) note that personal data analysis is a process which involves the researcher expressing and recalling past events. Therefore, I will go back to specific occasions, memorable events which are still vivid and pay attention to my emotions. During the process of recollection, recalling the past introduce writing that involves thoughts, events, and dialogue of the event. Qualitative research enables the researcher to let the data evolve during the process of writing. From the beginning of this study, it has not been clear enough, what distinctive patterns and themes will be produced. Ellis and Bochner (2008) point out “the qualitative researcher employs inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data. The categories that emerge from field notes, documents and interviews are not imposed before data collection” (p. 221).

The research questions, my memories and data collected from the semi-structured interviews guided the study, and attention was placed on each of the following topics, as my research unfolded. Having the research questions guiding my thoughts, in writing the story aided my narrative. Nevertheless, being under personal biases, which I might face in specific conditions might have affected some information. However, I tried to remain honest in my narrative by including a variety of experiences, both failures and successes that I have faced as a principal to integrate technology in a language school.

5. Findings

Having the research questions as a guide and TAM, I took into consideration all the relevant data while encoding and carrying out data analysis. Therefore, in this section, I have presented the main findings and themes that emerged during my analysis and helped the structure of my discussion.

5.1 RQ1: My perceptions towards the use of CALL into learning and teaching

My narrative about my perceptions of technology use has always played a quintessential role, in my curriculum as an EFL teacher, administrator and principal. Some of the reasons that I am keen on technology use, are: To begin with, I believe that technology use is innovative because it provides a novel teaching environment that distinguishes it from traditional teaching methods, and as a result, it has a positive impact on learners' higher thinking skills, and on the ultimate acquisition process. Nevertheless, we need to consider the drawbacks that might appear during the integration process that might affect the teaching and learning process. In addition, I think that the use of CALL can increase English-language learners' motivation and based on Dörnyei & Skehan's point of view, which postulate that motivation plays a significant role in learning a second language (2003, p. 610). Whereas technological tools such as interactive whiteboards, projectors, and printers might improve teachers' teaching and motivation. Another important benefit is that the use of CALL in learning enables learners to be autonomous, and autonomous learning plays an essential role in acquiring knowledge (Abrami 2006). Another belief of CALL employment which has shaped and structured my perceptions toward it is the fact that it deepens learning by using resources that learners are interested in. Also, I think that living in the digital age, the presence of technological tools will render a language school, a better environment, and might be valued by the community as an innovative school. Finally, I believe that the use of CALL helps EFL teachers to make their teaching more learner-centred.

These perceptions towards technology use align with the essential conditions of TAM. More specifically, '*perceived usefulness*' determines that users' have a positive attitude toward using technological tools because they believe, it enhances learning and teaching, and they accept and use it.

5.2 RQ2: My reactions towards EFL teachers' resistance to using CALL

At first EFL teachers seemed to be enthusiastic about the use of technology in teaching. Nevertheless, after a while, the resistance to using CALL in their teaching appeared. More specifically, some of them began to reduce their use of them in the classroom settings and then refused to use them or use them very rarely in teaching and learning. The vast majority of them were reluctant to say why they did not prefer to use them in teaching. Despite the fact that new technological tools were bought such as interactive

whiteboards and software programs like “Rosetta Stone” seemed not to alter the situation and foster EFL teachers to employ them. It became obvious that they did not believe in technology employment and as time was passing, they began to show resistance to utilizing technological tools in teaching, and therefore, the particular phenomenon created an awkward situation.

Writing my story about how I reacted towards EFL teachers’ resistance, took me back to each of the conditions that I had faced throughout the past eight years. These incidents are still vivid and often took place during our meetings, and sometimes before EFL teachers were proceeding to enter the classroom. During these years, I have felt the stress of organizing and facilitating EFL teachers’ needs and emphasizing the use of technological tools in teaching and learning. At some point, I required resting, but as you can observe throughout my story, pressure has been present, sometimes followed by panic and reluctance to proceed, in order to find effective strategies and responses to solve the problems. Therefore, responding to this situation, I started reading literature regarding technology integration. Also, EFL teachers’ resistance made me increase our weekly meetings, from once a week to two or three times.

My pedagogy was based on designing a curriculum that intertwined technological tools in teaching and learning to render the language school as one of the most up to date schools, which uses CALL in learning and technological tools in teaching to respond to learners’ needs. After revising my notes kept throughout these years, my reactions were as follows: The first reaction was that of an autocratic principal because I had designed the curriculum without considering EFL teachers’ points of view. I had not involved them in planning, decision making, and program development process based on technology. I had forced them at some point to follow the pedagogic approach by using CALL activities more often than before, without considering their views. Being aware of the situation, they did not appreciate this approach but believed, they will be familiar with the specific pedagogy in the future. Nevertheless, this type of response seemed not to function, because after using it for about two or three months, I observed a decline in CALL employment again.

The second response, observed from my notes, is that of a democratic reaction because I started to discuss with EFL teachers, the reasons for not using technological tools and CALL activities. During our conversation, I insisted and explaining the benefits of technology in learning and teaching. Looking at my notes from our conversations, and later discussing them with myself, I noticed that many

incidents arise when facing EFL teachers’ attitudes, and my reactions were sometimes unspoken, followed by internal anger regarding their resistance. From the notes that I had kept during our conversations, EFL teachers had mentioned several reasons for not using CALL activities and technological tools which are as follows:

“I have not been involved in the curriculum design, and I did not know that I am required to use technological tools in teaching, and I think EFL teachers need to be involved because they are part of the school community” (ENGTeacher1).

“I could, for example, provide all the stakeholders with some notions regarding particular technological tools and software applications for effective learning and teaching, which will enable me to use them, and as a result, I will be less reluctant to use them” (ENGTeacher2).

Also, one of them was unclear about the strategies and plans, I had made related to technology-mediated in teaching and learning during the previous years. She explained:

“I have been teaching English since 2012, and this is the first time that the principal has started to inform and discuss with me about technology use in learning and teaching, but before I had no idea at all regarding the details of the technology integration, just using them” (ENGTeacher3).

5.3 RQ3: Cultivating the culture of EFL teachers toward the use of CALL activities?

To answer the third research question, semi-structured interview questions were conducted, and the aim was to understand how to create a culture of technology integration to meet my pedagogical approach.

5.4 Guiding question one: How does your principal help you integrate CALL activities?

The guiding question manifested the theme that EFL teachers had been provided with a supportive environment to attain CALL integration by their principal. The two findings that emerged from this question were: EFL teachers were fostered to experiment with CALL by using new software programs every term and provided support for professional development. Nevertheless, comprehensive planning seemed to be rare. In addition, participants constantly mentioned the need for a teacher-to-teacher model of demonstrating the use of CALL activities in learning and teaching. More specifically, it suggests that EFL teachers re-

quired the demonstration to be presented by their colleagues which will facilitate the integration process. Moreover, four out of the five EFL teachers stated that they weren't provided with enough information about the plans and strategies, the principal had made regarding technology-mediated learning and teaching. The next guided question, which I was curious to have a better understanding of, was about the specific obstacles EFL teachers perceived as barriers to CALL integration.

5.5 Guiding question two: How have you been helped by the principal to overcome the obstacles of CALL use

Barriers to CALL integration seemed to be affected by a plethora of factors that interfere with the improvement of CALL. The main theme helping EFL teachers overcome barriers to CALL integration found the following obstacles and a brief explanation of those barriers are presented below.

For me, the implementation of CALL activities is successful, only if it is supported by teachers. Therefore, one of the barriers found was time. All EFL teachers mentioned the fact that altering their practices seemed to be a fast process because their workload was increased, and they needed to put extra effort into CALL integration. For instance, the adaptation of lesson planning and professional development required efforts besides the actual teaching hours. They stated that the principal did not provide enough time to them to adopt and follow a slow process. For instance, one of them stated:

"It seems to be so fast-changing the approach of teaching by using technology in learning and teaching because I need time to adapt the lesson plans which I have been using up until now. Therefore, much more time is required for the integration of CALL activities in teaching and learning"

Another, focal element impeding CALL activities was teachers' belief regarding the importance of CALL in learning, whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages was consistently mentioned by all participants. Even though, in their weekly meeting held by the principal technology used was the main topic discussed. Also, lack of time to observe CALL activities being used by their colleagues, to question the observation, and form an idea, before attempting to use it, and 3 out of the five participants required their principal to watch some recordings from their colleagues before they use it into their learning and teaching. The last finding found inhibiting CALL integration was fear. The obstacles of fear mentioned by teachers were as follows:

- Fear of CALL problems occurring during the lesson;
- Fear of parents' point of view;
- Fear of classroom management; and
- Fear of not covering the material.

In short, fostering the culture of technology use in teaching and learning was provided by the principal to the EFL teachers. More specifically, the data manifested that EFL teachers were fostered to experience call activities in teaching, but without a specific plan on how to do it. Therefore, it seemed to have impeded the integration process, followed by the other barriers mentioned by the EFL teachers such as not having ample time to absorb the new curriculum design and the need for support from their experienced colleagues.

6. Discussion

Based on an in-depth analysis of the findings provided a greater understanding of the phenomenon and demonstrated some insights which enabled me to try to answer the research questions and discuss the themes that emerged about TAM and previous literature.

Therefore, this section explains the significance of the findings with supporting literature and discusses several themes that emerged.

6.1 The value of technological tools in learning and teaching

This study revealed the main theme about the value of technology in learning and teaching. My positive attitude regarding technology use was based on the notion that it can be innovative, increase learners' motivation, and foster autonomous learning. In addition, the presence of technology is valued by the community, and teaching becomes more student-centred. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious that without a clear pedagogy, the employment of CALL and technological tools might not be successful. In addition, the results suggest that a positive attitude is shaped around the idea that CALL employment responds to the students' needs and deepens learning and the ultimate acquisition process. Whereas technological tools improve teachers' teaching and motivation.

The findings of this study are supported by previous studies which have found that positive attitudes toward technology are related closely to the benefits of using it as a tool in teaching (Bullock, 2004; Oda, 2011; Zhong and Shen, 2017). However, unlike previous studies, this study

adds to the previous studies that a positive attitude is also shaped due to the authentic activities that the CALL offers, and to the fact that they provide a suitable environment for autonomous learning and responding to the students' needs. These findings suggest that the positive attitude regarding technology relies upon the advantages that they provide in teaching.

These attitudes towards the use of technological tools and CALL programs align with the essential conditions of the TAM model. More specifically, with the '*perceived usefulness*' and as stated by Davis et al. (1989) the integration of technology occurs, when school administrators have a positive attitude and believe that there are several benefits. However, I could add to the point stated by Davis et al., that not only administrators' positive attitudes, but also, teachers' attitudes contribute and play a significant role in the process of integrating technology into the learning environment. The results of this study support the aforementioned statement because the contradiction and conflicts that I encountered throughout these years suggest that EFL teachers' attitudes play a focal role since the integration process was hindered by their resistance. Furthermore, findings suggest that other factors are required to be taken into consideration such as the teacher's role and pedagogy about technology use which facilitates the implementation process. Finally, the results suggest that EFL teachers find it difficult to comprehend the need to employ CALL and technological tools without taking into consideration the pedagogy of why using it.

6.2 Responding to EFL teachers' resistance towards technology use

The second research question explored my reactions toward EFL teachers' resistance to the use of CALL and technological tools. Two Significant themes emerged from this research question: the first autocratic response and the particular response created a myriad of problems. Some of the reasons might have been the absence of EFL teachers, in decision-making and planning, and as a result, had impeded the use of CALL activities and technological tools in teaching and learning. EFL teachers are being silenced from participating, and just follow the pedagogical approach proposed by the principal, which affects their beliefs, as well as technology implementation. My view holds about the exclusion of EFL teachers from the curriculum design and to ensure it slavishly created more resistance and tension between me and EFL teachers. Increasing the use of CALL activities in learning and teaching manifested that EFL teachers can use it just for a while, but as the time is passing, they stop utilizing them. Thus, this is consistent with the previous studies (Aydin, 2007; Abrami, 2006) that EFL teachers consider

technological tools and CALL activities as supplementary and not part of the curriculum design and utilize them as teaching accessories to support a predominantly teacher-driven class with minimum interaction between learners. Moreover, it aligns with Senge's (2015) perspective point of view that it is required by the principals to communicate the advantages of technology use in learning and teaching, and as a result, minimize the barriers. Therefore, this study revealed a call to involve EFL teachers during the curriculum design and discuss the importance of technology in learning and teaching based on a new pedagogy that is built around technology and CALL use. In addition, the results to some extent aligned with the statement proposed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) that the principals' role is to create effective strategies and visions but adds to the particular statement that in order to achieve these strategies and visions and avoid conflicts, EFL teachers must be included, as well as learners for successful integration and all these align with the external constructs of the TAM model.

The second emerging theme was that of a democratic perspective point of view. The involvement of teachers in the discussion process aided me because I attained a greater understanding of the EFL teachers' resistance. During our conversations, EFL teachers mentioned the fact that they had no idea about the curriculum design, and this unawareness seemed to have impeded technology integration and created several conflicts between me and EFL teachers. In addition, EFL teachers mentioned the fact that they could provide the principal with different software programs which suit better students' and their needs. According to EFL teachers, this would enable teachers to use technology in learning and teaching. Therefore, this suggests that being aware of the curriculum design, and using EFL teachers' choice regarding applications, can reduce resistance. Research suggests that EFL teachers' involvement is quintessential, as it aids them to construct leadership capacities (Serafidou & Chatziioannidis 2013, p. 171).

6.3 Technological barriers

The semi-structured interview emerged two main themes: the first and second-order barriers. First-order barriers continued to persist. Although EFL teachers were provided with various technological tools, first-order barriers were present, and are as follows: time was needed for EFL teachers to observe their colleagues teaching learners utilizing CALL activities, and the fast rate of changing technological tools. These barriers are the influences outside of EFL teachers' control, which hinder technology use, and this includes support, training, and resources. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that I have contributed to

the barriers EFL teachers face. Thus, as the principal of the particular language school, I need to identify these barriers and seek ways to solve them. The data is not consistent with previous studies (O'Dwyer et al., 2005; Venezky, 2014) which found that principals who contained the appropriate knowledge and pedagogy were successful since the results manifested that the absence of pedagogy created conflicts between me and EFL teachers.

Second-order barriers. EFL teachers were keen on the slow implementation of technology in their learning and teaching. This self-study revealed the obstacle of fear. Fear of classroom changing, evaluation process, and being afraid of making mistakes in front of learners. Second-order obstacles are attitudes that keep an educator from utilizing technology. More specifically, these obstacles involve EFL teachers' beliefs regarding the way learners learn and acquire knowledge and the role of these tools in learning and teaching. Related to the TAM and the "perceived ease of use" this fear results from a lack of knowledge. Previous research states that fear can be reduced through professional development (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2015; Wachira & Keengwe, 2016). Nevertheless, this study provided evidence that EFL teachers were provided with ample professional development. The Literature might be true; however, I believe that despite training, teachers need to possess the courage to use and attempt new technological tools, and the particular view is consistent with Bauer and Kenton's (2005) study which found that despite the fact that teachers were well equipped with the technological knowledge, they did not use technology in their teaching. Therefore, it suggests that other factors might contribute to the resistance to technology use, and the findings of this study suggest the need to pay attention to teachers' attitudes regarding technology use and pedagogy before using CALL and technological tools in learning and teaching. In addition, the results suggest that principals need to discuss the benefits of technology in learning rather than forcing EFL teachers to use them. Regarding the 'perceived ease of use' and its anchors added, the results of the study might explain the resistance of CALL and technology use, but the next generations will be obsolete and unable to explain educators' resistance since they will be well equipped with technological skills.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to take a deep look at me as the principal of a language school, that is attempting to integrate technology. By exploring the unique challenges of being in this position, as the researcher and the subject at the same time. I employed autoethnography to build the

foundation of this qualitative study. Reed- Danahay (1997) asserts that through a self-story, autoethnography provides the opportunity to connect personal experiences to the culture. By telling the story, I wanted to contribute and inspire other language school principals to consider my findings, when dealing with EFL teachers' resistance toward CALL and technological tools in their educational institutions.

Some of the findings from this self-study to some extent answered my research questions. They revealed how I perceive the use of technology. Furthermore, how I perceived my reactions to deal with EFL teachers' resistance by describing my emotional reactions, aid me to have a greater understanding of the problems experienced which I undergo between my administrative role and technology rejection. At the same time, the outcomes of this research paper might provide useful insights for technology implementation.

This study deepened my knowledge regarding the benefit of using pedagogical theory for technology integration. At the beginning of this study, I didn't name CALL resources as constructivist or any other theory. However, reading the literature provided me with the opportunity to create a greater understanding. I strongly believe that introducing these theoretical perspectives to teachers would help them to recognize the advantages of using technology in learning and teaching.

The potential contribution to scholarship and practice should be carefully considered when generalizing its findings. The key limitation of this study is that the findings of this paper to scholarship and practice should be carefully considered. More specifically, as an autoethnography, it is relied on a single dataset and provides the experience of one personal narrative, by presenting my memory, reflections, and experiences. Moreover, this study is situated in the context of a language school principal, being a principal of a language school which involves particular needs and challenges in a developing language school, and therefore, its results should be interpreted with this context in mind which suggests the need to be cautious about generalizing the results.

Future studies could investigate principals as a group to better identify their attitudes, approaches, and management strategies, as well as obstacles they encounter in order to create a holistic picture of how to solve them during the integration process. Gaining a better understanding of the language school principals' use of technology might help practitioners and administrators develop effective strategies for integrating technological tools into the educational system. Furthermore, it might also aid principals themselves

to make better decisions about their approaches to the use of technological tools in teaching and learning.

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About the author



Kristo Ceko is interested in the principals' attitudes towards technology integration in teaching and learning and their role in the integration process. Moreover, exploring the factors which inhibit the implementation process and affect teachers' attitudes and motivation towards the use of technological tools in learning and teaching? And whether their attitudes and motivation to use technological tools and multimedia applications change over a period of time.

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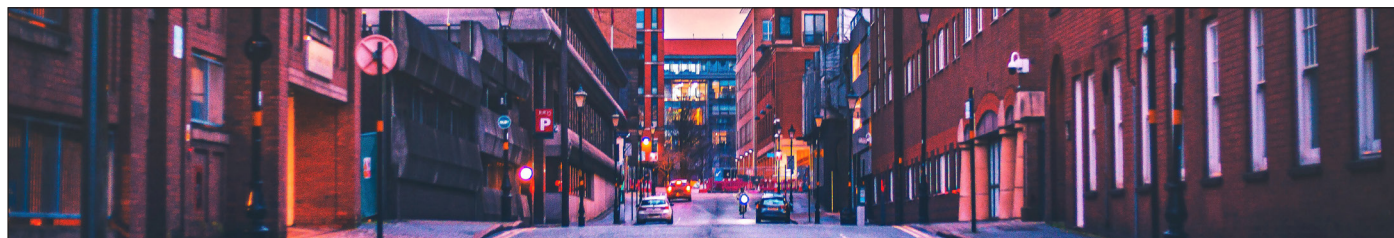
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An invisible fork in the road: The autoethnography of a female social scientist

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Abstract

Research has shown that girls' confidence and ability perception are critical to their beliefs, attitudes, and interests concerning the pursuit of mathematics and science. In historically male-dominated fields, females often have a tenuous relationship with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines. This autoethnographic study explores one girl's trajectory away from a keen interest in mathematics and science in favour of social sciences. Four central themes were identified as critical to females' interest, pursuit, and advancement into STEM careers, including gender-based socialisation; confidence, ability, and achievement; classroom environment and school curriculum; and family 'curriculum making'. The findings that impacted the divergence from STEM are revealed through interviews with the author's parents and expressed through a reflexive narrative. The findings in this paper suggest several actions that families and schools might take to support the STEM aspirations of young female students.

"We can't separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience." (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 573)

1. Introduction and background

As a young girl, two of my favourite books were ‘How the Universe Works’ and ‘Our Solar System’. I hoped they would show me how to get to space, and I desperately wished for a telescope for Christmas to chart my path (I got a microscope). I relish the time spent in my grandparents’ basement with my brother, heads down with the vintage Erector set, and less fondly, fighting over Legos. I performed well in all of my courses in high school (secondary education equivalent), including mathematics and sciences. There was no apparent rationale for my move away from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines towards social sciences. The signs pointed to a kid destined to become a scientist or engineer as a way to get to space. Nevertheless, here I sit today, a self-affirmed *social* scientist.

1.1 Legal background and “the leaky pipeline”

I grew up before STEM as we know it today. I completed my first twelve years of school amidst times of significant reckoning and governmental legislation intended to advance exposure of girls and women to STEM disciplines, but before I fully understood the implications of Title IX. *Note: In the United States, Title IX is a law that seeks to ensure and enforce gender equality and reduce discrimination in federally funded educational programs.* I will use ‘STEM’ to refer to the combined disciplines I explore in my personal experiences for this study.

Until the mid-1970s, female university students were traditionally steered towards and selected majors in teaching, history, or other social sciences. In 1972, the United States government enacted Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, paving the way for higher admission of women into educational programs within the STEM fields. In 1980, the Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Technology was created to advise on advancing women in STEM disciplines. Statistics show a significant increase in female scientists between 1970 and 2000 and a steep increase in baccalaureate degrees awarded to female graduates between 1980 and 1987. After this point, the number of females in the computer sciences declined through the mid-1990s, and today, females continue to be underrepresented in science and engineering (Alper & Gibbons, 1993; Aspray, 2016).

This ‘leaky pipeline’ of women into STEM disciplines does not begin at the university level. The slow migration of girls and young women away from the ‘masculine domains’ has been identified as early as before school entry, continues and escalates through middle school, and climaxes by the end of

students’ sophomore year of high school, where there is a firm male advantage in physical science achievement as well as a distinct male advantage in life sciences and mathematics ability (Burkam, Lee, & Smerdon, 1997; VanLeuvan, 2004; Zhou, Fan, Wei, & Tai, 2017).

In a culture with historically ingrained beliefs about gender roles, unbeknownst to me, I was caught in this socio-cultural maelstrom. Unconsciously encoded to believe that ‘girls don’t do math’ and ‘girls are better at reading and writing’, my die was cast as a social science practitioner – a reader, a writer, an educator, and a ‘relator’. I’m not resentful, unhappy, or disillusioned about life. I’m not jealous of my brothers’ careers in engineering and technology or disappointed with my parents for not pushing my interest in space. However, I feel that I missed my calling to the physical sciences to some degree.

To unpack my experience requires me to reflect on internal and external influences that guided my educational path and future trajectory. As such, this research is undertaken as autoethnography, a form of autobiographical narrative inquiry which guides one towards making meaning of life experiences. As a research method, autoethnography allows researchers to use personal experience to reflexively analyse experiences in the context of social and cultural schemas, with the goal to make life better (Adams, Holman, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). This account includes my own and my parents’ perspectives, interweaving attitudes and observations with external dynamics, and allowing me to juxtapose my experience with cultural schemas during a specific period in my life. Therefore, in the present study, I address the question: *What factors or influences might have deterred my pursuit of STEM disciplines in favour of my social science trajectory?*

I hope to locate the invisible fork in the road.

Employing a feminist approach to my metaphorical search, I will first review internal and external factors identified within the literature that influence girls’ academic and subsequent career trajectories. I then explain the methodological rationale for autoethnography and then present my road travelled through a series of reflective vignettes. Finally, through self-discussion, I attend to tie the loose ends of my journey before concluding.

1.2 Need for the study

While significant extant research addresses female pathways into STEM at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels (Alhaddab & Alnatheer, 2015; Ellis, Fosdick, & Rasmussen, 2016; Craig, Verma, Stokes, Evans, &

Abrol, 2018; Seymour, 1995), as well as career entry (Alper, J.; Gibbons, 1993; De Vita & Giancola, 2017; Smeding, 2012), Seymour (1995), noted a lingering need to learn more about the pre-college experiences of young women who chose not to pursue STEM fields, particularly the origins of preferences, skills, and competencies at this level. Further, there is a need to examine what drives women from careers in science in favour of ‘fields involving people rather than abstractions’ (Alper, J.; Gibbons, 1993). Pringle, Brkich, Adams, West-Olatunii, & Archer-Banks (2012, p. 218) asserted that ‘the relationship between adult expectations and the girls’ self-perception as science and mathematics learners’ is an area yet to be vigorously explored. I intend to lend my authentic voice and personal experience to address these opportunities within the leaky pipeline narrative. Reflection is central to the feminist project, which I now turn to as a theoretical guide for my inquiry.

2. Theoretical frameworks

2.1 Feminist inquiry

Theory presents us with organising frameworks that help us understand and interpret systems, policies, and processes which support or suppress the individual. Feminist theory is a way for women to speak to, respond to, and act according to one’s own beliefs vis-à-vis her lived experiences. It is generally accepted that feminist ideology is concerned with eliminating inequality and injustice in women’s lives (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). As such, feminism is also a welcoming ethos; it ‘includes all women in its embrace, and it celebrates the achievements and struggles of women’ (Shaw & Lee, 2004, p. 448). The nature of feminist inquiry allows for and welcomes the melding of multiple vantage points, which become the foundations of research and practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Feminist theory holds a rich yet complicated history; this should be no surprise as women’s issues are weighty and complex. In the United States, the nascence of the feminist movement was anchored by first-wave feminism, which focused on human rights and gender equality (Ruth, 2001), including women’s suffrage. The paradigmatic roots of first-wave feminism rested on the belief that gender was socially constructed, with either overt or unconscious beliefs about the behavioural expectations of men and women (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014).

Second-wave feminism began in the 1960s and argued that society built on patriarchal foundations sought to

advance the status of men and masculinity while diminishing women (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014).

Subsequent feminist movements have ensued, including third-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s and fourth-wave feminism in the 2010s. It is within second-wave feminism that my youthful experiences were largely situated and serve as the historical context to recount my experiences, more specifically through the feminist standpoint.

2.2 The feminist standpoint

A standpoint goes beyond the simple notion of having a stance on a matter; it is interested in ‘the sense of being engaged’ (Hartsock, 1983, p. 285). Inherent in a standpoint position are the personal realities and societal perspectives, often well-intended, hidden from outward view, yet deeply impacted by human relationships and environmental dynamics (Hekman, 1997). Thus, the feminist standpoint seeks to ‘express [the] female experience at a particular time and place, located within a particular set of social relations’ (Hartsock, 1983, p. 303). The feminist standpoint emboldens exploring womens’ experiences to ‘go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations’ (Hartsock, 1983, p. 304).

Indeed, the feminist standpoint is a theory of engagement as well as scholarship. It recognises ‘common thread’ within female experiences but also acknowledges that these threads are ‘neither self-evident nor obvious’ (Hartsock, 1983, p. 303). In the spirit of the feminist standpoint, the truth of the human experience vis-à-vis knowledge construction should be approached with methodological rigour. I hope to attend to this agency in this research, beginning with a review of the literature.

3. Literature review

My reflection required me first to understand some of the factors that influence girls’ and young womens’ entry into STEM disciplines. Therefore, I conducted a literature review using databases and search engines, including Academic Search Ultimate/EBSCOhost, Scopus, and Google Scholar. A review of extant literature served multiple purposes. First, it acted as a source of contextualising data, allowing me to situate my personal experience with public history. The literature review also served as a point of validation of my recollections as social science research, juxtaposing personal subjectivity with external objectivity (Chang, 2008) and attending to Hartsock’s call for robustness in feminist research.

3.1 The autoethnography literature review

As a feminist researcher, I concur with Kathryn Blee that ‘we are more honest as scholars when we acknowledge the myriad ways in which our personal lives and emotions are intertwined with who, what, and how we study’ (Adams et al., 2015, p. 11). I believe that our stories can only enrich our scholarship and engage our audiences. Therefore, this study was undertaken as an autoethnography, a research methodology that allows the author to ‘[illuminate] multiple layers of consciousness and understanding, explicitly linking the personal to the cultural’ (Campbell, 2015, p. 235).

A goal of the autoethnography literature review is to ‘begin to situate ourselves in story – our own story, the story told in existing writing and research on our topic or experience, and the stories told by others’ (Adams et al., 2015, p. 49). As a complement to the feminist standpoint, autoethnographic literature reviews recognise that knowledge construction is uniquely a social exercise and inherently based on the vantage point of the researcher. That ‘some [knowledge attempts] are better than others as starting points for knowledge’ (Campbell, 2015, p. 235) should not prohibit the exploration and extension of knowledge, even if such attempts may be contested (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

With these caveats declared, I now turn to the literature to investigate influences on the entry of girls and young women, myself included, into STEM disciplines.

3.2 Factors influencing girls’ entrée into STEM disciplines

3.2.1 Gender-based socialisation

Values, self-perception, and identity are well-documented touchpoints that steer men and women in different directions academically (Alper, 1993; Corbett & Hill, 2015; Leaper, Farkas, & Brown, 2012; Shapiro, Grossman, Carter, Martin, Deyton, & Hammer, 2015). Shapiro et al. (2015) found that both sexes anticipated gendered differences in their futures, but boys more likely than girls believed that there were some jobs that boys were better at and that boys had more career opportunities.

Influential adults portrayal of gendered roles plays a crucial role in students’ interests but may also create gender-differentiated values and self-perceptions (Gilbert, 1996; Leaper, Farkas, & Brown, 2012; Smyth & Nosek, 2015). There is no shortage of evidence within existing literature to

demonstrate this phenomenon; for example, mathematics and sciences as ‘masculine’ and the social sciences as ‘feminine’ (Gilbert, 1996; Seymour, 1995); the social stigma of being a girl in a boy’s field (Leaper et al., 2012; Seymour, 1995); inability to give themselves ‘permission’ to choose STEM majors (Seymour, 1995); encouragement to pursue ‘softer’ sciences (Lee & Burkam, 1996; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998); and curriculum content skewed in favour of males (Weber & Custer, 2005).

Growing up, I distinctly remember hearing the refrains ‘girls don’t do science’ and ‘girls are better at reading and writing’. These messages have stuck with me throughout my life, yet what I know better as a researcher than I did as a young woman is that perceived gender differences may indeed be a factor of childhood relationships, experiences and perceptions about identity, ability, and values (Lee & Burkam, 1996). When introduced early, I believe that these types of longstanding social mores become embedded and are difficult to unlearn. This refrain anchors my suppositions for my entrée into the social sciences – by nature of my sex, it was my destiny.

3.2.2 Confidence, ability, and achievement

Confidence is a primary influencing factor of female interest and pursuit of traditionally male disciplines. Despite efforts to improve the inclusion of women in STEM, research shows that a key rationale for the lack of and decline of women in science is loss of confidence (Adams et al., 2015; Alper, 1993; Corbett & Hill, 2015; J. Ellis et al., 2016; Seymour, 1995; Zhao, Carini, & Kuh, 2005).

Beginning in early adolescence, girls begin to question and lose ground on perceptions of their abilities in science and mathematics, and this period has been shown to be the beginning of a STEM or non-STEM trajectory (Gilbert, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 1996). As the perception of ability begins to erode, regardless of demonstrated achievement, self-efficacy and confidence in these subjects diminish. The perception increases with age and impacts the likelihood of continuing in STEM disciplines (Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998; Schuster & Martiny, 2017).

While the literature posits the criticality of girls’ confidence, I am sceptical and uncertain of the role of confidence in my journey as a contributing factor to my achievement. It is not a word I would have used to describe my youthful self. To achieve, I believe one must possess some degree of confidence. I hope to elucidate my relationship with confidence through this reflection.

3.2.3 Classroom environment and school curriculum

A study of academically talented high school girls conducted by Patterson and Johnson (2017) points to confidence as a significant indicator of girls' enrolment in Advanced Placement (AP) Biology and Chemistry courses. Girls' confidence level is critical to perceptions of their abilities and, consequently, their active participation in the classroom (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998). When girls actively participate in hands-on labs, experiential, and inquiry learning, these experiences have the effect of enhancing their ability perception (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998; Schuster & Martiny, 2017).

And yet, girls who do extend their interest in STEM disciplines often ultimately pursue 'softer' subcategories, for example, biological sciences over physical sciences (Burkam et al., 1997; Patterson & Johnson, 2017; VanLeuvan, 2004; Weber & Custer, 2005). The same Patterson & Johnson (2017) study reported unexplained yet higher levels of anxiety and hesitation concerning Physics, indicating implied gender beliefs and the resulting avoidance of this domain.

While the literature indicates that curricular activities may thwart confidence, and hence, participation by girls, I take the issue of the school curriculum more literally. As will be explored in the coming sections, there were many opportunities for me to participate actively in a variety of advanced mathematics and science courses. I also believe the infrastructure of the curriculum did not permit someone with my depth of interest the time to immerse in the curriculum in a practical way.

3.2.4 Family 'curriculum-making'

Family has been described as children's 'first culture' and influences experience and future narratives (Craig et al., 2018; Hanushek, 2016). What children hear, observe, and see sends subtle and overt messages about the acceptance or appropriateness of exploring and developing 'STEM identities' (Craig et al., 2018).

Strong associations are created if the relationship between family and STEM subjects is positive, exploratory, and encouraging. It is likely that when similar attitudes are established in conjunction with positive relationships with STEM disciplines, the seed for entry to STEM is more powerful (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Craig et al., 2018). According to Dewey, experience 'cumulatively shapes how students live science, how they learn science, and ultimately, whether science becomes a part of who they are' (Craig et al., 2018, p. 626).

It is not a far stretch for me to apply Dewey's insight to my experience with the social sciences. I was raised in a family embedded in the social sciences, including education, theology, and law. As such, I cannot deny the presence of the social sciences in my family experience and how it shaped who I am today.

4. The study

This research aimed to investigate different variables in the experiences of a conflicted female student and how various experiences influenced the educational and subsequent career path in social sciences. What caused me to take the social science fork in the road? I have not been brave enough to dive deeply into this question ... until now.

4.1 Methodology

The value of autoethnography lies in that it enables 'the perspective of the self in context and culture, exploring experience as a means of insight about social life, and recognising and embracing the risks of presenting vulnerable selves in research' (Adams et al., 2015, p. 103). Many scholars critique autoethnography, suggesting its position is questionable within academic research because of its individualistic nature and a perceived misalignment with traditional methods for assessing qualitative inquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography is an appropriate methodology for my research because while significant existing research addresses female pathways into STEM at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels, as well as career entry, there remains an opportunity to learn more about the pre-college experiences of young women who choose not to pursue STEM fields (Seymour, 1995). Specific to this research, autoethnography allowed me to examine my experiences within the context of internal beliefs and external factors that influence pre-college women's trajectories (see Appendix A).

4.2 Research bias

The focus of this research was my personal experience and perceptions, a reflection of my early academic life, upbringing, and career path. Therefore, I am necessarily linked to the research, including inherent bias associated with my observations and analysis. As noted above, a frequent critique of feminist qualitative research is research bias (Holt, 2003). I must consider certain limitations of undertaking a study using an autoethnographic methodology.

First, readers may find my parents' objective bias a limitation of this study; it is natural for parents to view their children through rose-coloured glasses. During semi-structured interviews, I assumed a professional yet comfortable demeanour and allowed responses to unfold organically, cautious not to lead, as discussion meandered between personal and cultural contexts.

A second possible limitation of this research is that 'memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past' (Chang, 2008, p. 72). Certain aspects of reflection may be misremembered, minimised, fragmented, or idealised more or less than the actual events. Chang (2008) suggests the use of external documentation to augment autoethnographic data, noting that it may serve to 'validate or correct your personal data from the past as well as self-observational and self-reflective data from the present, help triangulation with other data sources, fill in gaps left by self-based data, and connect your private story with the outer world' (p. 112). Therefore, to help inform the contextual period of this research, I referenced my academic transcripts and personal archives.

Despite the challenges of autoethnography, one of its key advantages is that 'it offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people' (Adams et al., 2015, p. 21). To increase analytic objectivity, I followed the themes from the literature review, which I believe influenced my trajectory either overtly or subconsciously.

4.3 Data collection and analysis

In advance of data collection, informed consent was received from the study participants (my parents), and ethical approval was received according to my doctoral programme protocol. Because autoethnography is a personal story, my goal as the interviewer was to create comfort so that my parents might speak authentically and evoke memories they felt relevant to the topic. The focus of the conversations was to discover the influences that had a bearing on my academic interests, development, and achievement, which led me to pursue social sciences. A guiding interview protocol was developed based on themes emerging from the literature to facilitate objectivity and mitigate possible bias; this was shared with my parents in advance to allow them time to prepare.

According to Bernard (2006, p. 7), data analysis 'is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place'. Two hours

of interviews were conducted via video conferencing, recorded, and downloaded. Following data transcription and formatting, I completed three rounds of review to narrow the focus. In round one, I identified overarching descriptive themes, and in round two, I combined overlapping themes in alignment with the literature. Finally, in round three, I narrowed the focus to data that would provide clarity, synthesising my findings into the following vignettes, which reflect the attitudes and experiences which I posit as seminal foundations of my social science trajectory.

5. How did I get here?

Beginning this research, I could not initially pinpoint a specific point when I ventured one way down the social science path. Shapiro et al. (2015) point to social role theory and social cognitive career theory to help explain the experiential journey from interest to engagement to the pursuit of a given subject. During this journey, 'feelings of self-efficacy and expectations fuel her career interests, which, if supported, lead to career goals, and ideally, to action that moves her towards achieving her goals' (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 4). In other words, interest, confidence, and achievement grow out of experience, exposure, familiarity, and encouragement. Therefore, I turn to a deeper examination of both internal factors (behaviours, aptitudes, and abilities) and external factors (classroom and familial), which influenced my path into social sciences.

5.1 Renaissance girl

'[You were] very inquisitive, a seeker of knowledge. You were a very well-rounded student as well as someone who was interested in not just, as you say, the social sciences but also math.' - Mom

One of the epiphanies I had early on was the notion of the 'Renaissance Man'. With historical archetypes like Michelangelo, Leonardo DaVinci, and Thomas Jefferson, the idea of a person knowledgeable and gifted in a variety of disciplines was supremely appealing to me. Considering this list now, I cringe at the missing 'Renaissance Woman' on my list of inspirational figures. Lack of historical female exemplars aside, I wanted to follow the example of those brilliant polymaths, at least in my world. I see this in the variety of my academic transcripts: Symphonic Band; Orchestra; French; Chemistry; and World History. I see it in extra-curricular activities like Debate, Junior Achievement and as a volunteer with the Red Cross. Despite any talent I might have inherited from my art teacher mother (I did not), I briefly attempted to incorporate an art class into my

course schedule. I took business Calculus outside of school hours at the community university because it conflicted with Band, and I wanted to do both (more on that later). I even remember coming home and studying a Latin dictionary ‘for fun’. I desperately wanted to be a ‘well-rounded student’, the prerequisite for acceptance to a top university according to my parents and teachers, and an attribute that was a natural complement to my insatiable curiosity about ... everything.

‘You had an innate ability to seek out things, to be inquisitive. You have to be good at that in order to see connections from different cultures and different societies and different people to something else. You were good at that. The effort comes into, I think, how you were allowed to pursue that. What is effort? Some kind of energy you put into something, right?’ -Mom’

When I consider my parents’ descriptions of my efforts and abilities, which here might be more accurately described as ‘effortless’, it seems that I am reflecting on someone else. Contrary to my Mom’s description, I believed that I needed to put in effort first to translate my interest in STEM into some quantitative indicator of my ability; curiosity plus effort equals ability. Through effort, I would disprove those nameless, faceless naysayers who claimed, ‘girls don’t do science and math’. My Mom describes the synthesis of curiosity, effort, and ability best:

‘I think it was more your abilities. You had a great ability for it [mathematics and sciences] because we only had to maybe explain it to you one time, and then you picked up on it. Then I can remember you always would take it and go to the next level, which shows effort on your part. You did not need a lot of push to get to the next part. That’s what I would call the inquisitive part of it. It was more of a very strong innate ability to grasp subject matter concepts and then figure out how to take it to the next level, which is effort. You really didn’t have to use much effort to do it because it came naturally’. -Mom

While ability and effort seemed a natural complement to my inquisitiveness, I question my Mom’s connection of inquisitiveness and effort. At face value, yes, it does take effort to attend to multiple pursuits. But what was I trying to achieve by taking on all of these disciplines, and what does this have to do with the present exploration?

The issues here point me to attribution and motivation. Research has shown a consistent pattern regarding ‘motivational and attributional’ perceptions of ability versus effort, and girls especially have a strained relationship with STEM disciplines (Gilbert, 1996). Girls tend to attribute their

success in STEM subjects to effort over ability, whereas boys tend to attribute success to ability over effort (Gilbert, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 1996).

My Mom’s insight, which I give expert credibility as a lifelong educator, attributes my success first to ability and then effort. To me, the opposite was true. I needed to apply more effort as an indicator of my ability, and by extension, my achievement. These phenomena imply that girls’ low STEM motivation is a factor of self-efficacy and a direct predictor of intentions to pursue particular disciplines (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Gilbert, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 1996; Schuster & Martiny, 2017).

With this contradiction between perspectives, I could not yet name effort or ability as the causal factor leading me away from STEM. The reader will realise in the forthcoming sections that despite my efforts to demonstrate abilities in STEM, the effort was likely an exercise in futility from the start.

5.2 The competition

I distinctly remember the competition. Every Friday, Ms Honor posted rankings of her AP Algebra II/Trigonometry students based on cumulative marks, sorted from high to low. Lee and I would rush to see which of us would appear at the top of the list. Every week, back and forth for months, we vied for that coveted top spot. Although there was no actual reward, I wanted the intangible satisfaction of seeing my student number (regularly) above his.

Now that I had established my motivation – to prove my ability as an indicator of belonging in STEM – how did I plan to prove I belonged with the boys who were naturally inclined to excel in mathematics and science? I would compete.

‘I think one could say that you had a built-in confidence. I think a portion of it was our own expectations. I think you just internally knew what you needed to do and by the same token, you’re competitive. You’re a competitor. I trace that back to – all the way back to elementary school. It’s a kind of self-motivation. It’s wanting to present oneself well. That definition speaks of self-confidence and a kind of inner motivation’. -Dad

Here again, I arrive at attribution. I don’t believe I was confident first, and I certainly did not associate confidence with competitiveness. In fact, I think it was the other way around. My demonstrated motivation and confidence as

early as elementary school recalls the notion of ‘identity imprinting’, a phenomenon that occurs even before a child enters school and influences the experiential journey into science and math, and later on, STEM career trajectories (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Craig et al., 2018). My Dad’s characterisation of my identity imprint surprises me. For me, it was not that I was confident in my ability; it was winning the competition that bolstered confidence in my mathematics abilities. The competition provided assurance and validation that I could ‘do math’.

Despite my motivation and triumph in this particular competition and the resultant increased confidence in my mathematical abilities, Archard (2012) notes that competitiveness can be a risk factor when associated with competence and success. It would stand to reason that instances of failure or underachievement can be a blow to the ‘confident’ student when confidence is linked to competence and success, as suggested. A study of gifted girls conducted by Perleth & Heller (1994) revealed a fear of failure instead of a sense of confidence that most impacted educational success. Ouch! That sounds familiar.

Indeed, the drive behind the competitiveness my Dad described was not confidence so much as a manifestation of the fear of failure. I had to continue to prove my ability; competition plus success equals belonging. As it turns out, the competition was not so much with Lee, but with myself. Although my confidence in these subjects was growing, it was still nascent and fragile; one point deduction, one disparaging comment, or one loss to Lee might have upended all my progress.

Unfortunately, research has shown that in early adolescence, girls begin to question and lose ground on perceptions of their abilities in science and math, and this period has been shown to be the beginning of a STEM or non-STEM trajectory (Gilbert, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 1996). The confidence that seemed evident to my Dad and appeared to manifest in my success in mathematics was just not enough to sustain me through to an extended foray into STEM disciplines. In that competition, yes, I conquered the Trigonometry and the boy who naturally excelled, but he was supposed to – I was the outlier.

Thus, I began to question the origins of my ability. Maybe Lee wasn’t as smart as he seemed. Maybe Ms Honor wasn’t the best teacher. Maybe the curriculum wasn’t that challenging. Maybe hearing the joke about my state’s school system ‘North Carolina – first in flight, 48th in education’ (out of fifty states) created a logic model in my mind: If all of the factors around me were mediocre, then were my abilities

overstated? When I reflect more closely on the origins of my effort, confidence, motivation, and ability, I can almost touch the cracks that began to emerge. In case internal questioning was not enough, two external factors sealed my fate, and the road began to fork even more precipitously.

5.3 You have to choose

‘You have to choose’. This is what my guidance counsellor conveyed as we sat together to determine my senior year schedule. I had enjoyed playing the oboe for the last four years and was now the only one in my school, a responsibility I took seriously and with pride. Unfortunately, seventh period Symphonic Band conflicted with AP Physics. French, which I had started in grade three and had become part of my being, convened the same period as AP Calculus. ‘You have to choose’.

I will leave it to the reader to surmise the outcome of this conversation. I was devastated then, and my eyes well now reflecting on this seminal moment. *What could have been?* As evidenced by the interaction with my counsellor, the logistics of the school curriculum were indeed a limiting factor in my ability to engage the options available – scheduling conflicts. In a randomised controlled trial focused on alleviating stereotype threat in three US high schools, Bancroft, Bratter, & Rowley (2017) found that student curriculum significantly contributes to achievement, especially for minority and female students. As a teacher in the same school system I attended, my Mom had insight into how curricula were administered.

‘You [had] to teach students so much of this subject, that subject, and the other subject. You [had] a certain amount of math you [had] to teach, a certain amount of science you [had] to teach, and a certain amount of the non-math/science courses you [had] to teach. The curriculum was the problem’. -Mom

It is now easy to see how what my Mom calls ‘curriculum equilibrium’ hampered access to the breadth of courses I might have taken. An unfortunate by-product of scheduling logistics meant that I could not explore a broader range of subjects – I had to choose. The culminating effect is that I could not apply any of the internal factors that seemed to have propelled me. I could not use my inquisitiveness to extend my knowledge, nor could I compete with my classmates to build my confidence. Although I might dig deeper into the complex interplay of ‘curriculum equilibrium’ and achievement, I won’t overcomplicate the reason for my derailment: lousy timing.

5.4 Please, pass the scalpel

'Boys were given more. They were allowed to take charge more ... and the girls were like assistant secretaries or something like that because girls were going to be secretaries or teachers or nurses or something like that. Boys were seen as stronger in certain areas in terms of taking charge and giving directions...' -Mom

My Mom had a clear vantage point to the unbalanced leadership within classroom experiences between boys and girls, speaking as both a parent and a teacher within 'the system'. She likely saw first-hand that girls' experiences tend to be 'more passive, less demanding, and less experiential', thus thwarting opportunities to gain confidence in science and mathematics (Burkam et al., 1997; Seymour, 1995, p. 438). Conversely, boys have more active exposure, leading hands-on lab and equipment activities, while girls are more likely to serve in 'assistant' roles (Burkam et al., 1997; Seymour, 1995; Dreves & Javanovic, 1998). I am sure my Mom would not have been pleased to know my role of 'medical assistant' as Andrew, my lab partner, dissected a foetal pig over the course of a week in AP Biology II; I don't think I touched it once. This situation most certainly would have warranted a visit to my teacher and school administrators to provide 'guidance' on how I should be challenged appropriately.

The impact of girls' assuming passive roles in the classroom cannot be understated, and my role in the lab is an example of the long-term impacts on girls' self-actualisation. Girls' confidence level is critical to perceptions of their abilities and, consequently, their active participation in the classroom (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998). When girls are engaged in classroom activities, including hands-on labs, experiential, and inquiry learning, these experiences enhance their ability perception (Corbett & Hill, 2015; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998; Schuster & Martiny, 2017). When girls are able to participate actively and also assume leadership roles in science classrooms, including having control of equipment, practising active experimentation, and compiling lab reports, confidence is bolstered, and perceptions of science as a male-only domain diminish (Burkam et al., 1997; Dreves & Jovanovic, 1998).

When I think back on my opportunities for leadership roles, what comes to mind is performing melancholic solos from Wagner's concertos or leading group discussions on select works from the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Although enriching, I admit that neither of these 'leadership opportunities' likely lent themselves to a future in STEM. While dissecting a foetal pig may not have been enough of a cognitive or confidence leap to push me to Physics, it was

nonetheless a missed opportunity to challenge not only my skill in science but to extend a leadership opportunity that might have propelled my confidence as a future physical scientist. Perhaps I should have taken up that scalpel.

5.5 The McDowell family curriculum

My parents were the most intelligent people I knew, and their collective intelligence enamoured me. My Mom taught multiple subjects (making her a polymath in her own right), and my Dad was the most eloquent orator speaking from the pulpit every Sunday. Their words carried weight with me and still do. It is not lost on me that I still seek to emulate aspects of them both as an instructional designer and practising Toastmaster.

Two significant influences come to mind when I think of my 'first culture' (Craig et al., 2018; Hanushek, 2016) and family curriculum (Craig et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2015). First, as people of colour, my parents' beliefs about being educated and school achievement were paramount; education was the centre of our family orientation. More specifically, a *university* education was at the centre of our family orientation. As such, I was raised with an unspoken urgency and exigence impressed upon me that education was the way to avoid future obstacles. Their parental ethos identified education as a deeply ingrained ideal, imperative for advancement, and rightfully so. As recently as 2013, a National Center for Educational Statistics study showed, regrettably, that when compared to the Coleman Report of 1965, the black-white achievement gap had not significantly diminished (Hanushek, 2016). My parents were tenacious in their efforts to prevent my brothers and me from falling into this achievement gap:

'Because we are persons of colour and because both your mother and I recognise the nature of the prohibitions placed upon persons of colour. It was just absolutely important for us given that the culture in which we live. It was just understood that the way up was through education; there was no other way. That's just it. Because, again within this community of colour of which we are a part, we understood what the disadvantages would be if that [college] were not the case'. -Dad

While our racial background may not have resonated in this way in my younger mind, a university education was essential to overcome the racial inequity my parents saw and experienced. I see now that only the end game mattered; English or Physics did not matter; Band or French did not matter; Biology or Trigonometry did not matter:

‘High school (secondary school) was only a hurdle to overcome when it was understood or should have been understood that as a member family, we’re looking beyond high school’. -Dad

John Dewey has long informed our thinking by providing schemas that help us contextualise the importance of experiences; this contextualising continuum informs how we absorb and process experiences (Craig et al., 2018). Part of my contextualising continuum includes my parents’ experience as people of colour seeking the best possible outcomes for their children. According to our family curriculum, what I focused on was not important as long as I continued to track towards completing university. Through my parents’ eyes, the best possible outcome was achieved through education.

While my parents’ fight against the achievement gap was undoubtedly an undercurrent in our family, through the eyes of my younger self, there is a more obvious part of the equation. My immediate ecosystem was not comprised of mathematicians or scientists. The scientists I knew were doctors examining my eyes or giving me vaccines; or a lone female Chemistry teacher, sadly a concept I remember finding odd yet intriguing; ‘She knows chemistry, so why is she a teacher?’ What children hear, observe, and see sends both subtle and overt messages about the acceptance or appropriateness of exploring and developing STEM identities (Craig et al., 2018). My case demonstrates both sides of the coin. While I never received an overt message not to explore STEM in greater depth, what I heard, observed and saw in the McDowell family curriculum was always, unquestionably rooted in the social sciences, succinctly described by my Dad:

“My father, of course, was a lawyer. His brother was an architect. My mother was a librarian and an English teacher. Basically, we really did fall to the social sciences. I think that’s the trade of an educated family as well.”
-Dad

As I reflect on the disciplines and professions that I observed as a child, I am not surprised that I gained familiarity and comfort with the social science business. Indeed, McDowell’s were educators, clergy, writers, readers, missionaries and ‘people people’. As I conclude the findings from this reflection and think about the breadth of accomplishment in my family curriculum, I realise my journey has gone from sadness and questioning to pride and gratitude.

6. Discussion

When I introduced feminist ideology in section 2, I intentionally paused to capture a moment in time. It was necessary to understand the evolution of the feminist movement, as each period scaffolds and enables subsequent advancement of women’s socio-cultural position. For me, a reflection of the evolution of the feminist movement is all at once insightful to my experience and makes me acutely aware of those unspoken, invisible tenets that my younger self was not privy to, but certainly developed as a by-product of societal dynamics; the work feminist advocates and scholars were working to change.

In this reflection, I have tried to be true to the goals of the feminist standpoint – to draw directly from the realities that shaped my experiences and to ‘define the nature of claims’ (Hekman, 1997, p. 341). I have also tried to bolster the dominion of the feminist method, as called upon by Hartsock, ‘to connect everyday life with the *analysis* [emphasis added] of the social institutions that shape life’ (Hekman, 1997, p. 343).

When I began this exploration, I presumed that my ultimate pursuit of social sciences was just what girls did; after all, girls were better at the ‘soft stuff’. For someone who has been described as inquisitive, with demonstrated ability and effort, it seems a lazy excuse, something I would not tolerate now as both a feminist and a PhD candidate, the latter of which requires all of these attributes. Nevertheless, today I’m an instructional designer, not an astrophysicist.

I also learned through this exploration that I had a complicated relationship with confidence and ability. As with many adolescent girls, I struggled with confidence for any number of reasons, mostly superficial and having to do with what I’ll call ‘social interests and influences’. As indicated in extant research, girls tend to diminish their capabilities, believing their success results from effort instead of ability. I was a textbook example of this phenomenon, and yet it seems I had some reckoning that something was amiss with this mindset. Through ‘the competition’, my confidence grew – I was ‘doing math’ doing it effortlessly, and doing it well. And yet, it was not enough to propel me further, no thanks in part to bad timing with course scheduling.

My Dad vehemently described me as a competitor. I had never to this point considered myself a competitor, at least not in the traditional sense. After reflecting through this process, it is true – I compete daily with myself, which is why I find myself disappointed to have to acknowledge that

my parents saw in me qualities I might have translated into a STEM education and career; a ‘capable’, ‘motivated’, and ‘confident’ ‘competitor’.

‘You have to choose’ never should have happened, and again, it is not something that I would let pass today. I’ve grown into too much of a dogged problem solver to allow scheduling conflicts to impede my goals. Today, we benefit from remote synchronous and asynchronous learning, allowing learning to traverse space and time constraints. In this reflection, one of my ‘ah-ha’ moments was the impact of leadership opportunities in the science classroom. Extant research posited significant disparities in pre-college girls’ and boys’ curriculum and classroom experiences, marked by different experiences, roles, and activities. Retrospectively, I see this as another gateway to confidence and a missed opportunity.

I did not speak of achievement in the sense of high grades with respect to my family, but in the sense of the absolute urgency and necessity to complete university. A university degree qualified my brothers and me for equal opportunities, to not be diminished in society, and to realise that we belonged wherever we wanted to be, regardless of societal expectations. That it didn’t matter to my parents what I was interested in as long as I graduated is a revelation that had never occurred to me. Whatever I was doing in high school was working, so there was no need to intercede. My parents saw the long game (university) and saw me tracking towards that significant achievement (graduation). To me, this is all at once profound, upsetting, and perplexing. I now better understand and respect their position; and am deeply grateful for the foundation they set, which continues to propel my educational pursuits, even as a ‘mature’ PhD candidate.

While my previous reflections might have inferred these factors, I can understand how, as an adolescent and teenager, I may not have been able to name these factors as discrete influences. In a final pointed question to my Dad, I asked how it was, with all the signals, that we, together, did not follow through on my ‘STEM identity’.

‘With regard to STEM and the extent to which certain courses or certain interests or support is reinforced. I think if there’s a failure, on our part, it may have been in that direction’. -Dad

Prior to submitting this paper, I had the opportunity to connect with my closest friend in junior high school, Candida, after thirty years. I told her about this research and asked if she remembered that I wanted to be an astronaut,

to which she immediately and animatedly responded, ‘Yes, I do! You were such a smarty!’ Conducting this autoethnographic study elucidated many qualities I had not known before yet seemed evident to others. It has left me pensive and wistful as I uncovered internal and external influences that left an indelible impression on my life. Reflecting on my missteps, regardless of internal or external orientation, only serves to stir the competitor within me to follow my Dad’s message to ‘continue pursuing’.

7. Final thoughts

Existing literature has called for more robust inquiry into girls’ pre-university experiences with respect to STEM disciplines. Specifically, there is a need to delve more deeply into girls’ self-perceptions and beliefs about ability and external influences and expectations that impact girls’ relationship with sciences and mathematics. To address the call to action, this study sought to explore my ‘invisible fork in the road’, the visible and discrete factors contributing to my social science trajectory. My retrospective was situated within a framework of cultural and societal expectations of perceived gender roles during junior and high school. The findings in this study show that one can never be sure why we arrive at our destinations until one takes the time to explore the rationales, going deeply beyond superficial assumptions.

Existing research supports the link between family and significant adults as strong influencers and agents of girls’ and young womens’ interest in STEM disciplines. As evidenced by the present study, these influential individuals cannot overestimate what more passive approaches, no matter how well-intended, have in girls’ lives, especially those who demonstrate ability, motivation, and confidence. Those who surround young women must be observant, vigilant, and purposeful in helping capable young women pursue their interests; this includes creating positive experiences for females at an early age, both within and outside of school. Schools can foster sustained STEM interest and achievement of female students by constructing curricula that challenge with active inquiry lab work, opportunities to demonstrate leadership, and connecting content in meaningful ways to students’ prior experiences. Outside of school, families can create ‘family curricula’, exposing girls to museums and activities that encourage and nurture a “fluid inquiry mindset” (Craig et al., 2018, p. 637).

It should be noted that the present study did not examine additional factors such as family, social or economic status. These factors would be valuable to future conversations on the evolution of young women from diverse demographic

backgrounds into STEM disciplines. Additional study isolating confidence, perceived abilities, and self-efficacy, evaluated through the framework of intersectionality, would also contribute to understanding motivations and deterrents to young girls' pursuits of STEM.

This study shed light on the conflicted feelings of an aspiring girl astronaut trapped in the body of a future female social scientist. I hope that this study serves as an instructional message to those who surround young women. I hope these reflections are a call to action to girls never to deny the interests that captivate them; they should not feel compelled to disavow this part of their identities. Multi-talented, curious young women must also be aware of the external forces, societal power structures, and cultural dynamics that impact their experiences. Successful female scientists, technologists, engineers, and mathematicians must serve as *vocal* role models. Perhaps even women like me who didn't quite get there can provide girls with the encouragement, support, and strategies to overcome obstacles, blossom, achieve, and flourish as they relentlessly pursue their dreams.

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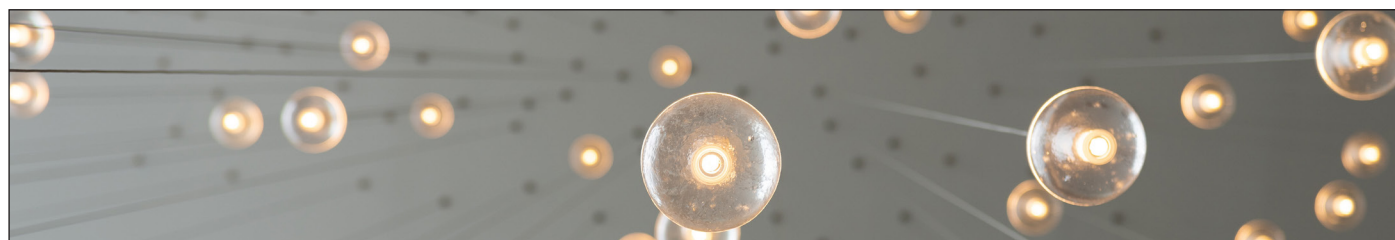
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Emergency Remote Teaching and me: An autoethnography by a digital learning specialist during Covid-19

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Abstract

In March 2020, WHO (2020) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic and most institutions embarked on Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Central to ERT have been Digital Learning Specialists (DLS) who have been actively supporting teachers to make and sustain the transition. However, there has been limited research on their own experiences and perceptions during ERT. This autoethnography employs Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory as a conceptual lens, to look at ERT through the perspective of a DLS working in language education. The findings indicate that ERT challenged me to reconsider my premises and beliefs and grow as a professional. I also acknowledge that ERT, despite the challenges it presented, had a positive effect on digital language learning during the pandemic. Yet, concerns remain about whether education systems will embrace more pedagogically sound online learning approaches post-pandemic or whether they will settle with ERT.

1. Introduction¹

Covid-19 was declared a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 after the number of cases outside China had risen alarmingly and Europe had become the epicenter of the pandemic. Globally, many countries imposed

lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus, and, by March 2020, 144 countries were estimated to have suspended face-to-face education, affecting approximately 1.2 billion students (UNESCO, 2020). Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) emerged as a new teaching practice, making it possible for education systems worldwide to quickly switch to online classes.

My context, language education, was also affected by the pandemic, with remote instruction becoming the predominant teaching mode (British Council, 2020), at least for those with Internet access. I work as a Digital Learning Specialist (DLS) and lecturer in English Language Teaching (ELT) for a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the UK; I am also a freelance DLS who supports language institutions around the world with Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). Since March 2020, this expertise has allowed me to assist both my department and other language teachers worldwide to implement and sustain remote teaching. Through this role, I witnessed the daunting challenges and transformations teachers experienced while adjusting to new teaching modalities and developing new skills (Rapanta, 2020; Moser et al., 2021). However, I feel that my own challenges and transformations as a DLS remain obscure.

Indeed, while the role of Digital Learning Specialists in teacher transformation during the pandemic is well documented in the literature (Xie et al., 2021a), there is relatively little research on their own experiences and transformations. Yet, due to their central role in ERT, understanding their perspectives, experiences, and transformations is crucial to better understand the phenomenon of ERT. To this end, this study will use autoethnography to explore whether and in what way Emergency Remote Teaching has been a transformative experience for me as a Digital Learning Specialist. Autoethnography is a research methodology that places the self at the centre of cultural analysis in order to understand a social phenomenon (Adams et al., 2015). Through self-reflexive inquiry on their lived experiences, researchers can provide important insights into sociocultural contexts and issues (see section 4.1 for more details). By using the self as my focal point in this study, I aim to shed light on how my experiences during ERT have changed the way I see myself and my professional context (language education). As such the overarching research question is:

- To what extent has my work as a Digital Learning Specialist during Emergency Remote Teaching transformed me as a professional?

Throughout this paper, the term *Digital Learning Specialist* is used as synonymous to that of educational technologist, instructional designer, digital learning coordinator, and head of digital learning and teaching (JISC 2017; University of Oxford, 2021) working in-house or as a freelancer.

2. Literature review

This section will examine the literature surrounding ERT. After looking at ERT in its broader educational context, it will explore how it relates to language educators and DLS.

The term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) arose from discussions among online education researchers and specialists on Twitter to make a clear distinction between intentional high-quality online education (Hodges et al., 2020) and the temporary transition from in-person instruction to alternative remote deliveries during Covid-19. According to McCarty (2021) the term was coined to “non-judgmentally describe the circumstances of educators mostly unprepared to cope with the new necessity to teach online, relieving them of unrealistic expectations as to learning outcomes” (p.4). However, not all references to ERT have been non-judgmental. Schlesselman (2020) refers to ERT as “chaotic” (p. 1043) pointing out that institutions and teachers relied on quick fixes and transitioned their courses without adequate adaptations to online modalities. Similarly, Rapanta et al. (2020) assert that because of their pedagogical unpreparedness in online teaching, most institutions and teachers resorted to “tips and tricks” (p. 924) rather than pedagogically sound guidance and “little time was devoted to reflection-in-action” (p. 941). The literature also provides explicit and implicit critique about institutions and teachers’ resistance to technology before the pandemic pointing out that this was a significant barrier to designing quality remote instruction during ERT (Schlesselman, 2020; Thompson & Lodge, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020).

Apart from the general educational scene, there are several studies associated with the challenges that language teachers experienced during ERT. For instance, it has been pointed out that there has been a shortage of language specific professional development during ERT (Moser et al., 2021) which may have led language teachers to resort to low-quality drills or easy-to-find but ineffective activities available online (Guillén et al., 2020). Hazaa et al. (2020) found that students’ and teachers’ “digital illiteracy” signif-

¹ Please note that a number of acronyms are used in the paper, such as ERT (Emergency Remote Teaching) and DLS (Digital Learning Specialist), and are spelt out in places to help the reader remember what each stands for.

icantly reduced the effectiveness of the online experience. Perhaps more importantly, it has been pointed out (Hazaa et al., 2020; Cheung, 2021) that the lack of authenticity in online interactions may be hindering teachers' efforts to foster students' communicative competence; authenticity is a feature underpinning Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Thornbury, 2016) and lack of it is believed to affect students' engagement and language learning.

Central to ERT have been Digital Learning Specialists (DLS) who have been actively supporting teachers to make and sustain the transition to online modalities either institutionally or via online knowledge communities (e.g., social media fora, blogs, webinars). While the role of DLS varies significantly between organisations, it generally bridges technology and pedagogy by "supporting or enabling learning with the use of learning technology" (Association for Learning Technology, 2020, para. 3). Under normal circumstances, DLS are responsible for assessing and implementing new technologies, as well as creating courses that integrate effective instructional design (Kanuka, 2006; Reiser & Dempsey, 2011). However, in this time of crisis, DLS have been "frantically assisting" teachers and students to shift online (Schlesselman 2020, p. 1042), sometimes almost overnight (Kilgore & Diaz, 2020), as well as offering training, materials and even IT assistance (Bal et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2021a).

While the literature clearly acknowledges DLS' integral role during ERT, most empirical studies have been focusing on how their work supported teachers and students to develop new skills while there has been limited research on their own learning and transformations. Xie et al. (2021a) do acknowledge that DLS had to learn new skills to support teachers and students, but they are more concerned about how they reached out to the teaching faculty and built relationships. Also, Xie et al. (2021b), look at DLS shifted thinking during the pandemic but again this concentrated more on the professional learning they were providing for teachers and institutions, and less on their own shifts during ERT.

However, given the key role of DLS during ERT, it is worth exploring both their own learning and shifting professional perspectives. Having a deep understanding and appreciation of these perceptions is critical not only to shedding light on their vital role during ERT but also to making better sense of the phenomenon of ERT itself. After the pandemic, the demand for online or hybrid courses might continue (Xie et al., 2021b; Ofsted, 2021), which may increase the need for DLS professionals as well. It is therefore of utmost

importance to have a thorough understanding of their shifting learning and thinking during the pandemic.

3. Theoretical framework

In this research, I employ Mezirow's (1991, 2000) Transformative Learning Theory as a conceptual lens through which to understand my transformative learning experiences during Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). This theory aligns with my study in that ERT was drastic and transformative during the pandemic for both teaching and learning. I therefore use this lens to understand the transformative impact of ERT on me as a Digital Learning Specialist (DLS).

According to Mezirow (2000), transformative learning takes place when adults engage in activities that cause them to see a different worldview from their own and then "make an informed and reflective decision" (p. 23) to integrate this realisation into their own worldview. He describes this learning as a process of adults modifying their assumptions, beliefs and expectations of themselves and others.

According to this theory (Mezirow, 1991), the following elements are key to bringing about transformative learning:

- *Disorienting dilemmas* i.e., a significant stimulus or cognitive conflict that takes place when individuals realise that their current understanding of the world does not fit with the current evidence. The sudden, unplanned, and rapid transition to online learning triggered by Covid-19 caused this cognitive imbalance, because as Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) put it "individuals were unable to make sense of the experience within their current pre-pandemic frame of reference" (p. 662).
- *Critical reflection* i.e., the process in which a person intentionally constructs new meanings through critically examining their own beliefs; in my case, my reflections and shifts over the last year as well as this autoethnography. This process involves systematic reflection on underlying premises, beliefs and assumptions that can lead to a *perspective transformation* which the individual will then act upon.
- *Rational discourse*, i.e., discussing with others the newly discovered incompatibility between your premises and the world and exploring, logically and objectively, your personal and social beliefs and assumptions. For me, this was expressed through public speaking and private or public discussions on social media teacher communities and fora on the topic of ERT.

Several studies have used Transformative Learning Theory to understand teachers' and students' experiences and perceptions about online learning. For example, Andrews Graham (2019) examined faculty members' transformative learning as they transitioned from a face-to-face to a distance modality and then returned to the face-to-face classroom again. The results show that the shifts led teachers to reassess their own beliefs, roles, interpretations, and assumptions with the author concluding that Transformative Learning Theory is a useful lens when examining these changes. Also grounded in transformative learning, recent research by Kim et al., (2021) investigated teachers' experiences of online instruction during Covid-19 while Almusharraf and Khahro (2020) examined adult students' satisfaction and transformative experiences when instruction moved online.

Although transformative learning has been widely accepted as an important theory for adult learning, it is not free of criticism. Usually, critics believe it places an excessive focus on individual learning, neglecting social interaction and transformation (Şahin & Dogantay, 2018). However, other studies (e.g., Finnegan, 2019; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020) challenge this notion, contending that Transformative Learning Theory does emphasise interpersonal learning, i.e., when people communicate to build understanding through *rational discourse*. Similarly, scholars maintain that Transformative Learning occurs when the individual and the social intersect to help adults transform their perspectives on both themselves and the world (Fleming 2002). With regards to Covid-19, Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) argue that Transformative Learning Theory could provide adults with a useful framework for reflecting on the global crisis and for initiating a dialogue that could be useful in confronting it, both individually and collectively. Certainly, the pandemic has affected people on both a global and personal level, making transformative learning very relevant to the situation.

4. Methodology

4.1 Autoethnography

This study uses autoethnography, a research methodology that enables individuals to adopt self-reflexive inquiry and use their lived experiences to understand a social phenomenon (Adams et al., 2015). For Anderson (2006), this involves "understanding our personal lives, identities, and feelings as deeply connected to and in large part constituted by—and in turn helping to constitute—the sociocultural contexts in which we live" (p. 390).

Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares some features of storytelling and self-narrative but goes beyond "mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2016, p. 43). Through the use of autobiographical stories and self-reflection on these stories, researchers are able to access and explore their complex inner thoughts and emotions and, thus, gain an understanding of social phenomena (Lee, 2020).

Anderson (2006) identifies the following five key features of analytic autoethnography:

1. Complete member researcher (CMR) status, which requires that the researcher be a full member of the social world under study.
2. Analytic reflexivity, which involves self-introspection directed by a desire to understand both the self and others, as well as sustained awareness of one's positionality.
3. Narrative visibility of the researcher's self i.e. enhanced textual visibility through field notes and other analytical evidence demonstrating the researchers' own experiences and thoughts.
4. Dialogue with informants beyond the self. Unlike evocative autoethnography, analytic autoethnography is not limited to self-experience. Thus, to avoid self-absorption the researcher should engage with informants beyond oneself.
5. Commitment to theoretical analysis. Analytic autoethnography is not concerned with recording personal experiences, but rather with using empirical data to draw insights into social phenomena. Because of this, Anderson (2006) recommends that autoethnographers remain "committed to an analytic research agenda" (p. 375) aimed at better understanding social phenomena.

Similarly, Chang (2016) calls for "autoethnographies that are ethnographic in their intent" (p. 49). In other words, autoethnographers (unlike ethnographers) use their personal experiences as primary data, yet, just like ethnographers, they are expected to treat their data critically, analytically, and interpretively in order to detect its cultural significance.

The benefits of reading and writing autoethnography are numerous. When a topic is personally meaningful and the study is contextualised appropriately in the researcher's sociocultural context, readers can gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena (Chang, 2016). This deep understanding of oneself and others can help build more successful and empathetic cross-cultural relationships. For the researcher, the process of self-reflection and self-understanding can also

lead to self-transformation (Chang, 2016). Finally, from a methodological perspective, the ease of access to data is an important advantage since the researcher draws on their own experiences as the basis for investigating a particular phenomenon.

However, it is precisely this strong emphasis on the self that has created some resistance to accepting autoethnography as a valuable research method. For example, autoethnographies are often criticised for showing self-indulgence, narcissism, introspection, and individualism (Atkinson, 1997; Sparkes, 2000).

Chang (2016) warns that if the following pitfalls are not avoided, autoethnography may indeed become a research method of limited social significance (Chang, 2016, p. 57):

1. Excessive focus on self in isolation from others;
2. Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation;
3. Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source;
4. Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and
5. Inappropriate application of the label autoethnography.

Set in a global pandemic, my research topic is at the intersection of self and social inquiry and using an autoethnographic lens will help me to better understand both my own experiences and the phenomenon of ERT. Furthermore, autoethnography seems closely related to my theoretical framework. As Lee (2020) asserts, by analysing their shifts or emotional struggles, the researcher may identify new perspectives and actions, making autoethnography an effective approach to research transformative learning.

Considering the above, I will take a rigorous approach to my inquiry; because my dual role (as both a participant and researcher of this autoethnography) requires self-reflexivity and detailed textual visibility of the self (Anderson, 2006), I will openly illustrate my experiences and insights and systematically identify embedded assumptions. I will then consider these assumptions in an objective and rational manner and discuss changes in my premises and beliefs during my engagement with ERT and this autoethnography.

4.2 Research questions

This research seeks to shed light on my transformative learning experience as a Digital Learning Specialist (DLS)

during Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). As such, the overarching research question (RQ) is *To what extent has my work as a DLS during ERT transformed me as a professional?* To answer the RQ, the following sub-questions will be employed:

- RQ1. What were my experiences during ERT as a DLS?
- RQ2. What was the impact of these experiences on my self-perceptions?
- RQ3. What was the impact of these experiences on my perceptions of teachers?
- RQ4. What was the impact of these experiences on my perceptions of language teaching and learning?

Understanding my shifting perspectives towards the self, teachers, and language teaching will provide insight into the impact of ERT on myself as a DLS and my professional context (language education).

4.3 Data collection and analysis

To answer my RQs, I collected data from March 2020 until April 2021 e.g., my own and others' social media posts, blogs, talks, emails, messages, and field notes (from instructional design, teacher training and class observations) which:

- a. refer to my work during ERT e.g. the roles I took on; the activities I engaged in.
- b. show my positionality and stance e.g. evidence of my feelings towards ERT when I first engaged with it.
- c. show my shifts and transformations e.g. evidence of changes in the way I felt over time.
- d. show the perceived impact of my work on teachers e.g. comments, tweets, and emails from teachers about my work; criticism I received, etc.

This formed *Data Set 1* which comprised a total of 10,120 words. During data collection, I used Chang's (2016) "inventory activity" (p. 76) which involves not only collecting but also evaluating and organising data. I used the above categories (a-d) to organise my data set but additional thematic categories were also born in the process of data evaluation.

This process brought back memories and feelings which enabled me to write story-based, narrative reflections which comprised my *Data Set 2* - a total of 7,185 words.

More analytically:

To answer RQ1, I used Chang's (2016 p. 73) autobiographical timeline and listed significant events and experiences related to my involvement with ERT in chronological order. I then selected the most prominent experiences, described its circumstances in a narrative format and explained why they were important.

To answer RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4 I read Data Set 1 closely and recorded my reflections to these questions:

- How did these incidents make me feel then? How do I feel about them now?
- What were my assumptions of teachers at the beginning of ERT? What were my assumptions about ERT as a teaching approach? To what extent are they different now?

To check my memory-based recollections and validate my findings, I also invited three "co-informants" (Chang, 2016, p.65); a DLS (co-informant 1), a teacher trainee (co-informant 2); and a critical friend with whom I frequently discussed my experiences with ERT (co-informant 3). I shared relevant parts from Data Set 2 and asked them to add comments. Where relevant, I included their contributions to my analysis and asked them to review and validate it.

During the initial reading of the datasets, I followed Chang's (2016) recommendation and made notes of my "impressions as to repeated topics, emerging themes, salient patterns, and mini and grand categories" (p. 131). I then worked systematically back and forth between the data sets coding interesting features and repeated patterns (Creswell, 2014) until I established a comprehensive set of 10 initial

codes and 25 sub-codes (see Appendix). At this stage I examined the relationships between the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The ones that bore little relevance to my research questions, were excluded e.g. *theoretical terms*, while others merged together e.g. *doubting myself* into *feelings*. After multiple reviews, four refined themes and sub-themes emerged (Table 1).

As a way of validating what I had done thus far, I compared it with Chang's ten strategies' framework (2016, p.131):

- (1) Search for recurring topics, themes and patterns;
- (2) look for cultural themes;
- (3) identify exceptional occurrences;
- (4) analyse inclusion and omission;
- (5) connect the present with the past;
- (6) analyse relationships between self and others;
- (7) compare yourself with other people's cases;
- (8) contextualize broadly;
- (9) compare with social science constructs and ideas, and
- (10) frame with theories.

For Chang, there is no specific order in which the strategies need to be followed except that the earlier ones are more analytical in nature and the later ones are more interpretive.

4.4 Ethics

I decided from the outset to stay true to myself without exposing confidential information from the HEI I still work in. I therefore excluded data from management meetings as people would be easily identifiable. However, I included my field notes from trainings, instructional design and class observations as people's anonymity could be protected. In my freelance role, people's identities could hardly be identified

Table 1. Refined themes

My experiences during ERT as a DLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting to ERT • Exposing my positionality • Researching
The impact of my experiences on my self-perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding my DLS voice • Self-validation
The impact of my experiences on my perceptions of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through my teacher lens • Through my DLS lens
The impact of my experiences on my perceptions of language teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positionality shift <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities • Fears

as I had worked and interacted with a significant number of people worldwide. I did, however, pay close attention to remove any information that would risk their being identified through deductive disclosure (Kaiser, 2009). Any public tweets and posts were also anonymised and identifying characteristics, such as geographical location and ethnic background, were removed.

Regarding procedural ethics, I obtained signed consent from my three co-informants to use data from their contributions and where relevant, I asked them to read my analysis and validate it.

5. Findings

Overall, the findings of my analysis show that my experiences since March 2020 led me to undergo a *perspective transformation* (Mezirow, 1991) with regards to ERT and its impact on my professional self (DLS) and the context I work in (language education). While I actively engaged in helping teachers move online, I did not really approve of it and feared that the unprincipled shift to online teaching would have a negative effect on language education. ERT and the emotions it triggered acted as disorienting *dilemmas* (Mezirow, 1991) that forced me to challenge my beliefs and assumptions and engage in *critical reflection* and *rational discourse* in order to find creative solutions. Below, I present the findings for each research question structured according to the themes that emerged from my analysis (see Table 1).

5.1 RQ1. My experiences during ERT as a DLS

When Covid-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, and lockdowns were announced almost overnight in many countries, educators with no prior experience in online teaching were asked to move online urgently to ensure continuity of instruction. My social media feed was being flooded with educators' posts desperately asking for help to move online. I was angry! I had spent years working with technology. I had a master's degree in digital learning and years of teacher training, reading, and researching. How could they even think they could achieve this overnight? Why are they asking for help on social media? Aren't their institutions supporting them? Can this lead to a decent learning experience for the students?

The findings show that the following three facets triggered my *disorienting dilemmas* and encouraged me to engage in *critical reflection* and *rational discourse* (Mezirow, 1991), shaping my experiences with ERT from March 2020 until the time of writing.

5.1.1 Adjusting to ERT

The first lockdown in the UK took effect on 16 March 2020, and all unnecessary social contact ceased immediately. In the HEI where I work, my role as a DLS was adapted one week prior to the lockdown to encompass online instructional design, consultation and academic staff training while my teaching hours would be reduced to allow time for my new responsibilities. Meanwhile, in my freelance capacity, the demand for keynotes, training and consultation was rocketing and I would receive requests from around the world on a daily basis.

I was in demand, and it was all exciting, but I would soon be overwhelmed with troubleshooting, multimedia design, tight deadlines, and a constant feeling that I was taking part in an experiment where everyone assumed that I had all the answers. I didn't. When I designed online courses in the past, I didn't have the current time restrictions; I would also recruit teachers with advanced digital skills, and I would have designers create multimedia. None of this was currently in place so no, I was struggling to strike a balance between what was realistically possible and what was pedagogically sound.

In practical terms, I had to get used to training teachers exclusively remotely. In the past, I would train face-to-face in a lab where I could offer trainees hands-on support when required. Managing a group of 20 digitally-novice teachers remotely was beyond chaotic. For some of them, even basic software navigation such as finding the right button was a challenge, but I was unable to go next to them and show them where to look. I don't know how they really felt during the sessions as their feedback was always appreciative. Deep down inside though I feared that I was an awful trainer and that my sessions made them feel overwhelmed and inadequate.

Things gradually improved as I developed new strategies. I would include more step-by-step software walkthroughs, ask a lot of concept questions and offer one-to-one support slots for teachers. I found this last one to be less intimidating for both novice teachers and myself.

5.1.2 Exposing my positionality

Discussions on social media were buzzing among the academic community, with DLS, including myself, hotly debating the terminology for this new type of Covid-19 teaching to draw a clear contrast with principled online education. The term *Emergency Remote Teaching* first

Figure 1. Tweet, March 2020



Sophia Mavridi @SophiaMav · 21/3/20

Yes, it could be but it would need expertise in #elearning and instructional design. What we actually see at the moment is what I would call emergency remote teaching, not quality online learning. With this in mind, I think it would be safer to keep changes to the minimum.

appeared in Hodges et al. (2020) on 27 March 2020 but there is evidence that I was confidently using it before that (see Figure 1).

Feelings of frustration were overflowing each time I heard digitally-novice educators referring to what they were doing as *online teaching*. What they were actually doing was scramble their way onto Zoom and then try to make it more exciting by incorporating one hundred tools such as Kahoot, Quizlet, Flipgrid and loads more. To me, who had been working on digital learning for years, who had bothered to take it seriously, read the literature and do research on it, it was all an absolute hypocritical slap in the face.

Perhaps I was not so angry with the teachers; teachers were asked to build the plane while they were flying it and in a way, I sympathised with them. I was angry with the EdTech providers who had found a golden opportunity to sell their products; I was angry with the institutions which wanted to salvage the semester at all costs; and I was angry with the self-proclaimed trainers who after their own scrambles on Zoom they were training teachers to 'teach online' despite zero educational background in TELL. It was painful to see *online learning* becoming a caricature in their hands and so I challenged them in my keynotes and social media.

Quite a growing number of self-proclaimed, self-accredited experts in online learning lately. We really need to be careful about what we consume. These are difficult times for education. Teachers need support. Misleading them with inaccuracies is not helping.

(My facebook post, November 2020)

5.1.3 Researching

Despite the feelings of frustration described above, I found ERT intriguing. Never before had I seen the world of language teaching being so involved with technology. I

wanted to dig deeper and know more about ERT. Is it as bad as I think? How do language teachers - from all educational contexts, across all five continents - feel? What support do they need? And this was how my research project was born on 11 April 2020. In less than three months it received more than 1000 responses - an unprecedented number for me. And as I was reading the responses that were pouring in, I could hear the teachers' voices, fears, excitement, and struggles, and ERT started taking a clearer shape in my mind and in my heart.

Based on a mixed methods approach, this paper is now set to be published (see Mavridi, in press). However, even at the early stages of data analysis, the preliminary results were an emotional punch in the stomach; out of 1102 valid responses, 91% of the participants had never taught online before and very few (13%) received substantial training to transition online. Almost half of them self-organised their own training via freely available webinars and resources while 65% lacked ongoing training and support over the first months of the transition (March to June 2020). It was all shocking; and the more I immersed myself in the data analysis, the more my empathy for these teachers deepened.

5.2 RQ2: The impact of these experiences on my self-perceptions

5.2.1 Finding my DLS voice

As described above, ERT triggered me to expose my positionality and engage in public and private *rational discourse*. Evidence from early data, however, shows that this was not an easy endeavour. Were teachers ready to hear my criticism? Do I sound too unsympathetic and harsh? Will they hate me?

Signals from Twitter were mixed. Some teachers would find my tweets thought-provoking and insightful, but some

Figure 2. Tweet, March 2020



Sophia Mavridi @SophiaMav · Mar 25, 2020

...

A good read on why good online pedagogy matters. Students will learn via ANY platform as long as our teaching approaches allow this to happen. Pls stop focusing on Zoom and screencasting > Lecturing into your laptop is not nearly enough [timeshighereducation.com/opinion/lecturing-via @timeshighered](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/lecturing-via-timeshighered)

others insensitive and counterproductive as the following comment on my tweet (see Figure 2) suggests:

Sometimes you do just want to say give us a break! This stuff takes years to perfect. At the moment, zoom and screen casting seems enough to me...

(Anonymised comment to my tweet, March 2020)

This was disheartening. I was only trying to help but it felt like educators were not ready to hear the truth. Should I join the popular voices in language education which cheer teachers' scrambles in remote teaching? I didn't want to lie to teachers but neither did I want to appear unsympathetic among new 'online learning' enthusiasts. What if I'm wrong? What if they hate me?

All these questions, which I now see as *disorienting dilemmas*, would haunt me even more in mid-April 2020. A global association for language teachers had invited me to take part in a panel discussion on Covid-19 teaching. Over 1000 language teachers were expected to attend, which made me even more nervous and uncertain of what to say. I took issue with institutions, tech-providers, and publishers who were cheering teachers for stumbling on Zoom and urging them to keep it up because 'students need a teacher'. This was not true. Students didn't sign up for this; what they really needed was a good learning experience, not continuity at all costs.

I decided to first share my views with my co-panellists as we were preparing for the big day.

The trend is to support people with lies but I'm not sure I can jump on this bandwagon. I fear these fast food pedagogies will result in poor teaching, poor learning and an even poorer ELT sector.

(Email to co-panellists, April 2020)

I'm grateful for this private group discussion because I can now realise that my co-panellists helped me to reflect on my underlying beliefs and assumptions (critical reflection), crystallise my voice and get it out there (rational discourse).

We are not exactly in a position to put everything on hold while we plan a perfect (or less imperfect) plan for education in general.

I certainly don't think you should be sugar coating things. The voice of real experts like you who have been working on remote learning for years is REALLY important right now.

(Co-panellists' advice in April 2020)

On the day of the panel my heart was beating fast as I was trying to find the right words to say. I started off with the bravery of the educational community to step out of their comfort zones and just get on with it despite the steep learning curve. I emphasised that this should be celebrated because it shows determination and resilience. At the same time, I did introduce the term *emergency remote teaching* and stressed that what was currently happening was not online teaching but an ad-hoc, unprincipled approach that tries to simulate face-to-face pedagogies on online platforms. I used examples from my ongoing research to alert teachers of the issues with the pedagogy, teachers' workload and students' engagement and point out that ERT is not sustainable in the long run.

I could feel the vibes from the audience as comments in the chat were pouring in and my Twitter notifications were flooding my timeline. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had uttered my truth and teachers found it thought-provoking. I was in awe. Teachers WERE ready to hear the truth after all.

5.2.2 Self-validation

Many expressions of my positionality followed and evidence from the data shows that my educational community appreciated my voice; some said it helped them immensely with their remote teaching, others that I was influential. I had never experienced such public self-validation before, and I found this recognition motivating and inspiring.

Having attended some of your online talks and seminars, I think you are one of the most insightful academics with an eye on the reality of our teaching practices. Your saying “We are building the plane while we are flying it” couldn’t describe better the reality we have been experiencing since last March in our teaching practice.

(Private message from teacher, Greece, February 2021)

Thanks for all your work Sophia! It’s incredibly helpful for me and it gives me courage to go on trying new practices and developing new skills despite the great effort and time required! You’ve been a great inspiration to me!

(Private message from teacher, Italy, January 2021)

Perhaps the most surprising perception regarding my voice was that it was *compassionate* for teachers. I had no idea I was compassionate! In fact, I thought I came across as critical and unsympathetic.

If at any time today, you have the sense that your ears are burning, it is because you are one of the experts supporting my decisions in my Course Design rationale. Your compassionate defence of teachers at this time is greatly appreciated

(Private message from teacher, UK, May 2020)

These experiences helped me to find my voice as a DLS shaping not just how others see me as a professional but, perhaps more importantly, how I see myself.

5.3 RQ3. The impact of these experiences on my perceptions of teachers

5.3.1 Through my teacher lens

I was teaching a group of postgraduate students in October, when everything that could go wrong did. Some students were losing connectivity and would drop in and out

of the platform. I had to troubleshoot for them while keeping the rest of the class engaged. The breakout rooms would not work so I had to ditch the lesson plan and improvise an activity in the main room. Platform glitches would not allow my pptx to display on screen, so I had to convert it into a PDF while keeping students busy with something else and while repeating instructions for those who had sound issues. I just wanted to scream. The end of the lesson found me utterly stressed and drained. How on Earth do digitally-novice teachers manage these hiccups? Do they lose face? I went back to my survey data collection and read through some teachers’ answers and this one brought tears to my eyes.

I feel like no matter what I do, it is never enough. Not enough for me, as I would like to give my students much more and for the school that is always demanding something better.

(Language Teacher, Brazil)

5.3.2 Through my DLS lens

Quite recently, I made a post on social media about institutional decisions that add unnecessary tasks to teachers’ heavy workloads. The post, perhaps unsurprisingly, resonated with a lot of teachers but it also received replies from students and one of them almost broke my heart.

Teachers have had it easy, the students are paying the same 9K while not even receiving proper education.

(Instagram, February 2021)

Seriously? Teachers had it easy? The remote courses that institutions offered during the pandemic lacked on many levels, but teachers tried very hard and, in many cases, they developed remarkable skills. Teachers are the frontline workers of a system that left them alone to look for answers on social media. They are the buffer that absorbs most of the stress generated by ERT: students’ complaints, pedagogical concerns, technological issues, institutional demands.

And I felt at peace with these perceptions of teachers and glad that I could eventually hear and understand their voices. The truth is I was probably never against teachers; but over the first phases of ERT I had not realised who I was against. If teachers were indeed not able to provide ‘proper education’ as the student above asserts, it is the decision makers and the education systems which did not prepare them properly; and, perhaps, Digital Learning Specialists like me as well.

Co-informant 3 (critical friend) reassuringly notes that they had noticed this shift.

Yes, you were defending them quite strongly after a point. I remember you saying once that teachers can't be blamed for everything that goes wrong in education during Covid.

(Co-informant 3, April 2021)

Overall, the findings show that my experiences during ERT as well as writing this autoethnography brought about a clear *perspective transformation* with regards to teachers. Not making sense of my experiences within my pre-pandemic frame of reference triggered cognitive conflicts (disorienting dilemmas) which in turn led me to engage in *critical reflection* and *rational discourse* regarding my underlying premises and assumptions.

5.4 RQ4. The impact of these experiences on my perceptions of language teaching and learning

5.4.1 Positionality shift: Opportunities and fears

I feel that another major perspective transformation was with regards to the effect of ERT on language teaching and learning. While I initially took a very negative stance, I realised that ERT improved teachers' perceptions of technology, and in doing so, it opened up the possibilities that we - DLS - have been advocating for years.

It seems that co-informant 1 (DLS) shares my current view on ERT.

Absolutely. Teachers are finally listening and want to get their hands dirty and like you I feel this is preparing the ground for something good in the future.

(Co-informant 1, April 2021)

Although I now see ERT as a stepping stone to more innovative pedagogies in the future, the data also reveal some concerns. What if it's not a stepping stone but the final destination? There seems to be an emergence of self-proclaimed experts in digital learning, and evidence from the data suggests that one year into the pandemic, the pedagogy of language teaching is still struggling. For example, relatively recent field notes from freelance i) lesson observations suggest that teacher preparation programmes (BAs, MAs) are taught by lecturers who do not know how to teach

online; ii) ESL (English for Specific Purposes) classes raise concerns about engagement and assessment.

- T [the teacher], presenting slide after slide; interaction with sts [students] is minimal;
- T shows sts how to teach vocabulary. Some pictures are pixelated; all seem to be grabbed from Google without attribution.

(Notes from BA in ELT class observation, January 2021)

- Instructions before breakout room activity were only oral. T gives sts 10 min. Too short? Sts do not fully engage in the breakout room. There is no follow up in the main room.
- End of term reading comprehension exam. Exam is set to take place asynchronously; once started, it needs to be completed within an hour but sts can download the text anytime before they begin the test. Wonder how many sts had it translated on Google, then began the test?

(Notes from ESL class observation, March 2021)

Even so, there are some rays of hope captured in the data, as four language educators (from Korea, New Zealand, Greece, and UK) have contacted me asking for directions and postgraduate degrees that specialise in digital learning. This seems to be signalling an important opportunity for the world of language learning to develop more innovative pedagogies post pandemic.

6. Discussion

This study has found that my experiences during ERT challenged me to go through a *perspective transformation* in the way I see my professional self (DLS) and the context I work in (language education). This section will discuss how these findings fit with existing literature and what the implications are both for the professional self and context.

The literature tends to identify DLS as experts who knew what they were doing throughout ERT. For example, according to Schlesselman (2020), DLS "offered workshops, provided one-on-one consultation, and developed resources in the same way and with the same standards that they were used to" (p. 1042). However, the findings of this research align more with Xie et al. (2021a) who point out that DLS were themselves "in new territory" (p. 72) and had to

develop new skills. There were often compromises in key areas of their practice, but according to Gacs et al. (2020), these compromises are not necessarily negative if they promote “a rapid response” (p. 383). It could also be argued that DLS have the pedagogical and technical expertise to take such risks effectively. However, it is fair to admit that it was not only the teachers who had to compromise, improve, and learn new skills during ERT. It was all stakeholders, including DLS.

With regards to professional identity, Xie et al. (2021a) point out that the visibility and status of the role was boosted institutionally with Digital Learning Specialists (DLS) admitting that they now receive more respect from teaching faculty. As I already had my feet in both camps (by being both a DLS and a lecturer), I cannot entirely identify with this shift. The data shows, however, that ERT helped me significantly to find my voice as a DLS and feel more confident as a professional. It also connected all the different dots of my professional identity together into a more coherent whole; my institutional, freelance, and social media identities are now painting a more unified picture of my professional self.

With regards to digital learning, this research showed that ERT acted as a *disorienting dilemma* (Mezirow, 1991) that forced educational systems to step out of their comfort zones and find creative solutions. In doing so it provided a significant boost to online and digital learning paving the way to the possibilities that we, DLS, have been advocating for years. There is also evidence in the literature to support this; for example, Ferri et al. (2020) indicate that European educational systems are already planning to incorporate digital teaching into their annual teaching plans. Additionally, school leaders in the UK hope that some aspects of remote education can be maintained when schools return to physical classrooms (Ofsted, 2021). ERT has also inspired educators to pursue professional development related to digital learning and to appreciate its educational potential. According to Xie et al. (2021a), even those who were resistant to technology became more willing to acquire new skills. Even if this shift was because teachers did not have a choice but to rely upon technology during ERT (Brereton, 2021), it does signal an important opportunity for digital learning in the post-pandemic era as institutions and teachers are becoming potentially more receptive to the use of technology.

Indeed, the literature predicts “an increased synergy between online and offline learning” (Xie et al., 2021a, p.79) with the two modalities complementing one another after the pandemic (Ofsted, 2021). However, this research

captures concerns over the quality of this synergy in the language education sector. With most language institutions relying on quick fixes over the first phases of ERT (Moser et al., 2021; Mavridi, in press) and with this research showing that there are still significant pedagogical issues in language education, I fear that the less pedagogically sound practices that have been adopted during the pandemic may settle after it.

The literature seems to suggest that these pedagogical inadequacies may reflect a broader gap in the way language education has been approaching digital learning for years. For example, more than a decade ago, Kessler (2005, as cited in Compton, 2009) found that most language teachers seemed to gain their digital learning knowledge from informal rather than formal instruction; according to Hubbard (2008) the reason for this was a shortage of specialised Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) teacher educators and modules in teacher preparation programmes. During the pandemic, the literature confirms that language teachers were provided with generic technology-enhanced professional development rather than specifically designed for them (Moser et al., 2021). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the void was filled by self-proclaimed experts, technology vendors, or companies offering opinion-based, rather than evidence-based solutions (Rapanta et al., 2020; Thompson & Lodge, 2020). Moving forward, language education systems may need to identify TELL as a key priority in both teacher development and teacher preparation programmes in order to enable a more pedagogically informed approach to digital and online learning.

7. Conclusions

This study used autoethnography to understand Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) through the experiences and transformations of a Digital Learning Specialist (DLS). The findings show that ERT had a transformative impact on me as a professional, challenging me to find my inner voice, expose my positionality and develop new skills. The findings also show a clear *perspective transformation* towards ERT itself; As a DLS, I initially thought that the improvised and unprincipled nature of ERT would negatively impact language education. I now believe that ERT has been a beneficial approach for language teaching during the pandemic with the potential of acting as a stepping stone to more pedagogically sound digital instruction in the future. At the same time, I fear that if Technology Enhanced Language learning does not take a more prominent place in teachers’ professional development, ERT may establish itself as a new paradigm of online language learning after the pandemic.

The significance of the research is therefore two-fold:

First, it sheds light on a central but rather under-researched role during Emergency Remote Teaching, that of Digital Learning Specialist. Through supporting teachers to switch to online modalities and develop new skills, DLS also underwent important shifts and transformations. It is likely that after the pandemic the demand for online, hybrid and blended courses will continue, increasing the demand for DLS as well. Therefore, the significance of understanding their perceptions and transformations during the crisis is immense as we move forward.

Second, from the perspective of a DLS who has been actively involved in language education during Covid-19, it sheds light on the implications of ERT for language teaching and learning. Understanding ERT's potential opportunities and challenges is key for both effective action and strategic planning.

An important limitation of this study is that, as an autoethnography, it is informed by the experiences of an individual DLS. Although the breadth of the data was quite extensive both in its qualitative form and geographical contexts, generalising the findings should be handled with caution.

The next step for future research would be to build upon the findings of this paper by bringing in more DLS voices to explore their experiences and perceptions of ERT as we move out of Covid-19. I am also strongly motivated to continue monitoring how ERT develops post-pandemic and how it may prompt me to undergo further transformations as a DLS. After all, as Mezirow (2000) emphasised, transformative learning does not end, but rather inspires the learner to continue learning and transforming.

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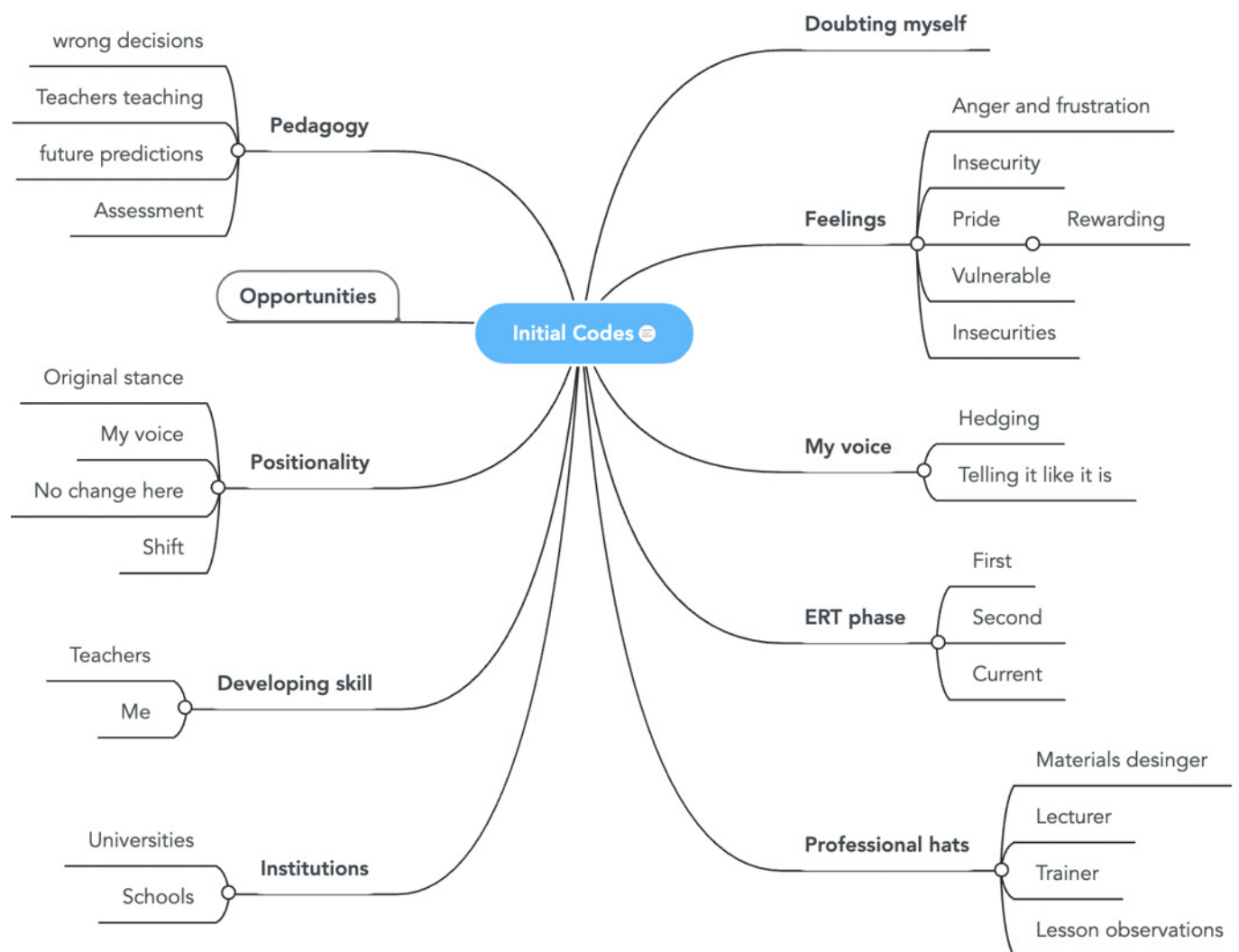
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Appendix A

Figure 3. Initial codes





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Lost in third space: Identity work of a “blended professional” in higher education

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Abstract

This autoethnographic study addresses the salient issue of the fluid professional identity experienced by an increasing number of employees in the continually changing context of higher education. Using the concept of the “Blended Professional in the Third Space” (Whitchurch, 2008, 2012) as a basis, the author explores the aspects influencing her identity as a higher education professional situated in a hybrid and constantly changing space between academic and professional roles. Drawing on the author’s own experience and reflections as an empirical basis, the study investigates how a blended professional deals with inhabiting this hybrid space, what issues she encounters, what opportunities she sees, and how all this impacts her sense of self and the way she constructs her professional identity.

1. Introduction

This autoethnographic study explores my ongoing identity work as a senior lecturer, eLearning specialist, and coordinator of responsible management education at a small university in Austria. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which the author uses self-reflective writing and other personal data to explore and interpret (often challenging) life-experiences, to critically analyse these, and to

connect them with a wider socio-cultural context (Chang, 2008). I have chosen this approach as an appropriate method to reflect on the identity struggles I encounter in my role and to analyse these within a broader context of identity issues in the Higher Education workplace.

As a professional who has spent all her working life in higher education (HE) at four institutions on two continents, dealing with multiple roles, responsibilities and relationships is nothing new for me. However, navigating my current role has raised intensified feelings of uncertainty around my professional self, around my place in the institution, and around my career trajectory. I seem to have lost a stable sense of belonging, of who I am in my current role, and who I want to be in the future in a professional sense. In this study, I will explore the reasons for this crisis of professional identity.

I am not alone in experiencing this “ontological uncertainty” (Hunter, 2020) and the difficulties of creating a stable sense of professional self. A growing body of literature documents the identity struggles of HE staff in the face of massive changes due to both external and internal pressures on HE institutions (Henkel, 2010; Calvert et al., 2012). The impact of these changes on academic staff identities has been discussed widely (Knights & Clarke, 2014; McFarlane, 2011; Hunter 2020). There has, however, been less focus on the identity issues experienced by professional staff situated in the growing, but still ambiguous and hybrid space between academic and administrative roles, an area also termed “Third Space” (Whitchurch, 2008). This autoethnographic study focuses on my experience of being an inhabitant of this “Third Space” (Whitchurch, 2008) and can thus be seen as part of my “identity project” (Giddens, 1991), i.e. of the ongoing effort to make sense of myself through a meaningful narrative.

Having a sense of who we are, and as a consequence, how we should act, is a basic human need and a prerequisite for our interaction with others and the world (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991) argues that whilst pre-modern and modern notions of identity were seen as a given, often based around seemingly fixed aspects such as gender, class, family, locality, etc., this seemingly stable notion of identity was disrupted significantly during late modernism, which saw a transformation of the understanding of self from a fixed concept towards an ongoing task. Identity becomes a “reflexive project” of continually constructing and maintaining a “Narrative of Self”, i.e. a coherent story that helps us make sense of our lives. Identity thus morphs from a rigid, pre-established and non-negotiable concept to one that is flexible, multi-dimensional, and forever evolving. It requires work. Similarly, Jenkins (2004) defines identity as “a

process – identification – not a thing. It is not something that one can have – or not; it is something one does” (p.5).

This study can be seen as an integral part of my active, self-reflective identity work as a HE professional. It is guided by the following research question:

- How do I construct and navigate my professional identity as a HE blended professional in Third Space?

The following sections explore and answer this research question in several stages. First of all, a review of the recent literature provides a discussion of the factors impacting on identity formation of HE employees. Section 3 discusses the concept and context of “blended professionals in the Third Space” (Whitchurch, 2008, 2012), which serves as a theoretical framework and provides the basis for analysis, followed by an explanation of the methodological approach, the data sources and ethical implications. Section 4 describes my development as a blended professional, followed by a deconstruction of the different facets of my professional identity in my current roles in Section 5, which includes an analysis of the multiple aspects that influence my identity work. By establishing challenges and opportunities in Sections 6, I strive to re-construct my professional self through the narrative process. In conclusion, I discuss the implications of my own exploration and analysis for a better understanding of the aspects that allow blended professionals to construct a meaningful narrative of their professional selves within the complexities of working in contemporary HE institutions.

2. Literature review

In the globalised, uncertain, complex world of the 21st century, where identities have become fragile, fractured, multiple, and precarious, constructing a stable sense of self is not an easy undertaking. At the same time, identity work becomes more significant when we find ourselves in circumstances that are in constant flux (Bauman, 2001). As our environment and context change, so do the relationships, accountability and points of reference we use to negotiate our identity, both within ourselves and in relation to others (Knights & Clarke, 2014). Our “self-narrative” becomes more complex, and at the same time more urgent (Giddens, 1991).

In higher education, change has been massive over the past half century. Trends such as the massification of HE, globalisation, technological developments (including online education), neoliberal influences, reduced funding, marketization and competition have driven significant transformations (Henkel, 2010). In Europe, the Bologna

process¹ and the resulting shift toward outcomes based and student-centred learning are an additional impact factor (Henkel, 2010; Kehm, 2015; Zellweger Moser & Bachmann, 2010). These developments have changed how HE institutions operate, how they relate to their students, and what roles and responsibilities are allocated to the different parts of the organisation. New areas have emerged (e.g. Learning Technology Centres), centralised departments have assumed more importance (e.g. Marketing, International Relations), and new pressures drive priorities and funding decisions (e.g. research, accreditation requirements, etc.).

As a consequence, HE workforce – and their sense of professional identity – has been subject to significant shifts. The challenges these changes have brought about are reflected in a growing body of research on academic professional identity, which – once deeply rooted in the shared values and community of the academic discipline – has become more fragile (Calvert, Lewis, & Spindler, 2011; Arvaja, 2018; Cardoso, Batista, & Graça, 2014; Macfarlane, 2011). This phenomenon has been investigated from a variety of perspectives. For example, Knights & Clarke (2014) identified several forms of academic insecurity (imposters, aspirants, existential concerns), arguing that academic professional identity and insecurity are multi-dimensional and interrelated concepts. Calvert et al. (2011) explored how academics establish a sense of identity based on where they decided to put their effort and time. They discovered a strong sense of duty and service, which however came at a cost to their own wellbeing. Investigating yet another angle, Macfarlane (2011) claims that a “hollowing out” (p. 69) of academic roles has occurred, brought about by new managerial models which require specialists rather than academic “all-rounders”. Referring to the traditional roles of academics in the areas of teaching, research and service, he maintains that many of the traditional responsibilities of academic staff, especially those related to student support, have been taken up by non-academic HE professionals, thus “eroding the academic profession’s collective memory about its key purpose” (Macfarlane 2011, p. 71).

While academic staff struggle with re-defining their identity in the face of what Macfarlane labels the “unbundling” of academic practice” (2011, p. 59), the focus in this study is on the identities of those HE staff who are being employed in rising numbers to take up some of these “unbundled”

roles, straddling a space between the academic and non-academic spheres of HE institutions, an area termed “Third Space” by Whitchurch (2008; 2012). Section 3 describes the context and characteristics of these roles, providing the theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis.

3. Theoretical framework

The framework for analysis in this study is based on the work of Whitchurch (2008; 2012; 2018) and her characterisation of “Third Space professionals”. “Third Space”, a concept originally derived from the work of Bhabha (2010), describes the location of encounters between different cultures, where negotiation of meaning occurs, new identities are constructed, and new forms of community develop. Transferring this notion to higher education, Whitchurch (2008; 2012) defines “Third Space” as the emergent territory between academic and professional domains, the sphere that is inhabited by employees who do not fall neatly into the academic group, nor do they solely belong to the non-academic group of staff. Based on her findings in an international study investigating these roles, Whitchurch (2008; 2012) developed a categorization of non-academic staff into bounded professionals, cross-boundary professionals, unbounded professionals, and blended professionals.

We will focus here on the definition of the “blended professionals” who are employed specifically to work across the academic and administrative areas, so their roles are positioned in a hybrid space by design. Blended professionals have varied backgrounds, and their place in the structure of a university can be awkward. Some of them are situated as executive officers or strategic advisers to HE leaders (Smith, Holden, Yu, & Hanlon, 2021), others are part of new “Third Space” organisational units such as eLearning support or technology areas (Beckingham, 2015; Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Stoltenkamp, van de Heyde, & Siebrits, 2017; White, White, & Borthwick, 2021), others again are in traditional areas that have changed their role over time (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Veles, 2016).

Professional identity construction and continuity for “blended professionals” can be difficult (Smith et al., 2021; White et al., 2021). They often lack clear reporting lines or team memberships, and even if these are given, they are only one “base”, with other factors and actors impacting on their role and work. Blended professionals usually work with a range of different stakeholders across organisational boundaries who have their own cultures, languages, and priorities (Veles, Carter, & Boon, 2019). Many blended professionals find themselves in the role of change agents,

¹ The **Bologna Process** is a European HE reform process launched in 1999. It aims to enhance the quality of European HE systems, improve student and staff mobility and collaboration, introduce joint instruments such as the European Credit Transfer System and quality assurance standards.

disrupting existing practices and complacencies for others (Smith et al., 2021). There is also a lack of clear career pathways for these professionals (Moran & Misra, 2018), who frequently forge their own path, often in the form of “portfolio careers”. All these conditions impact on self-perception, require frequent adaptation and development of one’s approaches, allegiances and self-representation, and make identity work constant and complex.

As an increasing number of HE staff are experiencing these circumstances, more work is required that explores the nuances of how these professionals experience their evolving identity in the Third Space. The framework discussed here provides a solid foundation for analysis, individual self-reflection, and interpretation. There is, however, a lack of studies that provide authentic insights into the Third Space professional experience from blended professionals themselves. My autoethnographic study addresses this gap in the literature with a contribution that draws on the elements of Whitchurch’s framework, but is embedded in a specific context, background, and biography, and speaks with an authentic voice.

4. Methodology

This study employs autoethnography, a research method which uses self-reflective autobiographical data as its basis and has the purpose of “understanding self and its connection to others” (Chang, 2008), p. 56). Firmly rooted in qualitative and interpretive research paradigms, autoethnography is a form of self-narrative writing that “combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative detail” (Chang, 2008, p. 46). Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis (2014) propose that “when we do autoethnography, we look inward – into our identities, thoughts, feelings, experiences – and outward – into our relationships, communities and cultures” (p. 46).

Autoethnographic studies share a number of characteristics (Adams et al., 2014):

- They focus on personal experience;
- They describe the process of sense-making of the autoethnographer;
- They emphasise reflexivity;
- They provide deep insights into the socio-cultural setting;
- They include critical analysis of cultural norms and practices;
- They seek to engage their audience.

These characteristics make autoethnography a particularly suitable method for this study. My research aim is to explore my professional identity work in the context of the HE culture I find myself in, and through the process of writing². Adding authentic reflections based on lived experience to the discussion about blended professional identity contributes insider knowledge and in-depth interpretation, and offers opportunities for the researcher as well as her audience. Engaging in autoethnographic research can trigger profound self-reflection on the researcher’s own situation and role. This can help her develop a deeper understanding of her own complex emotions, perceptions, and thoughts (Lee, 2020), potentially enabling a greater sense of self both in terms of her own needs and in terms of her social relationships, roles, and actions at work. The research results can illustrate, deepen and expand the understanding of this space and thus contribute to the body of knowledge exploring HE roles, identity issues, and career development. This is useful for other blended professionals in similar situations, but also for those in their immediate context, for supervisors, colleagues, and others working with these types of roles.

Autoethnography is often criticized for being self-indulgent and not analytic enough to be a serious form of research (Anderson, 2006). In order to mitigate this potential weakness, I have used multiple data sources as the basis of this study, consisting of a short narrative and a visual timeline describing my career, a “Role-Gram” illustrating the different roles and relationships I have, self-reflective writing in the form of 20 Vignettes, and an interview with a colleague.

My curriculum vitae is presented in a timeline and short narrative and describes my career development, illustrating the evolution of my professional roles in HE in two different countries and provides the background for my identity dilemmas explored from a historical perspective.

A “Role-Gram”, an adapted version of the “Culture-Gram” proposed by Chang (2008), structures and details the different identities I perceive in my current role at work in the format of a mindmap. Chang’s model has the purpose of allowing “people to visualise their social selves” (Chang, 2008). My Role-Gram has a tighter focus and less dimen-

²Even though this study mainly focuses on my professional identity, it is important to mention some key identification aspects that are likely to have an impact on my experience. I am female, mid-career, have gathered experience in different HE institutions on different continents, and am the main breadwinner in a family of four. Exploring these factors as contextual determinants of my professional identity work would go beyond the scope of this study, but they should be noted.

sions than Chang's model as it is limited to my professional context rather than including broader life perspectives. It is a useful analytical tool to identify different aspects of my the different roles my job entails, including how I view my identities in each role and how these are related to the different groups of people I work with.

The core data set for empirical analysis consists of 20 "Vignettes" of self-observational and reflective writing composed over six weeks in early 2021. The Vignette titles and a short summary are provided in table 1. Vignettes 1 - 4 are reflections on my past experiences leading up to the current crisis of identity and serve as important catalysts to bring to the fore perceptions of myself in past employment situations, which have a strong impact on how I see myself in my current role. Vignettes 5-19 were written after critical incidents at work during the reflection process and provide insight into current situations and my feelings about them, with a focus on how they reinforce or change my sense of identity. Vignette 20 is a concluding reflection on possible future developments of my professional identity.

In order to validate my reflections and include another perspective, I conducted a narrative interview with a trusted work colleague. The interviewee was selected based a number of grounds: she knows me and my work, is not part of my immediate work team, has no invested interest in my professional area, and she knows the institution I work in well. She is also a person who has experience in coaching and advising others on career decisions. The narrative interview was conducted face-to-face, using a set of foundational questions and was subsequently transcribed.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012), inductively identifying themes as they emerged from the vignettes in a cyclical process of analysing, coding, validating, and creating themes, which are expressed in different facets of "identity". The resulting themes were correlated with the literature. For the coding process and the development of themes the software Atlas.ti was used.

There are ethical implications that require consideration in this study. According to Adams et al. (2014), [autoethnographers] "must be equally committed to conducting their work responsibly and ethically; they must consider the personal, relational, and institutional risks and responsibilities of doing autoethnography" (p. 25). This autoethnography is set in a real workplace and includes reference to my relationships with others and to institutional practices, some of which I find difficult. Whilst I have taken care to maintain anonymity of people I have mentioned, it may be possible

to identify certain persons for those who are familiar with the organisation. I have taken care to stay objective in my description of certain incidents and fair in my representation of others. Readers should remember that the narrative is my personal and subjective perspective.

In the following sections I focus on answering the research question by first providing a narrative of my development as a blended professional and a description of the characteristics of my role that identify me as a member of this group. After establishing these circumstances, I define the profiles of four distinct professional identities resulting from the data analysis with critical reference to the literature. These are constructions of my professional identity that have resulted from the self-reflective narrative process I have engaged with in the course of writing this research. The conclusion offers a summary of the key findings.

5. Becoming a "Blended Professional" in the Third Space

In order to understand how I conceive of my identity in my current role, it is necessary to look at how my career has developed. The timeline (Figure 1) shows the key stations in my career path, spanning at total of 25 years. It is important to note that I worked at four different institutions and that a majority of my career in terms of years and the steepest career progression took place in Australia. My return to Austria was a side-step in my career and marks the start of a less linear and more fragmented development.

After finishing my master's degree, I started my career as an assistant lecturer at the English department in a strictly academic context, with teaching, research and administrative duties. My roles were clearly defined, and I was part of a small team of other assistant lecturers who all fulfilled similar duties. After two years I was offered a project position in the educational technology area of the university and was soon appointed Coordinator, New Media in Teaching, a newly created position reporting to the pro-vice chancellor, Teaching and Evaluation as well as the head of IT Services.

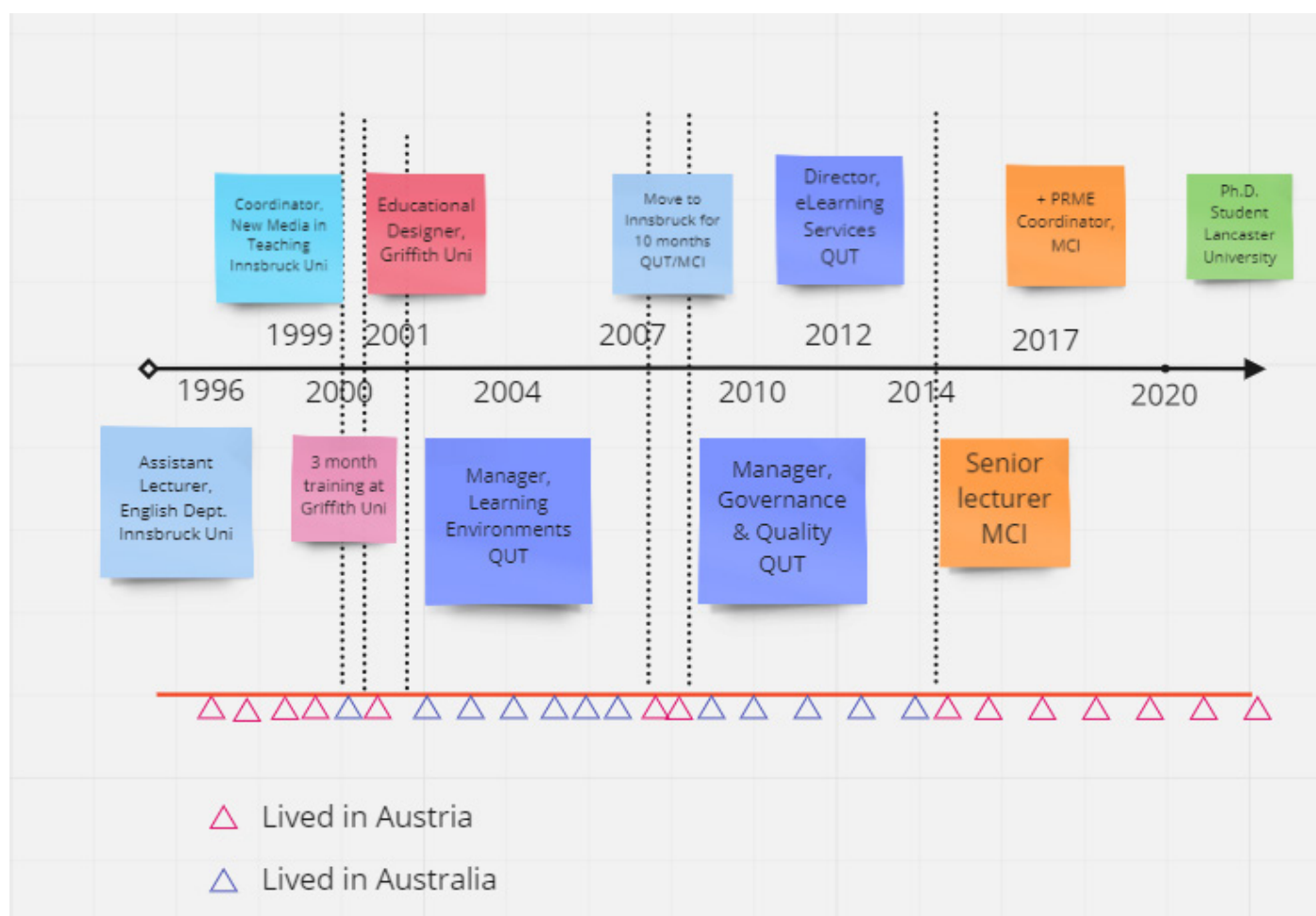
This was a big step for me. Leaving a strictly academic role to venture into a field that was new for me and new for the university was exciting, but came with big challenges at the same time. There were competing interests at the university. I keenly felt the rift between the technical and academic areas, which I had to balance. My still forming sense of professional identity was challenged, and there were only few allies I felt I could relate to.

Table 1. Overview of self-reflective Vignettes

Vignette 1: DIGGING IN THE PAST	Reflections on the development of my career, the different roles I held, opportunities taken and not taken, and how various styles of my leaders and other contextual aspects helped or hindered my development.
Vignette 2: LONGING FOR DOWN UNDER	Describes my feelings of homesickness for Australia and the aspects I miss both about the physical place and about my professional context.
Vignette 3: THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE	Reflections on moving from Australia to Austria, and the impact this has had on my family and myself.
Vignette 4: THE LUNCH THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING	Describes a critical incident which changed my sense of identity in the team, my relationship with my manager, and my professional security.
Vignette 5: THE MISSING LABEL	Illustrates the difficulties involved in having a role that is not easy to define and encompasses many different responsibilities.
Vignette 6: THE BROKER (WITHOUT A LICENSE)	Reflections on my role as project manager across different teams and the sense that I am assuming authority I may not have.
Vignette 7: THE ACTIVIST (WHO ISN'T ONE)	Describes my passion for responsible management education and my enthusiasm for furthering this field at my institution, but also the unclear legitimacy I have to do so.
Vignette 8: MORE WORK FOR ME	Illustrates how I create more work for myself in a project that is self-initiated but not sanctioned.
Vignette 9: THE FRIENDLY - ORGANISED - MOTIVATING TEACHER	Reflections on my role as an educator based on the feedback received from students through course evaluation.
Vignette 10: THE EU PROJECT	Account of my reactions to a new project I am leading in collaboration with six European partner Universities, and my excitement to start something new and creative, together with international partners.
Vignette 11: THE MUDDLE WITH THE SPIN-OFF	Describes a situation where lack of information and thorough planning leads to frustration.
Vignette 12: THE FACULTY WORKSHOP	Documents my sentiments after a successful faculty workshop, which has energised and uplifted me.
Vignette 13: THE STUDENT CONNECTION	Illustrates an example of direct collaboration with a student team who are planning a sustainability initiative.
Vignette 14: THE ETHICS COMMITTEE MEETING	Describes my participation in the Research Ethics committee, explaining activities and responsibilities and how I enjoy having a legitimate and active role.
Vignette 15: THE ACCREDITATION (THAT WAS AND THEN WASN'T A PRIORITY)	Reflections on my involvement in preparing for an accreditation, highlighting lack of clear communication.
Vignette 16: INTRODUCTION AT THE INTERVIEW	Account of my experience as part of an interview panel, where I found it difficult to clearly explain to the applicant what my role is
Vignette 17: THE MENTORING PROGRAM	Describes a project I conducted with a colleague outside the department, which was a great success and which I really enjoyed.
Vignette 18: THE TEAM MEETING	Illustrates how I feel awkward after a team meeting, where I report on my various activities because they seem so remote from what the rest of the team does.

Table 1. (cont.) Overview of self-reflective Vignettes

Vignette 19: THE MEETING THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN	Reflections on a critical incident where a meeting that was important to me was cancelled and the impact this had on me.
Vignette 20: THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FUTURE	Captures thoughts about the future of my career and raises existential questions about what path I should take.

Figure 1. Career timeline

After a year, I was sent to a partner university in Australia to work with them for three months. The Australian university had a strategic focus on online education and a large team of professionals in their eLearning department. I could not only take away significant knowledge and expertise, but for the first in my career I felt at home professionally – I had found my tribe, a community that shared my language, my sense of purpose, my interest in helping learners and faculty, and my desire to explore and develop the opportunities offered by learning technology. The three months passed quickly, and I returned to Austria much enriched, but also feeling that I left

behind a professional family of sorts, and part of my identity that I knew would not prevail in my work context.

About a year later, the Australian university offered me a position, and I returned initially for six months, but ended up staying for the next 14 years. Feeling like I was getting another chance to become what I was meant to be professionally, I quickly worked my way up from Educational Designer to various management roles. In 2012, I finally became interim Director for eLearning Services. In this position, I was in charge of a department of about 45 staff and

reported to the Deputy Vice Chancellor. This was a period of massive change in the organisation. I did my best to navigate the competing demands, the side-digs from senior colleagues who were pursuing their own agendas, and the insecurity all this created amongst my staff. It was stressful, and it turned me off senior management roles. When the position was advertised permanently, I decided not to apply, partly because I had enough of the politics and stress I had experienced, but mainly because I wanted to move back to Europe with my family. This was a significant turning point in my career, and I made a conscious decision that roles managing large teams of people were not what I wanted to continue doing.

I accepted a job at a small but ambitious university of applied sciences in Austria, which offered me a role in building up their online learning program. I was familiar with the institution, having spent 10 months there during a secondment several years earlier, and I knew both my future line manager and the Vice Chancellor. We agreed that I would take on a role as senior lecturer, do some teaching, but would mainly concentrate on building up the eLearning capacity of the institution within a small team of four. Although I was taking a massive side step in my career progression, I was excited by the thought of starting something new and working with an ambitious and motivated team. I knew I would get along well with my line manager, whom I regarded as an equal and friend. We agreed that we would work in partnership, share responsibilities, and I would act as his deputy.

The first few years were great. We worked hard on developing a number of online programs, established a faculty development program, and worked closely with other stakeholders. I enjoyed the creative work, the collaboration with colleagues, and sharing my knowledge with others immensely. My manager and I shared an office, which meant I was familiar with what was going on and communication was easy, not requiring much effort or planning.

The reputation of our team grew, and so did the demands and the workload. I had taken on some additional tasks and projects in the area of responsible management education that were not in the direct brief of the team, and this required me to liaise directly with the Vice Chancellor. I worked on another project with the head of the Career Center. I met other people through these and further activities. We moved to a bigger office and I no longer shared a space with my line manager. My sense of my position in the team changed.

2019 was a busy year with a high teaching load and several projects that demanded a lot of time. In the middle

of a stressful week, my manager asked me to have a talk. He told me about a few of my tasks that had not been completed the way he had hoped and asked me if I still wanted to be part of his team. I was shocked. I thought I had worked hard and was getting good results. I did not see this coming.

This critical incident was a significant turning point for me. It made me question my identity in terms of my position in the team, my motivation to pursue projects outside the teams' core portfolio, and the way I related to my line manager and other colleagues. My professional identity that had been relatively stable and secure up to this point suddenly became an issue. There was a rupture in the narrative, a dissonance that has been growing since then. This sense of loss and unease prompted me to engage in critical self-reflection and provides the basis for this autoethnographic study. In the next two sections, I will first discuss what makes me a "Blended Professional in the Third Space" and then analyse factors that impact – positively and negatively - my identity work in this role.

6. What makes me a "blended professional" in the third space?

Whitchurch (2012) defines "blended professionals" as "dedicated appointments spanning professional and academic domains" (p.408). Blended professionals are often required to work in ambiguous conditions, to understand different perceptions of the institution, to build partnerships and networks with a range of stakeholders, and to deal with diverse and potentially competing agendas. Whitchurch (2009) identifies four defining aspects impacting blended professionals: space, relationships, languages and legitimacies.

My current roles and responsibilities are clearly defined by these aspects. My duty statement includes teaching (which makes up about 40% of my overall workload), strategy development, faculty training and support for online learning. In terms of space, this situates me between the academic and the administrative/support areas of the institution. Organisationally, I am a member of a central service supporting online teaching and consisting of the manager and eight staff. Over time, I have developed many other ties to colleagues across and beyond the institution, so my relationships include a wide network. Depending on the context, I have to adapt to different languages, both in the use of actual languages (German or English) and in terms of adopting the specific terms, jargon, acronyms, etc. of a department, external partner organisation, or project group. My legitimacies are partly derived from my role in

Figure 2. Role-Gram



my immediate work team or as a lecturer, however there are other areas where they stem from directions from university management, and sometimes through my own active engagement.

The professional Role-Gram (Figure 2) is adapted from the concept of a Culture-Gram developed by Chang, which has the purpose of allowing “people to visualise their social selves” (Chang, 2008). It is used here to visualise my professional selves, including the aspects of space, relationships, and legitimacies discussed above. For each area (space)

of responsibility, I have identified a minimum of three descriptors that define how I see my role (legitimacies) in relation to the relevant groups I work with (relationships). The language aspects is not described explicitly here, and also plays a minor role in my experience overall. It implicitly impacts on the three other dimensions, but is not as prevalent as those or as relevant for my identity struggles.

Apart from the academic roles (teaching, research), all of my other responsibilities fall into what can be described as “Third Space” activities. They vary in their focus, but they encompass mostly strategic agendas either in the area of digital competences, online learning and teaching, or responsible management education. As the descriptors demonstrate, I see my role in most of the activity spheres as a driver, coordinator, and expert, in some of them as innovator/creator and explorer, and in others as broker or connector.

The Role-Gram illustrates the complexity of my role and confirms the notion that HE professionals are

“no longer being defined by their roles, accountabilities and position descriptions, but rather by complex and constructed identities, their relationships with other university communities and by their own perception of what it means to be professional in the contemporary higher education environment” (Velas, 2016).

This corresponds closely with the core functions and characteristics of blended professionals identified in the literature. Whitchurch (2018) emphasises the fact that blended professionals are likely to pursue a range of different agendas and may need to deal with tensions and competing priorities in doing so. Thus, the “location and ownership of professional activities [...] may well be subject to ongoing negotiation.” (Whitchurch, 2018, p. 10). Salden (2012), whilst questioning if Third Space is indeed a new phenomenon in HE, points to the fact that the number of personnel in this category is growing significantly, and that the novelty

lies more in the need for a better definition of their complex professional identities and their quest for clearer positioning or belonging within the organisation. Schneiderberg et al. (2013) discuss the roles of Third Space professionals, which they term Higher Education Professionals (HEPROS), in relation to academic and administrative university staff. They identify new and emerging functions in university administration as well as an unbundling of the role of the traditional academic role, leading to differentiation, which in turn leads to identity issues.

These findings in existing research confirm my personal experience as a professional working under these circumstances, and validate my sense of disorientation. In the next section, I explore how the multi-faceted aspects of my professional identity are constructed and what challenges and opportunities they entail.

7. Perceptions of identity

The aim of this study is to analyse how I construct and navigate my professional identity in the context described above. Consequently, the data analysis focussed on identifying units of meaning and themes which were clustered, resulting in four distinct facets of my professional identity:

- The creative professional with strong values and motivation
- The autonomous (change) agent lacking strategic impact and direction
- The un-belonging team worker, networker and lateral leader
- The experienced professional with a career ahead

These labels demonstrate a sense of self with both positive and ambivalent connotations and some qualifying descriptors. In the following, I will discuss each identity in the context of my authentic experience and with reference to the relevant literature.

7.1 Identity 1: The creative professional with strong values and motivation

Many of the positively connoted activities in the data analysed are related to creating something new: a new curriculum, a new skills framework, a new format for online content, a new student initiative, a new mentoring program. This confirms the notion that Third Space is often a creative zone, an incubation space, where innovation happens and new approaches are tested (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Conway, 2013).

In these projects, I can be inventive, apply and expand my expertise, and collaborate with others in the development of something meaningful. These aspects are central to the construction of my professional identity. As the adjectives used to describe my emotions show, involvement in these activities makes me feel “excited”, “happy”, “pleased”, “proud”, “passionate” and “energized”. This is reflected in the feedback from my colleague:

“I see you as ... an expert in different areas and also as someone who has the ability to create new things, who can develop projects, innovate and coordinate.” (Interview 1)

There is also a strong emphasis on being engaged in meaningful work and putting my energy into tasks that are aligned with my educational values. This is especially noticeable in the section below:

“I do this work not because I want to get something out of it personally but because I believe that we as an institution and as a society are not doing nearly enough when it comes to preparing our students for the challenges the future will hold for them.” (Vignette 6)

On the other hand, there are some activities that are demotivating:

“Doing menial tasks such as technical support is something I am not very keen on (and to be quite honest also feel I should not be doing at this stage of my career and at the level I am at), but is also part of my role.” (Vignette 7)

The emphasis on expertise, innovation and creativity as well as meaningful work can be seen as an expression of the basic human needs that impact motivation generally, and specifically in the workplace (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). It also becomes clear that professional and personal identities are hardly separable, especially when it comes to the alignment of values. Our professional identities are “also a matter of what we care about in the world [which] ... cannot be blocked of, hidden or erased as one transitions into new professional roles and settings.” (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018).

Deci et al. (2017) maintain that identification with the values and meaning of one’s work results in “enhanced qualities for work motivation” (p.24). Similarly, Whitchurch argues that internal motivation can be driven by the desire to promote and drive initiatives that have an impact on and

develop different invested groups, thus also providing “a sense of legitimacy” (Whitchurch 2012, p. 73). This is certainly the case for my engagement in the PRME³ initiative:

“I spend hours (night and day) dreaming up new initiatives and activities, I try involving colleagues who are interested and want to contribute through the PRME task force, and I try engaging students at different levels. I also feel I have been able to help shift the rector’s attitude towards the topic.” (Vignette 7)

In summary, creativity, meaningful work and alignment with my values are strong drivers and an important foundation of this part of my professional identity.

7.2 Identity 2: The autonomous (change) agent lacking strategic impact and direction

While I enjoy the autonomy that allows me to be the creative professional, there are also issues associated with this freedom. They are related to strategic alignment, legitimacy, and lack of guidance.

I am convinced that the work I do is important. However, because of the absence of clearly defined institutional goals in this area, I am seeing myself at risk of “mission drift” (Smith et al., 2021). Because of my ambiguous role within the organisational hierarchy, I do not have access to the structures that shape and influence strategic directions. My line manager does not see some of the activities led by me as his responsibility. This has the consequence that the activities I lead are not represented in the leadership team, as the following passage illustrates:

“There is nobody in the leadership team who reports on these activities, so they remain unreported in the ‘upper circle’ of the institution.” (Vignette 18)

Strategic alignment in the sense of “should I do this or not” is discussed in informal discussions that give me a sense of direction. But they only happen sporadically and when I initiate them.

Legitimacy of what I do as part of my core team is a related issue, which becomes apparent in this reflection after a team meeting:

³ PRME stands for Principles of Responsible Management Education and is an initiative of the United Nations Global Compact that aims to embed responsibility, sustainability and ethics into the business school curricula. It is a global network consisting of over 800 business schools.

“I feel a bit like I am stealing time from my “real job” (whatever that is). I do run ideas and thoughts past my line manager, and he is very supportive of them in our talks. He has also frequently commented that my enthusiasm for this topic is palpable. However, when it comes to actually putting ideas into practice, I often feel like I have to defend what I am doing.” (Vignette 7)

My search for strategic direction is related to the signals I receive from my line manager. How much I rely on him to confirm my actions is demonstrated by my disappointment when he cancels a long-planned one-on-one meeting:

“Due to the many different projects I am involved in, I find it really important to update him [my line manager] frequently, and we have agreed on this being an important aspect of working together. His email says simply that he can’t make the meeting but that we will probably find some time next week. No alternative suggestion for a good time, no reason why he can’t make it.” (Vignette 19)

The frustration here results from my sense of lack of direction and leadership. In addition, the need to connect with my manager also derives from wanting to re-connect with the base and to relate, which is at the core of a further facet of my identity.

7.3 Identity 3: The un-belonging team worker, net-worker and lateral leader

The importance of belonging comes through strongly in my reflections, and is related to space (including physical location) and relationships.

My position in the team gives me legitimacy as a digital learning and teaching expert and as someone who is knowledgeable about digital competences. It was for this expertise that I was hired, and it is still formally spelled out in my duty statement that I spend about 60% of my time in this space. It is not, however, represented in my position name, “Senior Lecturer,” which is very generic. On the one hand, this allows for flexibility and agility in terms of my developing roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, it echoes the lack of clarity of my role, and the difficulties of identification which arise from this. The narrative in the vignettes reflects a strong feeling of uncertainty about where I belong.

“I am also unsure about what a stronger focus on this area [PRME] would mean for my position in the organisation. Would I still be part of the team? Would I move

into another area? Would I be team- and homeless? Questions upon questions, and with that quite a lot of insecurity and a sense of un-belonging.” (Vignette 20)

My relationships with the colleagues in my team is friendly and honest, and we work together very well. However, as I started to work more closely with colleagues in other departments, and as some of the initial projects became ongoing activities, the ties within the team weakened. This is mirrored in the feedback from my colleague, who observed:

“Your connections outside of your department are stronger than those within.” (Interview 1)

This sometimes leads to a certain dissonance as I feel that the “outside” activities I undertake are not really seen as “team activities” but as something I do personally, beyond the remit of the team.

“I often have the feeling I have to “prove” ... that I am pulling my weight also with those things, which are often picked up by my two more junior colleagues. After my “critical incident” a few years ago [when my line manager asked me if I still wanted to be part of the team], I am constantly on edge with regards to not appearing as if I don’t contribute to the team.” (Vignette 7)

The long period of working remotely during the 2020 pandemic, the resulting move to a different office a few floors from the main office and the social distancing necessary have aggravated this situation.

Despite these difficulties, the relationships I have, both inside and outside my team, are strong, valuable and important to me:

“Working with these multiple teams and stakeholders is fun, rewarding, and gives me a lot of exposure to different parts of the organisation.” (Vignette 1)

My internal and cross-boundary networks shown in the Role-Gram put me in a good position to identify linkages, synergies and opportunities for collaboration, and they enable my role of broker and lateral leader and develop “university cross-border collaborative capital” (Veles et al., 2019). This “subtle lateral leadership” role was emphasised in the interview with my colleague:

“You have a wide radius of influence ... [which] is not based on your function, but on you as a person, your personality. You are someone who likes to share her

knowledge, who wants to develop things, who can take herself back, and who values the contribution and input of others.” (Interview 1)

Whitchurch also emphasises this characteristic of blended professionals, who “build their credibility on a personal basis, via lateral relationships with colleagues inside and outside the university.” (Whitchurch 2008, p. 394).

The opportunities presenting themselves through my involvement in internal and external projects, the relationships I am able to develop, and the possibility to apply my expertise and make a difference in different contexts compensate for the unease I experience as a member of my immediate team. They also play a role in terms of my professional growth and career development, the topic of the next identity aspect.

7.4 Identity 4: The experienced professional with a career ahead

Engaging in this autoethnographic work has enabled me to analyse my current role and identify opportunities and challenges. This has given me a clearer sense of how I see myself in the organisation, including the values I hold, the assets I have, and the issues I need to tackle. It has also prompted reflection on how I should approach my future career development.

Kehm (2015) asserts that HE professional roles rarely have career progression models, even though they frequently contribute to the professionalization of other parts of the university. This is also the case at my institution. While – as a senior lecturer – I can pursue an academic career progression model, it would mean increasing my teaching load, conducting more research, and in essence giving up my “Third Space” role. This is not really where I want to head. However there are no other formal progression options. There are also doubts about my professional expertise and knowledge regarding taking a different direction:

“I have spent my life in online learning and teaching. This is where my expertise is, this is what my core professional background is, this is where I am on the ball with current literature. I am not an expert in sustainability education by any means. I have picked up a lot since I have become engaged in this area, but I still feel that I do not have the credentials to really claim expertise and professional experience in this area.” (Vignette 20)

The absence of this charted career path prompts me to find possibilities to grow and develop as a professional in other ways. For example, I have recently taken on a role as my institution’s lead in a project on digital skills with partners from five universities across Europe. This provides me with the opportunity to collaborate with new colleagues and to use both my subject matter expertise and my project management skills to work towards a joint outcome.

“This project is a very welcome addition to my responsibilities. We will create something new and meaningful for our students’ future skills development, and I have the opportunity to work with a team of colleagues at different universities. I will also be able to position myself within the wider network, which might lead to future opportunities for collaboration and connection.” (Vignette 10)

In addition, I have recently enrolled in a Ph.D. program, which has given me access to an additional academic world. Here, I can experiment with new ways of thinking, develop my research skills, and engage with a group of peers and with tutors at a different level in a collegial way geared towards advancing learning and scholarship.

These activities allow me to grow intellectually, professionally and personally, work in new contexts, and connect with an extended network of colleagues across different countries, sectors, and interests. My engagement here is a step toward a future self that might struggle less with issues of legitimacy and belonging. It is an effort to take a proactive approach toward the structural and interpersonal challenges of my current position and to further develop my professional portfolio. It will also allow me to position myself more strategically and strongly within my current institution and – just as importantly – in my own perception and narrative of my professional identity.

8. Implications and conclusion

Blended professionals constitute a growing and integral part of the HE workforce today. The space they inhabit continues to evolve, posing challenges in terms of their professional identification. Through the analysis of my experience in a blended role, this study has resulted in a number of findings that have relevance beyond my individual situation.

Firstly, my findings underline the importance of reflective practice for professionals in similar roles. Through reflection, analysis, writing about and illustrating layers of my role, as well as constructing different versions of my identity, I have

come to a much better understanding of my position, my values, challenges, motivations and options. The significance of reflective practice is confirmed in the literature. Smith et al. assert that “professionals who examine their evolving identities and expertise may be better positioned to address ambiguity or positional liminality barriers in their work” (Smith et al. 2021, p. 11). Behari-Leak & Le Roux argue that “the assertion of a personal identity in the professional space is ... an active and reflective process ... and, when attained, can be considered an achievement.” (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018).

Further, my study reiterates – and in some instances adds to – the essential factors for Third Space professionals to be successful, effective and confident in their roles: clear organisational goals, good communication, opportunities for creativity and meaningful work, support from supervisors are all necessary prerequisites to confirm legitimacy and enable blended professionals to thrive in the often uncharted contexts they operate in. The role of supervisors is also emphasised by Smith et al. (2021) who maintain that apart from providing direction and purpose, “the leaders who oversee our work also serve as mentors for developing our capacity as third space staff” (Smith et al., 2021), p.11). They also play a role in rewarding work and motivating us.

Finally, my results confirm the absence of a clear career development model for blended professionals, which is also reported in the literature (Kehm, 2015; Moran & Misra, 2018). This may lead to a lack of perspective and frustration and should be addressed by institutions. In the absence of clear progression opportunities, creative professionals will construct their own unique portfolios and profiles, and assert their identities as well as their legitimate place in the organisation through these, as long as they are recognised and rewarded accordingly.

This study has obvious limitations due to the uniqueness of my experience, which is not only determined by the specific conditions in my workplace but also influenced by the contextual aspects of my background and circumstances. However, the key outcomes can be transferred to other settings and may also inform further exploration of this topic.

Future research should include more authentic voices (like my own in this study) who deepen our understanding of the real issues affecting professionals in the Third Space and add diversity at the same time. Further investigation is also necessary to explore appropriate leadership approaches and support for these roles, considering autonomy, motivation, rewards and recognition, and career progression. In light of the rapidly changing work contexts experienced by

many professionals today, it would be important to explore the emergence of Third Space professionals in organisational contexts beyond HE such as the primary and secondary education sector, or indeed any area where traditional roles and boundaries are in flux, and new roles emerge as a consequence.

In conclusion, I am hoping that my study may be helpful to professionals in comparable roles who are on a similar quest for their place in the institution and for a more secure professional identity.

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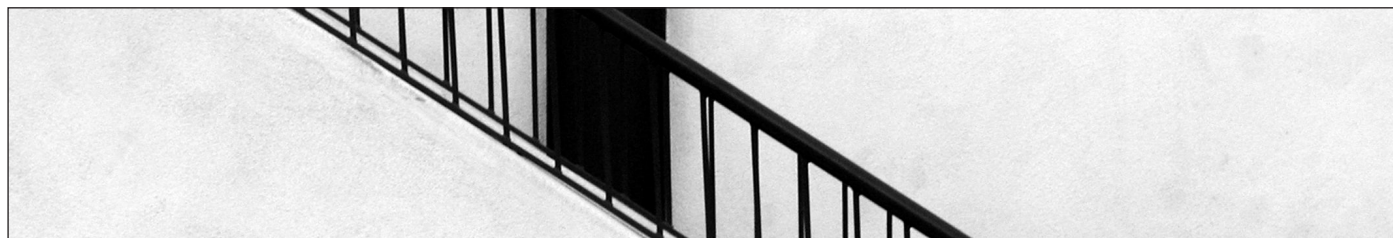
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Surviving institutional racism as a Chinese female in UK higher education

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Keywords

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Abstract

This autoethnography examines how my experience of microaggression, covert and overt racism is a result of a systemic failure to tackle racism in one particular UK university. In this paper, I reflect on my journey from being a student to a senior-junior staff struggling to break the glass ceiling to finally now a junior-senior staff in Higher Education. I have been through stages of being hopeful, defeated, fighting back and eventually being hopeful again. I hope my survival can help other non-white women to get a better understanding that some of our experiences are not because of who we are, but rather the system in which we are locked in.

1. This is personal

I came to the UK when I was 15, I was the only non-white kid in my class. I befriended a couple of British kids and I learned the British way of life very quickly. I share the same cultural values as my white counterparts and much to my shame, I also share some of the same prejudices. For many years now, I speak, think and even dream almost exclusively in English. I see things through the lens of a white British person and I am much more comfortable being around them than my own people. In my everyday life, I am seen as an equal to them; I am practically white. Despite

this, my career trajectory in UK higher education (HE) in the last 15 years has painted a very different picture; I have been met with obstacles after obstacles in one particular UK university - Uni A.

I want to understand why my experience from within the HE system is so different to my everyday life? I believe institutional racism is responsible, as it is something that is deeply embedded in the UK HE sector. Professor David Richardson, chair of Universities UK has acknowledged that "... a lot of evidence points towards universities perpetuating systemic racism" and "being institutionally racist." (The Guardian, 2021). Professor Richardson even apologises on behalf of the sector for being institutionally racist on national television earlier this year (BCC, 2021).

Throughout this autoethnography, I have critically analysed if I have been a victim of the deeply rooted cultural injustices (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015) that are part of the fabric of the UK HE culture. I want to know if institutional racism is to blame for my negative experience in HE?

Often researchers use autoethnography as the methodology for similar reasons; we want to reflect on our lived experiences and to critique social injustice that has been imposed upon us, in an attempt to affect positive changes. Autoethnographies are meant to be deeply personal about the researchers' stories, they expose our raw emotions but also sit in the "intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political." (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p.1). Therefore, whilst this paper is subjective with my views and memories of certain events, I have also provided objective facts and voices from others in an attempt to thoroughly understand if any particular person were to blame or if the culture needs to change? I want to know if the colour of my skin is the reason why my career progression has been affected.

Primary data includes various communications I have had with friends and colleagues over the years:

- *Email communication:* As a union member, every time I feel I have been treated unfairly, I email my union representatives for advice. Therefore, most of the events included in this paper can be verified by email exchanges. These emails also helped refresh my memories of exactly what happened and when.
- *Formal complaint documents and meeting minutes:* One particular chain of events eventually led to a formal complaint. I have revisited the complaint documents, communication and meeting minutes to corroborate my memory.

- *WhatsApp and text messages:* Private communication with friends whenever I felt something negative has happened; these exchanges are less objective, but they are records of my emotions and reactions to particular moments.
- *Twitter:* I reactivated my Twitter account in March 2020 to start building my external networks. On a few occasions, I have used it to publicly discuss unfair treatments either I or my colleagues have received. These were passive-aggressive and probably childish attempts to openly signal how we are affected by institutional racism in our workplace.
- *Private conversations:* Most of the communications have been verbal between myself and others, therefore, I used an autobiographical timeline (Chang, 2016), as shown in Figure 1, to help compartmentalise relevant memories and reflection of my life in HE between 2005 and 2021. I have written a short account of how I remember each of the events included in the timeline. I am aware that my memories might be unreliable and my intense emotions when revisiting these painful memories might dramatise the actual events (Chang, 2016).

Using multiple data sources, I hope they can corroborate the validity of my memories, which given the topic, has more than likely been reconstructed taking in cultural and political consideration (Creswell, 2014). I triangulated the data using the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2019). This particular approach allowed me to develop and reshape my codes and themes as the study developed, to support my reflection of my mental and actual experiences. I attempted to maintain a balance between a more objective interpretation of the data by developing semantic codes (Braun & Clarke, 2018), as well as using latent codes to reflect on my emotions (Braun & Clarke, 2018). Critical reflection is crucial in this paper because it is "focused on uncovering these hegemonic assumptions (beliefs/common sense/blinding prejudices that are deeply embedded in our accepted culture), which permeate the context invading and distorting one's life, both in the intimate and social spheres." (Mortari, 2015, p.4).

I have used pseudonyms for everyone included in this paper to minimise the risk of them being identified. I acknowledge that my interpretation of what happened will likely upset them. However, I hope they would understand my reason for disclosing these very upsetting memories is to try and draw some closure for me, also to give my readers a better understanding of the harm institutional racism can cause. Relational ethics is complex in autoethnographies, as they are often written out of love, guilt or a sense of trying

Timeline visualization of significant events from 2002 to 2021, categorized by Positive, Negative, and Neutral events.

Legend:

- Positive (Green circle)
- Negative (Red circle)
- Neutral (Grey circle)

Timeline:

- Jan 2002:** Moved in the flat, started a new life.
- Sept 2002 - Jun 2005:** Did my GCSE and A-levels, was the only non-white kid in class, as practically grew up a white kid, got really good results so had the pick of top universities (was proud and full of heat).
- Sept 2005 - June 2008:** Started my BA(Hons) Project early at a renowned art school in London.
- Oct 2006:** Got my 1st job in HE, supporting students' learning in using digital media.
- Oct 2006 - Jan 2012:** Developed myself rapidly in many areas of fine arts student support in HE, I grew interest in teaching and wanted to stay in HE.
- Nov 2011 - Dec 2013:** Moved to a different team for different experience, still having a good time. Started my MA at Loughborough, I loved it, stood up for myself and sponsored for a better grade from my MA (otherwise, it might have been offered to another MA).
- Dec 2013 - Feb 2017:** Learned hard and progressed to supervisor role at a different team at the same university. In Summer 2014, completed my MA, I was one one of the most educated and experienced member of the team at work. I was ready to progress to the next level.
- Mar 2017 - Nov 2017:** Decided to look for other opportunities, a fresh start as it were. Managed to find another job at a different college at the same university, but the job was a junior position. The exchange seemed worth it because I could leave the petrosaurus toxic environment behind me.
- Nov 2017 - Aug 2019:** Managed to find another job that was a senior position at the same university, I was now more qualified and one of the most experienced person in the team, responsible for the most difficult and one of the most important projects in the team. I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it. I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it.
- Aug 2019 - Mar 2021:** Started my first job in HE (I did it for 15 years), I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it. I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it.
- Mar 2021:** Finally, I was offered a senior role in HE, I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it. I was doing the same job, but it was a senior role, so I was able to do it.

Brief outline of significant events between 2005 - 2021 with my life in HE. More detailed description in a separate document.

to right the wrong, therefore the personal intentions could outweigh the theories and reasons (Dauphinee, 2010). In my case, I have written this paper out of my love for the HE sector and my colleagues. I believe none of these people are racists at heart and their actions were influenced by the local culture.

The fairest way for these people would be to show them a draft of this paper and ask for their opinions via member check; a method researchers use to check the accuracy of what their participants have said and done in accordance with their recollection. However, this was not possible due to the sensitive nature of this topic; nobody likes being called a racist. Although this most certainly is not the intention of this paper, nevertheless, I worry that due to the already complicated relationships I have with some of these people, showing them my interpretation of the events they were involved in, in perhaps not a particularly positive light would make them subconsciously misinterpret my intention. Therefore, I have chosen to protect my own well-being first and foremost. I am not avoiding my responsibility as a researcher of telling my story and the impact it might have on my readers, quite the opposite; I hope by offering my version of my story, supported by data and resources, I can offer some companionship to those who share similar experiences, in an attempt to help them reflect and heal (Ellis, 2007).

Since member check is not possible, I have reached out to a colleague and a long term friend, Jennifer, as well as my union representative, Owen. I asked them for their recollection and interpretation of the events in this paper. Jennifer knows some of these people directly and Owen has supported me through many of these events. I believe by including their voices can help improve the credibility of this paper.

Furthermore, I have looked at an anonymous Instagram page with a total of 127 posts revealing a systemic failure at Uni A in dealing with racism. These posts describe the stories of other members at Uni A, some of which are similar to my own experience.

2. History will always repeat itself

I will avoid using the terms BAME or People of Colour in this paper because they were created by white people to support their superiority in Western societies (Lim, 2020). I will use the term Global Majority to describe non-white people to help us break free from being identified by the colour of our skin. Global Majority encourages us to consider ourselves as the majority in the world, currently about 80% of the total world population (Campbell-Stephens, 2020).

My arguments are supported by the Critical Race Theory (CRT), which has been an important concept in understanding racial disparities both in the US and the UK. CRT acknowledges the historical and “continued existence of racism” (Bhopal, 2020, p.503). In CRT, white supremacy does not only refer to the extreme far-right groups whose racist mentality and actions are crystal clear (Walton, 2020). Instead, CRT explicitly examines how white supremacy has a continuous influence on the way society is built, how decisions are made and policies are designed to discriminate against the Global Majority (Bhopal, 2020). Therefore, racism is deeply integrated into our social and economic structures and it must be understood as such (De La Garza & Ono, 2016). CRT seeks to challenge the historical “unequal distribution of wealth and privilege” (Walton, 2020, p.84) for most white people, meaning they have and will be more likely to have more opportunities in life, with or without them consciously knowing (Walton, 2020).

To understand this in the context of the British culture, we must revisit the origins of imperialism and colonialism, tracing back to the late 15th century when empires including the British violently invaded countries around the world, claiming resources, labour and lands that belonged to other people, including the Global Majority (Bain, 2018). This gave birth to white supremacy that has, over the last hundreds of years, been deeply and systematically ingrained in British culture. The *Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities*, published by the British government in March 2021 has acknowledged that racism still exists in today’s British society, however, it has categorically denied the existence of institutional racism. The report has been widely criticised by MPs and the media as failing to recognise how racism systematically affects the Global Majority in the UK.

It seems there is clear historical and recurrent evidence suggesting institutional racism is very real in the UK, but why is there an illusion that institutional racism does not exist? Is it because many do not speak up? Is it because those who speak up get shut down? Or are there more complicated reasons at play? Have we perhaps accepted this as a cultural norm? I do not expect this paper will be able to address the root of the issues, particularly as I am only telling my version of my story. Some might argue I have experienced a run of bad luck and that these are just a chain of coincidences. This is perhaps the biggest issue of autoethnography; the sample size is small and it is difficult to be a true representation of the masses. If after reading this paper, my readers do not believe institutional racism affects real people then they are entitled to their conclusion. As a researcher, I can only hope that this study can contribute to other studies that support

the impact institutional racism has on the Global Majority such as myself.

Now, let me tell you my story from the very beginning when I first set foot at Uni A...

3. My first taste of racism

In 2005, I started my BA(Hons) in Photography at a world-leading art university - Uni A. I was constantly encouraged by my tutors to explore my Chinese heritage; every February, I was asked the same question - "Are you going to do a project about Chinese New Year?" Meanwhile, I never heard my white classmates being asked to do a project about Christmas in December. Assuming I know anything about the Chinese culture and implying I should bring this into my practice is a textbook example of covert racism (Ramos & Yi, 2020).

I survived my degree without exploring my Chinese heritage, it worked for me, but did it work for my tutors? I feel as if my rebellion against my tutors' implicit instruction to be a model Chinese student had cost me my final grade - I got a 2:2 with 2% away from getting a 2:1. Uni A's regulations state that if a student is within 5% of the next grade, the tutors can exercise their discretion to award them the higher grade. I was disappointed that they did not do this for me, especially as they knew I suffered from a chronic illness in my final year that had affected my performance.

I decided to appeal for my grade on the grounds of unfair marking. When I was waiting to be seen by the appeal panel, I was accidentally left with everyone's records including notes from the exam board meeting. I looked and discovered everyone who was borderline between two grades was discussed and was awarded the higher grade, except me. Particularly, five white students who were within 5% of getting a 1st, were all awarded a 1st. My appeal meeting lasted less than 5 minutes because the panel unanimously agreed that my tutors did not treat me fairly, they awarded me the 2:1 that I duly deserved. Whilst my assumption of being subjected to covert racism is entirely subjective, the fact that the appeal panel ruled in my favour and my white classmates got awarded more favourable grades does support, at least in my mind, my version of the story.

Clearly, things have not improved much since my graduation in 2008, according to *Tackling racial harassment: University challenged* (2019), published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, two-thirds of the 1,000 random sample of students did not report their experience of

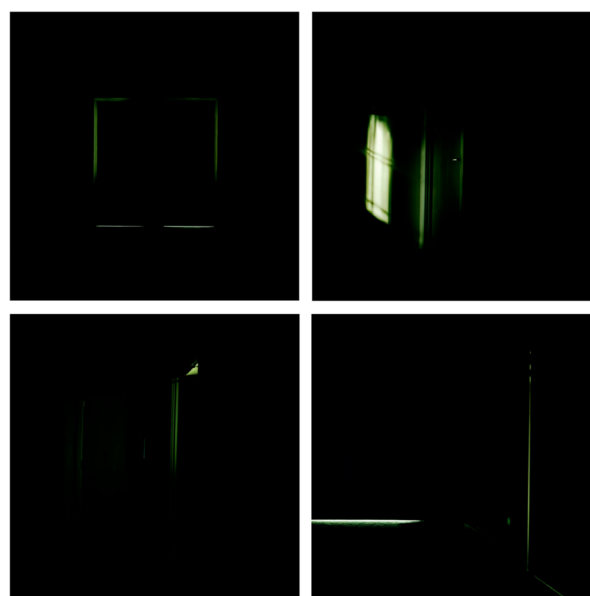
racism because they were worried that their degree results would be negatively impacted. According to Advance HE, in 2015/16, 78.8% of white students received a 1st or a 2:1 with only 63.2% of non-white students achieving the same results. The gap between white and Chinese narrows to only 6.6% with 72.2% of Chinese students achieving top grades (2017).

There are numerous posts on the anonymous Instagram page with Global Majority students and staff expressing their concerns about being treated differently from their white peers. The story below resonates with my own experience as a student:

Once in a tutorial a British Muslim student was showing her work. She was interested in landscape photography. The white tutor then said something to the effect of what don't you make work about being a Muslim woman in the UK. I thought that was so disgusting? Like are you asking white students to make work about whiteness." (Anonymous Instagram post 1, June 2020)

My fellow Asian classmates whose work was about their cultural heritage all achieved top grades, but I was the only one in my cohort who sold my entire degree show and The Photographers' Gallery in London wanted to show my work. So was it my talents that had a problem or were I a victim of institutional racism? Figure 2 shows some of the work included in my degrees show.

Figure 2. Part of my degree show series *Room C3C7*, 2008 that was highly praised by the curator at The Photographer's Gallery at the time.



My talents and the 2:1 that I had argued for eventually earned me a place on the Master of Fine Art programme at a prestigious art school in 2011. During my three years there, I was free to explore whatever direction I wanted, not once was I asked to include my Chinese heritage in my practice.

4. I am one of them only when I am a nobody

In 2006, when I was still studying, I started working in a digital media workshop at Uni A. It was refreshing because the colour of my skin did not bother anyone. However, I soon realised it was because I was a lowly nobody, so who cares if I was black, yellow or white?

I began experiencing incidents that I believe were racially motivated when I moved to a different team in 2011. My manager Hector would ask me to fill in timesheets detailing my every move, this rule only applied to me and Jo, a Jamaican lady in her 50s. Hector frequently compared my and Jo's productivities, criticising how slow Jo was, how sloppy my work was and my attitude was wrong. His criticism was baseless. As part of the Windrush generation, Jo was used to racism so whilst we often talked about Hector's treatment of us as being unacceptable, she took it "lying down", but I started speaking up for both of us. Instead of listening, Hector saw my speaking up as insubordination; he became more hostile and impossible to reason with. As a result of the constant stress Jo was put under, she was forced to medically retire in 2015.

Hector's behaviour was a typical example of white ignorance; a willfulness to ignore any new information that could undermine the status quo of white supremacy (Bain, 2018). White ignorance as a psychological state is for white people to maintain their innocence in situations relating to racial inequality, refusing to accept they cause the suffering of others, as well as to protect the wealth and status of being white bring (Martín, 2020). Those who have the white ignorance mindset tend to refuse to see the Global Majority as their equals. White ignorance does not mean passive behaviour, it requires conscious and continuous actions (Martín, 2020).

In 2012, Hector refused my request to join the Aspiring Manager Programme on the basis that I was not already a manager. Meanwhile, he supported a white female colleague's request and she subsequently became a manager. Hector's refusal was influenced by the fact that every manager in the department was white, granting my request would risk undermining their white supremacy because the programme could have given me a chance to join their rank.

White ignorance, therefore, is also a systemic and collective effort (Swan, 2010); the individual might not realise their contribution, as it was in Hector's case.

My colleague and friend Jennifer has confirmed that my interpretation of Hector's behaviour was similar to what she has witnessed. Jennifer joined the department after I had left and she too, saw how Hector treated Jo unfairly and harshly, as well as treating another female member of the team similarly. Whilst Jennifer never experienced unfavourable treatment from Hector, she agrees with my view that Hector seems to dislike female colleagues, particularly those who are not white.

In October 2020, my Trade Union conducted a survey on pay and progression at Uni A with 68 respondents. The report is available on request for our members. Some members expressed concerns about the lack of progression opportunities for Global Majority staff, with one respondent saying "There is a huge issue for BAME employees reaching mid/senior-level management. I used to manage a team and now am going back to a standard role where I feel I'm starting all over again at entry-level."

Hector's action made me more determined to progress. In December 2013, my hard work finally paid off, I returned to my previous job as a supervisor; I had earned a seat at the grown-up table, my future seemed brighter. All was well in the world, but this only lasted for about a year.

5. White ignorance always wins

In January 2015, my life was turned upside down due to family issues and a cancer scare. I was struggling mentally and my performance at work became erratic. Eventually, an anonymous complaint was made against me for being "aggressive and rude". When I asked my manager, Emily, for specific examples, I was told it was just a general feeling everyone felt, she refused to be specific at all. However, a white male of the same rank as me was known to be aggressive, constantly shouting at students; his behaviour was always excused as being just the way he is. Why could a white man be shouty constantly with no consequences, yet I got into trouble with a sudden drop in my otherwise exemplary performance? Emily went from being happy with me to judging me harshly without ever asking me if I was OK. Is it because I should be grateful that I was allowed to join the rank of my white colleagues, therefore, I should behave faultlessly and never compare myself with them? I felt like I was a victim of white ignorance again.

Although white supremacy and white ignorance do not mean the same thing, they are, however, interconnected. White ignorance, as explained before, is a systemic and collective effort that allows people to structurally decide not to see the world in a particular way (May, 2006). It is an excuse that enables white people to refuse to see the Global Majority as their equals. So when I am in a slight power of position behaving out of the norm, I threatened the superiority of my white colleagues. Although my behaviour was nowhere as bad as my shouty white male colleague, it was nonetheless deemed unacceptable, thus, I must be suppressed and controlled. Should I have told work what was going on in my private life? Would it have gotten me off the hook? Probably. However, why should I have to use my personal life to excuse systemic white ignorance?

Once my health was clear, I resumed my exemplary performance, but I decided to keep my head down by employing strategic ignorance (May, 2006); a deliberate survival tactic allowing me to choose only to see the positive things in the department. I chose to believe that the unfair treatment toward me was not racially motivated. Despite my relationship with Emily being broken beyond repair, I chose to be amicable with her, but she continued to treat me less favourably to my white colleagues.

I no longer felt comfortable in that department, so I started looking for jobs. The first offer I received was an assistant technician role elsewhere at Uni A, to accept it would be a demotion. However, it felt like the right decision at the time, because the only way I knew to escape racism is being a lowly nobody. When I announced my departure, my assistants and students felt sad. This gave me solace knowing I was valued in that environment, equally I felt uncomfortable that I was driven away probably due to the colour of my skin.

6. Institutional racism is real

In 2017, I was a lowly nobody again; I was looking forward to having some peaceful time. However, in the months that followed, I experienced a series of institutional betrayals (Smith & Freyd, 2014) where management omitted to recognise and act on a “host of microaggressive and harassing events” (Buchanan, 2020, p.97) that had caused me mental distress.

I shared an office with a young white male, Jacob, who was 24 then. Jacob graduated from Uni A a year before, he went from being a student with no industry experience to a senior film and video technician, which is unusual in other

universities but a common occurrence at Uni A. Always the “Big I am”, he waited no time to start undermining me, often interrupting and contradicting me in front of others. One time, I was having a tutorial with a student on how to use a camera. He must have heard something he did not agree with, he jumped in front of us, grabbed the camera off of my hands, nudged me aside and took over the tutorial. I had a quiet word with him afterwards, but he insisted it was totally acceptable to interrupt whenever he felt I was wrong. In the weeks that followed, I experienced many similar incidents so I reported Jacob to my manager, but I was told this is how Jacob behaves and I should just accept it.

Jacob is a product of his environment; he was educated from a “pale, male, stale” curriculum that focuses on white ideas and white knowledge; it celebrates colonialism and imperialism and encourages white superiority often without any explicit reference to whiteness (UCL, 2014). Students who are educated in such a curriculum might not be aware that they are being taught that racism is an acceptable social norm (Martín, 2020). Jacob had studied and subsequently works in a white-dominant environment without experiencing the outside world; is it any wonder that he felt he was more superior than me?

Even if I could excuse Jacob’s white ignorance because of his youth and to an extent, innocence. I will never forget other incidents involving senior academics that suggest a complete systemic failure to tackle institutional racism. One lunchtime, I was in my office talking to a friend, so when someone knocked on the door, I ignored it, knocking turned banging and the door was eventually forced open. A white female programme director barged in, demanded I was to take in some equipment belonging to Jacob. I said I could not do it because it had nothing to do with me and it was lunchtime, she told me “Well, I don’t give a shit, Jacob said you will do what he says.” She threw the equipment at my face and slammed the door on her way out. My complaint was dismissed with a comment from senior management, “It’s the beginning of the academic year, everyone is stressed, you have to be more tolerant of other people’s behaviour.”

Again, my experience is not unique as evidenced from the anonymous Instagram page showing posts of staff and students describing their experience of racism at Uni A, including a tutor using profanity when addressing their Global Majority students:

My tutor at Uni A referred to the young men of colour as dickheads repeatedly and called us the dickhead table. With the exception of one white boy who was a known

Nazi supporter. (Anonymous Instagram post 2, June 2020)

A Global Majority colleague's experience of racism:

I have been a Uni A staff for nearly 8 years, in a not-so-diverse team. I have had senior white male academic staff with toxic superiority complex, be verbally and physically aggressive around me, belittle me in front of other coworkers and students, then later pass it as humour! I am held more accountable than my peers for similar tasks/situations, and I am spoken to and explained things as if I am an idiot... But what irritates me even more, is when the same people who are enforcing discrimination and toxic hierarchy at work, have built up their image to show their activism/wokeness. I think it's very performative, disappointing and disgusting. (Anonymous Instagram post 3, July 2020)

7. They have the money. They just don't wanna spend it on me

In 2018, I managed to become a senior-junior staff again, but with a fixed-term contract with a promise that the role would eventually be made permanent; it was a risk worth taking. This all began with respect from all parties, however, as soon as I started requesting continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, my relationship with my manager, Martin, quickly turned ugly.

In April 2018, my CPD application was delayed by Martin and I missed the deadline. Luckily, I still managed to get funding for the CPD because of my good relationship with the CPD coordinator. However, when I asked for time away to do the CPD, Martin told me I had to use my own time. I asked why others were allowed to attend CPD courses using work time? He said because I was on a fixed-term contract, he cannot give me the full benefits. After pointing out to him that treating me less favourably was illegal, Martin reluctantly signed off on my request. History repeated itself in January 2019, Martin refused to sign off my application again and constantly challenged why I needed CPD, but I argued and got what I duly deserved. However, a seed was planted for my eventual dismissal.

In an official one-to-one meeting, Martin told me "I think you are playing a game, why do you want to do X, Y and Z training? What are you trying to achieve?" According to him, my CPD was less important than others in the team. I later found out from the only other female, but white, in the team that they had secured £7,000 funding, but I was excluded

from it. Martin's action toward me was a form of epistemic exclusion (Buchanan, 2020) because he never considered I am equal to him or other white people in the team.

In June 2019, I was told that my contract would not be renewed because they had no money to keep me on. However, I quickly managed to find another job because of my transferable skills; I became a (junior) learning technologist at Uni A, which is slightly more senior than my role in Martin's team. One afternoon, I walked past my old office and saw Olly sitting at my old desk; Olly had been a student temping in the workshop since 2018. A few weeks later, I found two more new white male staff in the workshop. I was lied to, they had money not only to keep Olly but also to expand the team, they just did not want me. As angry as I was, I was ready to move on, but I had one more thing to ask Martin, so off I went to my old office again, "Hey, Martin, can you give me the access code to the Adobe site that you promised me about?" Instead of giving it to me as previously promised, he says, "Geez, you are a leech, all you do is take, take and take." There were two other people in the office, both were shocked by Martin's remark, but neither said anything to defuse the situation. I left the office feeling awkward and angry.

This triggered a formal complaint against Martin alongside all other incidents in the 18 months that I was in his team, my complaint was 23 pages long detailing every incident. 16 months later, without having as much as a hearing, the Head of Technical Services, Charles, unilaterally decided that my complaint was only partially justified. He found no evidence that Martin had treated me unfairly; there was no evidence of racism or sexism because materially speaking, I was given as many CPD opportunities as everyone else and I got time off in lieu for them. Charles did not take into account that I had to fight for everything when others did not. He found no evidence of unfair dismissal because I ended up with another job at Uni A, but I only applied because I was weeks away from being unemployed. In his official response, Charles emphasised the derogatory comments Martin had made as being part of the culture. I think Charles has tacitly admitted that the racist culture is acceptable at Uni A. Whilst he acknowledged my feelings were hurt, Martin did not have to face any consequences at all. My complaint was dismissed and not categorised under racism.

Whilst Owen was not present in any of these incidents, he was my union representative and a friend whom I turned to often whenever Martin caused me distress. Owen has confirmed that my emotions and my description of these incidents at the time and how I have expressed them in this paper are consistent. Whilst this cannot verify the accuracy

of any of these events, Owen's input helps support the accuracy of my memories.

My lack of trust in Uni A's complaint procedure is shared by other colleagues as evidenced in the anonymous Instagram page:

I've seen a POC colleague in my team go through the complaint procedure. After they were subject to covert and not so covert racism from others in the team... The complaint procedure itself appeared to be a sham, with a distinct lack of POC as part of the arbitration process, as well as there being white managers involved who were not fully impartial. (Anonymous Instagram post 4, July 2020)

According to *Tackling racial harassment: University Challenged* (2019), prolonged periods of the complaint process causing staff stress and undermining confidence in the fairness of the process is a direct result of staff not speaking up. The report highlights the discrepancy between racially motivated incidents and the number of complaints made. It finds around 38% of the 159 publicly funded universities in Britain received no complaints from staff and a total of only 360 complaints from the rest of the universities between 2015/16 and January 2019. If my experience is anything to go by, I think it answers the question of why institutional racism does not officially exist, because complaints get shut down and not categorised using the racism label.

8. Haters are always gonna hate

Being a learning technologist is pretty awesome, I have once again found my passion in academia. However, it is quite clear that institutional racism is a real issue at Uni A, so it is unsurprising that I experienced more or less the same treatment in this role.

I worked very closely with another learning technologist in the team, Luke, a white middle-class male in his early 30s. Although his role was identical to mine, he never considered me his equal, he treated me with microaggression regularly. Luke had called me his protégé and apprentice publically on many occasions to explicitly suggest that I am inferior to him. He told School Deans that the only reason why I got the same job as him was that I got kicked out from my previous team, attempting to invalidate my credibility. This was a lie because I applied for the job the same way he did and I too, was the best candidate in my round.

Luke's other actions also implied that I was less intelligent and less capable than him by insisting on double-checking and redoing my parts of joint projects. He was probably influenced by the unfounded and absurd scientific belief that white people are genetically more intelligent than some other racial groups (Walton, 2020), whether he was conscious of this, I will never know. I have never spoken up because I needed to survive as it is not uncommon for Global Majority women to be timid professionally, after all, we might be the only non-white people in the team, as I was. The "feeling of invisible and unheard due to others' perceptions of our gender and ethnicity" (Gause, 2020, p.78) can be overwhelming.

Luke's microaggression towards me was motivated by his fundamental belief that white men are privileged and superior to others. He once told me, "Oh, I am white, things always come easy for me, I will never have to try as hard as you do." When his white privilege was undermined by the fact that I was his equal, it manifested into different forms of microaggression (Gause, 2020).

I was not alone in this, other non-white female learning technologists in other teams also had their versions of Luke. We formed an alliance to support our continued survival (Buchanan, 2020), our conversations have revealed that Uni A most definitely is institutionally racist and sexist, not least because of our collective experiences being so similar, but also stories we have heard from our colleagues. By April 2021, three out of the four female learning technologists have left Uni A for similar reasons. One of them has vowed to never work for Uni A again.

Uni A's own Employee Experience survey 2020 reveals that 48.2% of the 1498 staff responded says they do not think Uni A cares about their welfare and wellbeing. Whilst the published data does not reveal if any of these 1498 people felt let down based on race or gender, having almost 50% of responders feel their employer does not care about them, does show there are some systemic failures in caring for one or more particular communities of people.

In order to keep my sanity, I started looking outwardly to my external network as a way of distracting myself. I am beginning to have a presence on social media, I now have a voice that cannot be easily silenced. I have earned the respect from some high profile, senior academics from other universities, a currency that I thought could mean something when Uni A was recruiting for four senior learning technologists in summer 2020. Among the 200+ people that applied, Luke and I both became the final six candidates; he was promoted alongside the only other white male internal

candidate, meanwhile, I was denied a promotion. The feedback I received from the panel was that I was both “very impressive” and “extremely likeable”, whereas Luke was told the panel found it hard to trust him because of the way he presented himself. Why promote someone they cannot trust?

Shortly after this recruitment, Uni A had a fifth senior learning technologist role they needed to fill; Uni A's recruitment policy states that the recruiting manager could either advertise the role externally afresh or if there has been similar recruitment within the last six months, the appointable candidates can be considered without further interviews. The recruiting manager decided to revise the remaining two candidates from the final six - me and a middle-aged white man. Unsurprisingly, I was overlooked once again.

Gender and racial biases have long been contributing factors for the lack of Global Majority women in senior positions in HE (Gause, 2020). Over time, this has created a vicious circle; because it has been hard for Global Majority women to progress, others are deterred from trying. I feel as if this stereotypical assumption that senior roles need to be filled by white men and white women (Gause, 2020) was the reason why I was denied the promotion. I asked my boss why I was overlooked twice, he insisted that I was not overlooked and that all six candidates were given fair consideration for the first four senior roles. I was again fairly considered against the white man when the fifth role became available. As a long term union member, I know Uni A's recruitments are based on a point scoring system; the candidate who scores the highest in the interviews will be offered the job. Likewise, if multiple roles are available, the candidate who scores the highest will get to choose, then the candidate who comes second will be appointed after the first candidate has made their decision, and so on. It is a mechanical system, thus, in this instance, the only reason why I was not promoted on both occasions would be because I scored the lowest out of the final six candidates. My boss refused to comment on this and insisted there were no scores and that the panel only judged whether each candidate is appointable or not based on their suitability to the teams. Owen, acting as my union representative, described this as something dodgy. At my behest, he made an anonymous information request to Uni A's HR and their response implied that the interview panel did not follow the recruitment policy and confirmed that my interpretation of the policy is correct. Owen and I both felt all evidence suggested I probably was cheated out of a promotion, possibly two. I could break my anonymity and make a complaint, but I have been down that road before, I have lost faith in Uni A's ability in handling complaints of racism with fairness and transparency. My

heart was set to leave because I have come to a conclusion that my 15 loyal years were spent being trapped in a system that is clearly rigged.

9. The glass ceiling is finally broken

“Congratulations! We would like to make you an offer for the position of (senior) Learning Technologist...”

This exciting promotion with one of the UK's most prestigious universities means I have finally broken the glass ceiling - I entered the senior ranks in March 2021, which was only five months after I was overlooked by Uni A. This suggests I was good enough to be promoted, I just was not white enough for Uni A. I waited no time to share this news with everyone.

“How thrilled are you by the way that you started a career in EdTech only a year and a half ago and you have made significant strides? You should be really proud of yourself!” asked Luke, who himself has merely had a few months more experience in EdTech than I do. This comment is another classic form of microaggression being disguised as something positive, but its actual context is no less demeaning (Gómez, 2015).

Before I accepted this exciting offer, I wanted to know how much I am really worth for Uni A, so I told my boss I would consider staying if he would support a role review to make me Luke's equal again, because practically, even after Luke's promotion, we were still doing the same job. Without hesitation, my boss refused and said he will ensure I only do entry-level work going forward to reflect the hierarchical difference between Luke and me. There it was, 15 loyal years with clear competence and experience, I was still treated inferior to my white counterparts. Being stuck in a bad but not intolerable situation is quite common, as Buchanan suggests, “Being marginalized and devalued can be internalized often without conscious awareness that it is occurring.” (2020, p.105).

Leaving Uni A was the best decision I have made in years, but what about those I have left behind? I have retained my seat at Uni A's Policy Committee as a union representative because I owe it to my friends to try and influence positive changes. However, I am disheartened by the white ignorance from committee members representing Uni A. The committee is merely a box-ticking exercise. For example, when I and other union representatives criticised the questions in the recent Race Equality Survey as being leading, we were told those questions cannot be changed.

How can questions like “I believe I am treated equally...”, “... Uni A undertakes recruitment fairly and transparently,” or “I have been encouraged to apply for higher-grade jobs...” not subconsciously affect the responders’ answers? This survey is a part of a larger anti-racism action plan Uni A has been promoting. Whilst these are being promoted heavily via social media, staff have not been adequately informed of them internally. This makes me wonder if Uni A is doing this purely as a publicity stunt? Do they really want to make changes? I feel like I have heard it all before, but nothing ever changes. According to the *UK Universities’ Response to Black Live Matter report* (2020), there is an overwhelming concern that the recent anti-racism initiatives are nothing more than PR exercises to keep the public happy, universities want to be seen as doing something to tackle racism, but all will eventually fade away and not much progress will have been made.

10. A word to the wise

I do hope all the current hype (again) to tackle racism in HE will influence proper systemic changes. Until then, I believe HE as a sector is institutionally racist. At least, my experience with Uni A suggests as much; it has failed to support my professional development by denying equal opportunities and it has refused to acknowledge and deal with my concerns regarding racism. I have had a total of eight jobs at Uni A, so my experience is comprehensive.

To address institutional racism, universities must first adopt systemic thinking and openly acknowledge that racism is a significant issue for them (Lingayah, 2021). This can be done by having a completely transparent and trustworthy system to encourage reporting. Encouragement and support are important because by acknowledging the existence of institutional racism, we are admitting that it is a fully ingrained feature in our everyday life (Lingayah, 2021) that many are potentially affected and not a particular person or group are to blame. It must be a collective and fundamental cultural change. It can be done, but it will take years of continuous and collective efforts.

Perhaps this is easier said than done, as taking real actions would probably mean universities as a sector will have to acknowledge that their belief in white supremacy, stemming from the British history of imperialism and colonialism, is wrong. According to a YouGov poll in 2016, 43% of respondents felt the British Empire was a good thing and 44% are proud of the British history of colonialism (Rickett, 2017). I was unable to determine the random sample size of this particular poll, however, according to YouGov’s research

Q&A’s page, their random sample size is either 1,500 or 2,000 people.

I believe the majority who are proud of the British colonialism past are not outwardly racists or racists at all. However, as the CRT explicitly indicates, racism has a continuous and subtle effect on the development of societies. Therefore, I argue that as long as a substantial portion of the British public is proud of its shameful past, institutional racism will be a difficult issue to address. This is because most people probably do not consciously realise their contribution to this issue.

Despite this, a lot of initiatives have begun to address the inherent whiteness that is the main contributing factor to institutional racism. For instance, students have had many successes in recent years to decolonise the white curriculum - Goldsmiths students are famous for their occupation acts dating back at least a decade. In July 2019, they had their landmark success in making senior management take actions to tackle racism (Pimblott, 2020). Decolonising the curriculum is another way to influence system change because white curricula will only produce more whiteness, which perpetuates the systemic issue of white people teaching white people how to be white.

Aside from influencing systemic change, there are small steps that can be taken to support Global Majority staff to reach their career goals, such as providing bespoke career progression support (Bhopal, 2020), something I could most definitely benefit from. We can also help ourselves by being active and being visible with external professional networks (Buchanan, 2020). I believe that my eventual success in breaking the glass ceiling was, in part, a result of my active participation with external networks. The recognition, support and encouragement my external peers have given me are something that I should have been given by Uni A.

If you find yourself in similar situations to me, be visible and be loud, you can be easily silenced when you are invisible, but the more visible you are, the harder it is to ignore you. If you cannot progress internally, look elsewhere, your current employer is not the only one, sometimes the grass is really greener elsewhere.

You might notice that I have not once claimed that I am an academic, because contractually speaking, I am not. I have always had professional services contracts, this does not make me any less important than my academic colleagues. However, because non-academics typically are not associated with research and are not always at the forefront

of academia, this means much of the existing literature focuses on the experience of academics, rarely any emphasis is on the experience of “the rest of us”. I hope this paper has given you an insight and a critical analysis of my struggles as a non-academic.

Finally, my experience described in this paper is limited to the same university I worked for in the last 15 years, whilst this does not represent the entire UK HE sector, it does, however, present a pretty damning picture of the damage that institutional racism could cause. Furthermore, I have only presented my interpretation of my experience, which can be emotionally distorted (Chang, 2016). It is possible that I might have victimised myself more than what actually happened because any mention of racism and attempt to tackle it can be very emotionally challenging and tiring (Lingayah, 2021), as it has been in my case. Whilst the limitation of my story needs to be taken into consideration, this should not be used as an excuse to dismiss my claim that institutional racism is real. It is worth noting that none of the events written in this paper is incidents of overt racism. Therefore, I stand by my belief that all of the individuals mentioned have been, perhaps subconsciously, influenced by the British colonial past that suggests white people are superior to the Global Majority. I do not believe these people are racists, whether or not they were conscious of their actions could be classed as racism. With that in mind, I conclude this type of racism is difficult to substantiate because it has been part of the fabric of our society for the last hundreds of years. Changes are possible, but there will always be an uphill struggle.

Whatever you take away from my story, I do sincerely hope that if you have been affected by racism, consider speaking up. If you have not been affected, congratulations, but please provide support to those we are affected, it will mean a lot to us.

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Becoming a Networked Learner: Unpacking identity development in networked learning communities

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Abstract

The aim of this autoethnography is to explore my identity development across three learning communities, underpinned by networked learning to varying degrees, to understand the impacting factors and their results. Networked learning has been described as the teaching and learning paradigm of the twenty-first century, requiring the adoption of networked learning ontology and epistemology. In this paper, I argue that it is therefore imperative to prepare teachers, educated in earlier and possibly contrasting paradigms, for the identity work this shift requires. The literature presents insight from the perspectives of researchers and teachers in higher education. There is, however, a dearth of insight from primary school teachers who also participate in this paradigm. This paper contributes the insights of a primary school teacher navigating and enculturating within the networked learning paradigm, part of which is networked learning identity development. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the findings suggest that networked learning values and identity can be developed and supported to escape the habitus of older educational paradigms. This can be achieved through the proactive facilitation of critical reflexivity in combination with eight essential networked learning features. This study is of relevance to teacher educators, school leaders, local education authorities and educational practitioners interested in the adoption of networked learning. Recommendations are provided

for teachers, teacher trainers and teacher developers who may wish to adopt the paradigm of networked learning.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Technological advances of the twenty-first century have brought about what has been described as the ‘network society’ (Castells, 2000). The field of education has subsequently embraced networked learning (NL) and in many quarters, this has become a paradigm advocated for sustainable teacher development (Gaved et al., 2020; Katz et al., 2009; Ministry of Education-Singapore, 2017; Seto, 2019; Toole, 2019). Proponents of NL argue that it is the educational paradigm for the twenty-first century (Harasim et al., 1995; Fetter et al., 2010; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Hodgson et al., 2011; Ansari et al., 2012 & Toole, 2019). However, as the field of NL evolves, both benefits and challenges continue to emerge. NL has been defined as “learning that uses communication and information technologies (ICT) to promote connections between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors and between a learning community and its learning resources” (Jones et al., 2001, p.7). As a primary school teacher who has embraced lifelong learning, my own teacher education has entailed NL and participation in networked learning communities (NLCs). In the literature and throughout this research, I highlight the identity development required to become a networked learner and the challenges this can pose. I share the experiences of similar others in the literature, newly navigating NL, juxtaposed with relevant theory and extant research. I conclude this paper with recommendations for teachers, teacher trainers and teacher developers who may wish to adopt the paradigm of NL.

This autoethnography explores my experiences in three learning contexts, underpinned by networked learning to varying degrees, with the goal of unpacking and understanding my changing ontology, epistemology and resulting identity evolution. Autoethnography helps researchers make meaning of their struggles (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008). This study has therefore facilitated sense-making of my identity struggles in NLCs. It may also provide insights on NL for facilitators and designers of NLCs and NL-based teacher training programmes regarding the challenges participants may encounter and ways to overcome them.

This study’s relevance is derived from two widely held claims that: (1) NL is the educational paradigm for the twenty-first century (see opening paragraph) and that (2)

for teachers habituated in the conventional values of face-to-face teaching and learning, it is essential for participation in NL to shift onto a new set of prerequisite values, forging a new, networked learner (NLer) identity (Hodgson et al., 2011). I argue that for teachers to participate in NL-based teacher development programmes, this identity development must therefore become an integral part of initial and continuing teacher education where it can be fostered and sustained organically.

My evolving identity in NLCs has not always been intentional or comfortable. The current trend towards the adoption of digital pedagogies has at times triggered my resistance, an experience mirrored by similar others in the literature, explored in the findings. If NL is indeed the educational paradigm of this century, with the benefits it promises (Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Ansari et al., 2012 & Toole, 2019; Hodgson et al., 2011), it is therefore pertinent to pre-empt such resistance and proactively pave the way for its (NLs) understanding and adoption. This study inquires:

- RQ: How can networked learning communities support the networked learner identity development of primary school teachers?

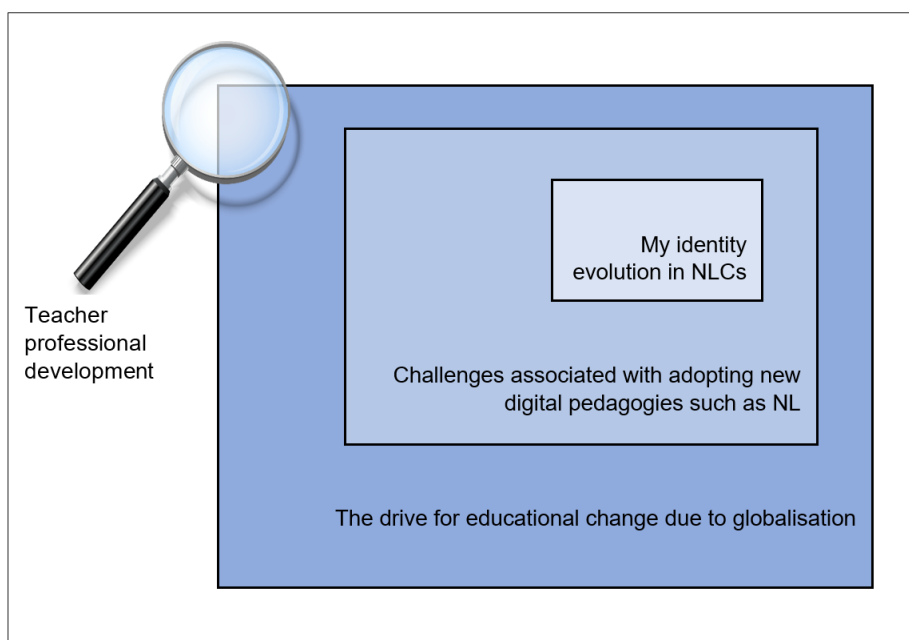
This is broken down into the following sub-RQs:

- RQ1: What have been my experiences participating in the three focus networked learning communities?
- RQ2: What ontological and epistemological challenges have I experienced during the identity development process?
- RQ3: How have I addressed these challenges and developed a new teacher identity?

In the following sections, I present my story, this study’s theoretical framework; an overview of the relevant literature, theory and key concepts; this study’s methods and findings and I unpack the latter in the discussion.

1.2 My story

Autoethnography has been described as the story of self against the backdrop of the story of society (Chang, 2008), told through the lens of culture (Adams et al., 2015). My ‘story of self’ is my identity evolution in my NL journey across three contexts, A, B and C. The ‘story of society’ against which I juxtapose my own is of challenges associated with adopting new digital pedagogies. This story of society falls within the bigger, ‘global story’ of the drive for educational change due to globalisation. The cultural lens through which my story is told is that of teacher professional development. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. My story context

1.2.1 Context A

My first NL experiences were on a training programme in the early 2000s, Context A, henceforth referred to as A. Before A, my last formal education had been my undergraduate programme completed in 1986. As my undergraduate studies and earlier professional development were undertaken well before the digital age, I had no experience of NL until A. A was a blended learning programme incorporating the open-source learning management system, Moodle, used for accessing course materials and connecting peers and tutors plus face-to-face teaching. The NL in this programme occurred during the online interactions between tutors and students, sharing of resources and collaboration on assignments. Various Facebook groups formed additional online learning spaces. I acknowledge that the face-to-face component of A may have impacted my experience in contrast to B and C.

1.2.2 Context B

My next NL experience was in Context B (henceforth B), a distance-learning programme. This was fully a NLC, with Moodle used to access resources, submit assignments and respond to tutor-posed questions in dedicated forums. In my experience, the forums were formal, tutor-led and my participation was tentative. I viewed assessment in B as more transparent than in A, however, not transparent enough for me to understand it. I arrived with apprehension

from A which had featured constant harsh appraisals. I was therefore on guard and working hard to establish a track record of good scholarship. At some points in A, I had also experienced racial and gender-based discrimination. I therefore decided that in the early stages of B, I would keep my ethnicity and gender hidden until I had established trusting relationships. With B being entirely distance learning (DL), and with no face-to-face, video or audio contact required, this 'hiding' was made possible. As B progressed, I maintained strong grades, received positive tutor feedback and won the confidence of my peers. This boosted my confidence and I evolved from tentative to a more confident NLER.

1.2.3 Context C

Following B, I began another programme, Context C (henceforth, C), by DL and NL-based. C was more cooperative and collaborative than A and B, tutor-facilitated, involved several group projects, discussions and peer feedback, and learner autonomy was stressed all through. I still had reservations from A and was therefore still not open to sharing my challenges in the forums. Even after gentle urging from a tutor to share my questions in the forum for group learning, I continued emailing the tutor privately. I decided at the time that I would learn in whatever way I felt most comfortable. However, this apprehension soon gave way to becoming comfortable with the discomfort of 'fish-bowl learning,' the opposite of 'hiding' in A. This unfolded as I learned to trust peers and tutors, feedback was established

as supportive rather than harshly critical, I saw assessment as transparent, and the programme promoted autonomy and reflexivity. I began to feel safe enough to enjoy and contribute to deeper learning through collaboration and knowledge co-construction with peers.

This story charts my NL evolution from *Apprehensive Outsider* in 'A,' to *Tentative Beginner* in 'B,' to *Invested Networked Learner* in 'C.' I am still evolving. There were several critical incidents (CIs) that provoked the re-evaluation and recalibration of my teacher values, ontology and epistemology. Some of this, I welcomed. Other aspects I initially begrudged but later embraced. This experience is further unpacked in the discussion, supported by the literature.

2. Theoretical framework

This section provides an overview of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, reflexivity and fields of practice, the theoretical framework for this study. It also lays the ground for unpacking the findings using this Bourdieusian framework.

2.1 Habitus

Bourdieu put forward the concept of habitus, a system of socially ingrained dispositions acquired through experience (Maclean et al., 2012). Habitus is influenced by previous experiences and goes on to influence future ones, hence Bourdieu described it as both structured and structuring. Habitus is however not static and may change with one's experiences such as age, time and travel. Habitus does not determine practice but operates as a limiting framework (Mouzelis, 2007). One example is a teacher's ontology (e.g. that knowledge is fixed and external to the learner) and epistemology (e.g. we learn by being taught), acquired through their own teacher-centred education and now influencing their practice. This concept of habitus has been criticised as simplistic and deterministic (Mouzelis, 2007). However, even with more recent extension and restructuring of this theory (Mouzelis, 2007), Bourdieu's habitus continues to influence sociological understandings.

2.2 Reflexivity

Also fundamental to Bourdieu's perspective is the concept of reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990a), defined by Maclean et al. (2012) as:

“the capacity of an actor to construct practical understandings ... of the location of self within a social system, to act accordingly ... and to reflect further and refine

understandings in response to events and the consequences of actions taken” (p. 388).

Through critical reflection (CR), individuals can break free from habitus (Maclean et al., 2012). Though not without criticism (Mouzelis, 2007), there is consensus that this unfreezing most likely occurs when a critical incident (CI) is encountered. In such CIs, habitus becomes incongruent with a shift in the field of action (Bourdieu, 1990a; Jordan, 2010), prompting radical self-questioning, re-positioning, growth and possibly identity development, until the new self aligns with the shifted field (Maclean et al., 2012).

2.3 Fields of practice

A third element in Bourdieu's framework is the concept of fields of practice (Bourdieu, 1990a). These are the structured social and professional contexts within which people, or actors, interact and operate e.g., the fields of education or sports. Each actor has a position within their field and positions are arranged in hierarchies by how much social capital an actor holds. Capital may be social, cultural, economic or symbolic. There is therefore a power differential between players, who compete and play to win more capital. This competition is 'the game.' Each game has rules and knowledge systems, which Bourdieu calls doxa.

3. Literature review

This section summarises key issues, concepts, theory and research relevant to NL and the connection between identity development and NL is established.

3.1 The nature of networked learning

The definition of networked learning continues to evolve (NLEC, 2020 & 2021). Hodgson et al. (2011) and Jones (2015) present eight essential components of NL: cooperation and collaboration; group working; discussion and dialogue; learner self-determination; difference; trust and relationships; reflexivity and learner investment and the role of technology in connecting and mediating. The power of NLCs to facilitate deep learning lies in the relational dialogue (Koole & Stack, 2016) and collaborative inquiry they facilitate that question thinking and practice (Toole, 2019). It is argued that this collaborative inquiry is powered by the strength of the relationships between the actors or nodes in the network i.e. the learners, tutors and resources (Church et al., 2002; Haythornwaite & de Laat, 2010).

3.2 Benefits and conditions for success of NL

NL is hailed for its potential to facilitate enhanced social learning processes; learning across barriers in time and space; transformative collaborative inquiry and its power to help minimise isolation in the case of remote learners (Fetter et al., 2010; Lieberman and Mace, 2010; Hodgson et al., 2011; Ansari et al., 2012 & Toole, 2019). Hodgson et al. (2011) discuss the shift this paradigm requires from “conventional face-to-face teaching and learning, towards a new set of values associated with networked learning.” Furthermore, new NL identities must be forged (pp. 295 – 296). Hodgson et al. state that:

“A strong element of this socio-cultural view of learning is that participation in authentic knowledge-creation activities, coupled with a growing sense of oneself as a legitimate and valued member of a knowledge-building community, is essential to the development of an effective knowledge-worker. Action and identity are key.” (2011, p. 355-356)

This growing sense of oneself underscores the relevance of reflexive identity development to the NL paradigm. However, even with the benefits enumerated in the literature, the success of NLCs cannot be taken for granted. Each NLC must deploy its unique features and contexts to make NL successful (Toole, 2019).

3.3 The role of identity and identity development in NL

Identity has been defined as “the way a person understands and views himself (sic) and is often viewed by others” (Horn et al., 2008, p. 62). Koole (2010) and Clark (2020) describe identity as performative i.e. we perform the identities we adopt. It could therefore be argued that what and whom we believe we are impacts what and how we perform, and to perform the role of a NLER, we must adopt and develop the identity of one. This aligns with Hodgson et al.’s call for NL identity development (2011). Identity development involves critical reflexivity (CR). CR leads to self-assessment and deep questioning of prior-held assumptions (Maclean, Harvey & Chia, 2012). This in turn can provoke iterative changes in consciousness and subsequent identity repositioning. These changes bring about transformative learning (Merriam et al., 2007) characteristic of effective NLCs.

3.4 Critique and challenges of NL

Even with the benefits and affordances of NL and NLCs enumerated, the literature reports that some students and teachers in online university programmes struggle with the

culture of online or NL (Koole & Stack, 2016). Lee and Bligh highlight the challenges of developing trust among diverse groups of people, contending that the assumption of underpinning trust in NLCs is naïve and incongruent with “everyday NL” (NLEC, 2021, p.341). They argue that any authentic definition of NL needs to acknowledge the everyday reality of shared challenge rather than promoting a romanticised ideal (NLEC, 2021).

In my professional journey as a teacher, from the analogue 1980s to the present days of digital pedagogy, my teacher values, ontology and epistemology have certainly been challenged and changed. Some change has come naturally, akin to the transformative learning through CIs, described by Toole as a feature of effective NLCs (2019). Other changes have been initially difficult, such as the vulnerability of exposing my learning challenges or becoming comfortable with asking for help. A teacher or student who is unable to make these necessary shifts (Mann, 2010) or form strong, trusting relationships in NLCs (Koole & Stack, 2016) may struggle to come to terms with this alien terrain. Reflecting on the arguments of Lee and Bligh in the preceding paragraph (NLEC, 2021), this could portend disadvantage for developing NLers.

Vermeulen et al. acknowledge the paradoxical role that diversity can play in NLCs (NLEC, 2021). They argue that on the one hand, diversity can facilitate sense-making as participants encounter difference and seek alignment and common ground, resulting in amended perspectives. On the other hand, when sense-making and re-alignment cannot be achieved, there is the risk of the breaking up of learning ties and disconnection (NLEC, 2021). Thus, NL ties can be precarious and a continuous balancing act, echoing Lee and Bligh on the assumption of trusting relationships.

Reynolds cautions on the darker side of community-based pedagogies (2000) such as NL, warning that traditional communities can be oppressive, with unequal power (as in Bourdieu’s hierarchical positions, 1990a) and control, driving conformity rather than autonomy. Participants may have different working and learning approaches and be at differing stages of readiness to participate (Bali et al., 2015). It can also be argued that since all pedagogies have merits and demerits, teachers should not be made to adopt NL if it does not align with their professional values, ontology or epistemology. Adoption imposed by organisational change would amount to imposed conformity. Indeed, Koole and Stack, in a study on *Doctoral students’ identity positioning in networked learning environments*, amidst positive reports from some participants also report “competitiveness, defensiveness and varying levels of participation

in online discussion forums” (2016, p.49). To mitigate these possibilities, The Networked Learning Editorial Collective recommend prior equipping of participants with NL skills (NLEC, 2020). This study therefore documents and unpacks my own challenges as I have journeyed through NLCs with a view to informing such NL skills training.

Drawing these arguments together, NL indeed has great potential for facilitating sustainable teacher CPD. However, the excitement to embrace NL for this purpose must be balanced by a consideration for its everyday realities, as warned by Lee and Bligh (NLEC, 2021). For some teachers, one of such everyday realities is the challenge of overcoming the habitus of earlier contrasting paradigms to develop NL values and a NL identity.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This is an autoethnography for the subjective understanding of my own experiences. It is therefore underpinned by subjective interpretivism (Cohen et al., 2011; Saunders et al., 2015). Much of the existing literature reports from the perspective of NL as a Higher or Further Education (H.E. or F.E.) paradigm. This study presents my perspective as a primary school teacher and doctoral researcher exploring the use of NL in teacher professional development. Though a self-study, participant data and reports from similar others found in the literature have been used, as well as feedback from a ‘critical friend,’ for member-checking and triangulation (Chang, 2008). Critical friend input was used to check for possible alternative interpretations. Data from memory have been used, capturing the past, and from reflections, capturing the present. Bourdieu’s sociological lens has been applied for analysis and interpretation.

4.2 Methods and data collection

Data were collected regarding three of my postgraduate study contexts, ‘A,’ ‘B’ and ‘C,’ in which I have participated in NLCs. The following methods were used for rich descriptions and depth of understanding:

1. My social media posts made in NLCs – contributions I have made on various Moodle, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms, spanning my teacher education;
2. My student journal entries spanning my teaching career, as memory joggers;

3. Self-reflections over my teaching career to unpack my experiences; and
4. Stories of similar others found in the literature, presented in the findings and discussion.

4.3 Sampling

From each context, I have selected the one CI that I found most challenging to resolve. CIs were selected for their transformational learning potential (Bourdieu, 1990a & 1990b, Toole, 2019). Stories of similar others found in the literature (i.e., H.E. students and academics new to NL) were selected for comparison using the following criteria: level of study (H.E. like myself) and experience with NL (beginner). I collected these stories from the literature as I sought to compare my experiences with those in extant studies, for subjective understanding (See Appendix A).

4.4 Data analysis

The data were compiled, prepared and read iteratively as one set for familiarisation.

Analysis was then implemented at three levels, described as follows.

4.4.1 Level 1

Both inductive and deductive coding, line by line and blocks of text as applicable, using basic themes from the data, the literature and the theoretical framework. These were: Support, confidence boost, security/insecurity/trust, autonomy/self-reliance, reconstruction (reflexively reconstituting self in response to CIs), relationships, learner investment, reflexivity, habitus, collaboration, accumulation (acquiring personal capital), embracing opportunities and isolation. Attempts to organise these further into analytical codes neither yielded coherent patterns nor did this address any of the RQs. Hence, I proceeded to Level 2.

4.4.2 Level 2

The codes were sorted by context, ‘A,’ ‘B’ and ‘C,’ as they applied. Some were expanded such as trust (growing, established). Additional codes were developed such as ‘integration’ and ‘tentativeness.’ Others were subsumed, such as ‘embracing opportunities’ into ‘accumulation.’ This sorting is illustrated in Table 1.

A pattern of growth began to emerge going from A to C.

Table 1. Sorting codes by context

Context A	Context B	Context C
Reconstruction	Accumulation	Security (growing)
Security (absent)	Security (growing)	Accumulation & Reconstruction
Isolation	Peer support	Peer support
	Confidence boost	Trust (growing, established)
	Isolation	Autonomy
	Trust (growing)	Confidence boost
	Integration	Support
	Tentativeness	

4.4.3 Level 3

Next, I assigned descriptions to each context, as obtained from the data, along with a description of the focus CI. This can be seen in Table 2 (see Findings and discussion section). Sorted by context, along with the category descriptions and related CIs, the emerging patterns of identity development began to provide responses to the RQs (see Tables 3 and 4).

4.5 Ethical issues

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Lancaster University. No identifying details regarding the three contexts have been used. Data sources from similar others in the literature are appropriately cited and referenced.

4.6 Limitations

Memory is not reliable as a data source. I have therefore used extant data from my own social media posts and journal entries for validation. My own biases have influenced my choice of CIs and my perspective on them. Thus, autoethnographies are subjective in nature and the findings not generalisable. However, generalisability is not the aim but understanding of self and others (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008). Albeit, to mitigate this subjectivity, I have compared my story against those of similar others and member-checked with a 'critical friend' (Chang, 2008). I have also used established theory in unpacking my experiences.

5. Findings and discussion

In this section, I present overviews of my NL journey and then unpack the findings in response to the research

questions. With the data coded and sorted as described, NL identities and patterns of identity development began to emerge. Across 'A,' 'B' and 'C,' my evolution from Apprehensive Outsider to Tentative Beginner, to Invested Networked Learner can be seen (Tables 1 and 2).


5.1 What?

As the data answers RQs 1 and 2 simultaneously, I present the findings for these 'What' RQs together.

- *RQ1: What have been my experiences participating in the three focus networked learning communities?*
- *RQ2: What ontological and epistemological challenges have I experienced during the identity development process?*

Drawing from Bourdieu, I arrived at 'A' with a positivist ontological and epistemological habitus (see Table 2). Not only had I last studied formally in what is known as the Industrial Age, characterised by instructivism and standardised learning and assessment, this education had taken place in a collectivist society (Bourdieu's field) where knowledgeable elders pass on knowledge to eager but passive learners who are habituated in the practices of: (a) receiving knowledge and (b) unquestioning acceptance of the wisdom of more experienced elders (doxa). Even though interested in the subject of the self-taught module (see Table 2), habitus influenced my decision to pass it up. However, challenged by this new field ('A') with its new constructivist doxa, I began developing reflexivity.

Table 2. My Networked Learning Journey Across the Three Contexts

Context	'A'	'B'	'C'
Corresponding basic codes	Insecurity Low trust Isolation	Tentativeness Isolation Trust growing Peer support growing Integration growing Confidence boost Security emerging	Tentativeness Trust growing Autonomy growing Confidence boost Security emerging Trust established Security
Context descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutor-led - Moodle used to teach, deliver/access resources, submit assignments and organise activities - Participants mainly working individually - Low degree of learner autonomy - Highly prescriptive - Highly critical assessment - University-created peer groups, mandatory and peer-created Facebook groups used to coordinate group activities and share information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutor-led - Technology used to teach, deliver/access resources, submit assignments and organise activities - Participation in online forums - Medium degree of learner autonomy - Vague assessment that I could hardly make sense of - Peer-created WhatsApp groups used for informal peer support and resource sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutor-facilitated - Technology used to facilitate group activities, peer support and collaboration, co-construction of knowledge, as well as to deliver/access resources, submit assignments and organise activities - High degree of learner autonomy - Constructive and supportive tutor and peer feedback that I could use for improvement - Peer selected forum groups - Peer-created WhatsApp groups used for informal peer support and sharing information
Critical incident	I was given the opportunity to choose between two optional modules. One was to be taught face-to-face. The other was to be self-taught by distance learning (DL). Though I was interested in the second option, I chose the first as I was not comfortable with DL or self-teaching. Later, I thought, why did I do that? What was uncomfortable about DL and why?	Fresh from 'A,' with experiences of discrimination, I started off at B hiding my ethnicity and gender. This was made possible by the DL nature of the programme. I only began to 'come out' after establishing trust with peers and tutors and acquiring some social capital on the course. I later thought, "Why did I feel the need to hide and how did I qualify safety?"	With initial hesitance from 'B,' I started off uncomfortable asking for help publicly in the forum, insisting on privately emailing the tutor. Only after building trust and more social capital did I begin to appreciate the role of collaboration and sharing in my own learning and in strengthening the value of the group experience. I later thought, "Why was I apprehensive about being vulnerable in the group?"
NL self-identity description by programme end	Apprehensive Outsider	Tentative Beginner	Invested Networked Learner
	 <p>My new 'selves,' aligning with the changing fields across 'A,' 'B' and 'C'(Maclean et al., 2012).</p>		

Williams (2000) argues that identities are formed through sense-making of one's experiences. Through reflexive journaling, studying my own CIs, self-evaluation and iterative practice modification, 'A' triggered the renegotiation of my teacher identity. I began to question my positivist understanding of knowledge, my behaviourist teaching, learning and assessment foundations and my avoidance of the self-taught module. This began my shift from Apprehensive NL Outsider to Tentative NL Beginner. As Tentative Beginner, I had sufficient self-efficacy to enrol on a distance-learning programme, 'B.' I had been introduced to digital pedagogy in 'A.' This was worlds apart from the educational field I was inducted into through my Bachelor of Education degree and teacher qualification in the 1980s. Learning for me in the 1980s was individualistic, and knowledge sources, static. By the 2000s, learning had become collaborative and cooperative, with learners interconnected via ever updating and expanding knowledge sources and communities. This required major shifts in ontology and epistemology, but I was happy to make them. Olsen speaks of teacher education experiences which could confirm, disconfirm or have no impact on a teacher's identity (2008). Koole and Stack report the same among distance-learning PhD students encountering discourses that support self-conceptions, those that trigger renegotiation and others eliciting discomfort and rejection (2016). Hence, identity is continually renegotiated, and since it is performative (Clark, 2020), changing identity leads to changing practice.

As Tentative Beginner, I had sufficient self-efficacy to enrol on a distance-learning programme, 'B.' I had been introduced to digital pedagogy in 'A.' This was worlds apart from the educational field I was inducted into through my Bachelor of Education degree and teacher qualification in the 1980s. Learning for me in the 1980s was individualistic, and knowledge sources, static. By the 2000s, learning had become collaborative and cooperative, with learners interconnected via ever updating and expanding knowledge sources and communities. This required major shifts in ontology and epistemology, but I was happy to make them. Olsen speaks of teacher education experiences which could confirm, disconfirm or have no impact on a teacher's identity (2008). Koole and Stack report the same among distance-learning PhD students encountering discourses that support self-conceptions, those that trigger renegotiation and others eliciting discomfort and rejection (2016). Hence, identity is continually renegotiated, and since it is performative (Clark, 2020), changing identity leads to changing practice.

With my new shifts, I felt that I could take charge of my learning in this new world. I could study via DL and self-

teach rather than depending on being taught. I embraced self-construction of knowledge in 'B,' studied asynchronously with a cohort and only reached out to peers and tutors when I needed help.

I enrolled in 'C,' happy to participate in group and forum activities and continued to contact tutors privately if I needed help. One tutor requested that all questions be posted in the forum to support group learning. I was uncomfortable with this 'fish-bowl' approach. I felt it was my prerogative to either share my challenges or have them addressed privately. In hindsight, I was still habituated in self-construction and individualistic learning and the penalties of not knowing, from 'A.' The new social-constructivist field, 'C,' with its doxa and collaborative actor relationships challenged the vestiges of my cognitivist habitus. Before this journey, I would have been unaware of this habitus. Now stirred by reflexivity, this challenge became a CI for self-study.

I must clarify that this study does not negate the contributions or continuing relevance of behaviourism and cognitivism. It rather seeks to highlight how I became stuck in the educational paradigms contemporary to my own earlier teacher training and education and how reflexivity both alerted me to this habitus and helped free me from it. This is aligned with the consensus in the literature that reflexivity fosters new perspectives, facilitates self-reconstruction and enables individuals to escape their own habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a; Cunliffe, 2002; Alvesson et al., 2008; Maclean et al., 2012).

Bringing the three contexts together, the one common feature that helped to address my ontological and epistemological challenges is reflexivity. It enabled the construction and refinement of practical understandings; repositioning within changing fields and doxa; renegotiation of inter-actor relationships and reflections on the consequences of actions taken. All this has resulted in stronger metacognition and deeper integration in my NLCs.

The vertical arrow in Table 4 shows the progression of my experiences in each context, from beginning to end.


In 'A,' I experienced insecurity as I sought to enculturate in a new field with new doxa; low trust in a harshly critical environment with opaque assessment practices and discrimination; minimal integration and subsequent isolation, from the beginning to the end.

'B' began with tentativeness and isolation as I fell behind due to illness. However, a peer-created WhatsApp group midway helped to build trust, peer support and integration.

Table 3. My ontological and epistemological challenges

	‘A’	‘B’	‘C’
Ontology	Knowledge is fixed and can be known.	Knowledge is fixed and can be known.	Knowledge is socially constructed.
Epistemology	You learn by being taught by more knowledgeable others. Knowledge is transferred from one who knows to one who does not.	You acquire knowledge through constructing it in your own mind. The more knowledgeable other facilitates this self-construction.	You gain knowledge by constructing it with others through iterative critical and reflexive dialogue. The more knowledgeable other facilitates this dialogue.
Critical incident/challenge	I rejected a self-taught module, being used to teacher-led instruction.	I embraced a new paradigm of distance learning but spent the first months ‘hiding.’	With ‘fishbowl learning,’ I could no longer hide. I was urged to ask and respond to questions in the Moodle forum.
Impact	I avoided the self-taught module as I believed I needed to be taught.	I became more accepting of DL as I developed confidence in self-study, with minimal peer and tutor support.	I embraced group learning, seeing the value of NLCs for deep learning. I learned NL skills.

Table 4. My Networked learning experiences

Context	‘A’	‘B’	‘C’	
Corresponding basic codes	Insecurity Low trust Minimal integration Isolation	Tentativeness Isolation Trust growing Peer support growing Integration growing Confidence boost Security emerging	Tentativeness Trust growing Autonomy growing Confidence boost Security emerging Trust established Security	Beginning of programme  End of programme

By the end of ‘B,’ I experienced a confidence boost from good grades, tutor feedback and peer validation, plus increased sense of security as a NLER and scholar. While this validation happened organically and repeatedly and I did not set out to obtain it, it resulted in social capital gain – some colleagues became as quick to respond to my queries as I had been to theirs and deeper connections with others formed away from the WhatsApp group.

‘C’ began with tentativeness, some trust, autonomy and confidence from B. This grew into an established sense of security where I became comfortable with the discomfort of fishbowl learning.

Koole and Stack report similar challenges among NL PhD students in their study. Some tried to locate faculty members with approaches and expectations similar to theirs (2016) rather than shifting from habitus.

“The participants sometimes found themselves trying to locate individuals (professors and supervisors) whose approaches and expectations were compatible with their own ... Rather than attempting to modify their orientations to conform to expectations and philosophical perspectives, two of the participants of this study elected to work with faculty members who could support their needs and growth” (Koole & Stack, 2016, pp. 50 – 51).

Koole and Stack also report students feeling “alignment or misalignment,” questioning their abilities (p. 54) and epistemological and ontological repositioning:

“Feelings of alignment and misalignment in the academic department and the academy appeared to result in participants’ questioning their own abilities ... Self-doubt appeared to arise from the struggle to understand their intellectual and social positions (academic language and norms) as they progressed through their doctoral studies ... One learner’s description of ‘standing on the same plank’ and ‘taking part’ in the academic conversation online with a recognized academic may suggest that the learner was psychologically and emotionally crossing the threshold into academia” (Koole & Stack, 2016, p. 54).

This can be seen in one participant’s response:

“I was lost for the first week or two. I really questioned if I should be in [the program] because when you’re kind of out in the practitioner world and you do very well at your job, and you’ve performed well in any courses you’ve taken, you’re really very confident in yourself—what I found is that when I went in the doctoral program, all of a sudden you’re exposed to articles and readings that are a foreign language to you.” (Koole & Stack, 2016, p. 50).

My changing identity summarised across the three contexts can also be compared to the range of experiences reported by Cutajar (2017) in a study of the NL experiences of 32 FE students. Cutajar’s findings present experiences ranging from learning divergent from others, to in parallel with others, to in convergence with others and finally in mesh with others across 4 categories.

Mann’s (2010) challenges on first encountering a NLC show similar epistemological challenges to mine. While my epistemological clash in A took the form of believing that “*You learn by being taught by more knowledgeable others. Knowledge is transferred from one who knows to one who does not,*” against the NL position that knowledge is socially constructed, Mann grappled with not being able to see her peers and teacher, plus identity concerns and orientation anxiety :

“It seems that the process of managing my identity as a learner entering and becoming part of this new learning community is exaggerated in the online learning environment. We know ... that any new group member is concerned with issues of whether one will be liked (acceptance anxiety), whether one will succeed and be

able to perform (performance anxiety), and whether one will be able to understand (orientation anxiety). It seems to me that these ‘anxieties’ were exaggerated online rather than mitigated. The factors that seem to be at play here for me are to do with the invisibility of one’s peers and teacher; the lack of or limited amount of feedback and clues as to who they are and what they are making of me; the loss of speed, and concomitant increase in effort required to communicate in writing; and my sense of clumsiness and illiteracy in this new medium. It is as if learning to express myself and engage with others in a new medium highlights and exaggerates processes I normally take for granted.”

In summary, my experience of incongruence with a new field and doxa, or new learning paradigm, aligns with extant research and established theory.

5.2 How?

In this section, I answer the ‘How’ RQ.

- *RQ 3: How have I addressed these challenges and developed a new teacher identity?*

In alignment with Bourdieu (1990a), reflexivity has helped me to identify my habitus as CIs triggered the renegotiation of my teacher identity. This has led to my embracing socio-constructivist pedagogies where I had once been stuck in largely behaviourist approaches to teaching and learning. The change in my identity from Apprehensive Outsider to Tentative Beginner and then, to Invested Networked Learner led to my changing teacher practice since identity is not just something we are but also something we do (Clark, 2020).

5.3 Overarching RQ

Drawing the findings together, I respond here to the overarching RQ:

- *How can networked learning communities support the networked learner identity development of primary school teachers?*

The main factor that has supported my identity development in the three focal NLCs has been reflexivity. This is because without reflexivity, I might not have been alerted to, or recognised that I had a pedagogical habitus. In the face of critical incidents, like Koole and Stacks’ two participants (2016), and as Lee and Bligh warn (NLEC, 2021) I might have disengaged from the NL and NLC. I therefore argue that NLCs and NL pedagogy need to promote learner reflexivity to facilitate NL identity development. In addition, to

develop reflexivity, a NLC needs to support the development of trusting relationships, as where there is no trust, defensiveness rather than reflexivity develops. This can be seen in my experiences as an Apprehensive Outsider, among Koole and Stack's participants resisting change (2016) and in Mann's NLC experience which she at some points describes as alienating (2010). Lastly, my experiences in NLCs and those of the similar others whose stories I have used in this study all agree on the essential components of an effective NLC outlined by Hodgson et al. (2011) and Jones (2015).

6. Conclusion

Through this autoethnography, I have explored my experiences in three NL contexts with the goal of unpacking and understanding my changing ontology, epistemology and resulting identity evolution. The aim has been to extend this insight to the challenges primary school teachers may face who are new to NL and find themselves having to embrace it as part of their teacher training and/or development. Drawing on Bourdieu, I have unpacked my experiences to reveal the key roles of reflexivity and trust in developing NL identities and values and the role of habitus in helping or hindering this. I have also reiterated the importance of Hodgson et al.'s eight features of effective NLCs. I therefore recommend that rather than requiring teachers to adopt NL values and forge NL identities, thus risking resistance, teachers should be supported to achieve this paradigm shift through ITE and teacher CPD programmes. These should consist of learning experiences that lead to deep questioning of ontology and epistemology through CIs. This way, the paradigm shift can be self-initiated through reflexivity, and identity development can begin before arriving in the NLC, mitigating culture shock. For further study, I would suggest action research in the development of a pre-NL unit of study to precede a NL-based ITE programme.

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Appendix A: Comparing my experiences and those of similar others in the literature

Theme	My experience	Experiences of similar others in the literature
Discomfort with NL paradigm; Epistemological clashes Identity concerns Orientation anxiety	<p>"I was given the opportunity to choose between two optional modules. One was to be taught face-to-face. The other was to be self-taught by DL. Though I was interested in the second option, I chose the first as I was not comfortable with DL or self-teaching."</p> <p>I believed that "You learn by being taught by more knowledgeable others. Knowledge is transferred from one who knows to one who does not."</p> <p>Though I was interested in the second option, I chose the first as I was not comfortable with DL or self-teaching."</p>	<p>"It seems that the process of managing my identity as a learner entering and becoming part of this new learning community is exaggerated in the online learning environment. We know ... that any new group member is concerned with issues of whether one will be liked (acceptance anxiety), whether one will succeed and be able to perform (performance anxiety), and whether one will be able to understand (orientation anxiety)." It seems to me that these 'anxieties' were exaggerated online rather than mitigated. The factors that seem to be at play here for me are to do with the invisibility of one's peers and teacher; the lack of or limited amount of feedback and clues as to who they are and what they are making of me; the loss of speed, and concomitant increase in effort required to communicate in writing; and my sense of clumsiness and illiteracy in this new medium. It is as if learning to express myself and engage with others in a new medium highlight and exaggerates processes I normally take for granted."</p> <p>(Mann, 2010, p. 209)</p> <p>"My experience of classrooms is of relatively bounded spaces ... As a new member of a learning group I am tending toward a need for community in the sense of a bounded space in which certain purposes and norms are shared. This may help me to contribute and engage more easily. The online learning group I experienced is a less bounded space, which has not explicitly established a common purpose and which has certainly not established agreed norms and values."</p> <p>(Mann, 2010, p. 214 – 215)</p> <p>"Questioning epistemology and ontology" "Epistemological and ontological positioning" (Koole & Stack, 2016)</p>
Challenges with self-presentation; Hiding/withdrawing Change triggered	<p>"I started off at B hiding my ethnicity and gender. This was made possible by the DL nature of the programme. I only began to 'come out' after establishing trust with peers and tutors and acquiring some social capital on the course."</p>	<p>"Contrary to my expectation that working online would allow far greater freedom of self-presentation, the paradox emerged for me of being more self-conscious online than face to face. There is a record of everything one says. One becomes visibly inscribed in the text. I was conscious of asking myself: How much do I disclose? How anonymous do I remain? ... I become conscious of wishing to keep my professional self out of my self-presentation."</p> <p>"I began to question whether I was the only one who thought differently. And if this were (sic) the case, how well did I and would I continue to fit into this group. For a while this led to my taking a more withdrawn position until I began to feel rebellious."</p> <p>(Mann, 2010, p. 209)</p>
Identity concerns	<p>"I therefore decided that in the early stages of B, I would keep my ethnicity and gender hidden until I had established an identity of competence rather than being assumed incompetent by default as I felt had been the case in A."</p>	<p>"The participants expressed concerns about whether or not their cohort mates viewed them as being reliable and supportive, having integrity, or being a leader."</p> <p>(Koole & Stack, 2016)</p>



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An autoethnographic account of the use of Twitter for professional development by novice academic

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Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory autoethnographic study of my use of Twitter to support my professional development. It investigated three research questions that focus on my approach to using Twitter, experiences and challenges, and management strategies. Using reflective narrative and data from my Twitter archive, five themes were developed using thematic, lexical, and social network analysis. These themes are: 1) constructing a personal learning network, 2) managing an evolving space, 3) serendipitous learning and staying in touch, 4) spontaneous engagement and opportunistic collaboration and 5) adopting helpful behaviours. These results suggest my use of Twitter evolved over time into a personal and networked space that has positively impacted my development as a novice academic. This networked space offered continuous opportunities for learning, collaboration and engagement. Though several challenges were experienced, deliberate strategies mitigated these challenges. While this study found similarities between my experiences and those of others from the literature, it offers potentially unique strategic insights into the use of Twitter for effective professional development.

1. Introduction

The higher education work environment is undergoing rapid changes with greater scrutiny placed on teaching and research excellence (Hollywood et al., 2019). These changes are evidenced in modifications to managerial systems and quality assurance practices, and increased emphasis on accountability and performativity (Reaper, 2016). These changes are taking place in the context of fiscal constraints, increase students' diversity, opportunities and challenges of technology, demands for interdisciplinarity, and changing faculty demographics (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013).

These changes have implications for higher education in general and in turn the professional development support provided to academics, especially those new to higher education (Behari-Leak, 2017). Concurrent with these rapid adjustments, limited opportunities for development and preparation of novice educators for the academy are often noted (Summers, 2017) though professional development and support are necessary elements for developing scholarly practices and career satisfaction in academia (Heffernan & Heffernan, 2019; Mathews, Lodge & Bosanquet, 2012). Further, it is acknowledged that novice academics share concerns about challenges they experience early in their career (Brown & Sorrell, 2017; Kiffer & Tchibozo, 2013; McDermid, Peters, Daly, & Jackson, 2016). Some of the needs identified by novice academics themselves include professional development opportunities to facilitate easy transition to academic life, research and publication and development of teaching skills, identity development, and purposefulness in service (Acker & Webber, 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2013; Matthews et al., 2012; Smith, 2017).

Social media has been adopted widely by academics for a wide range professional and career development objectives (Lupton, 2014; Malik, Heyman-Schrum & Johri, 2019; Singh 2020; van Noorden, 2014). This increase in uptake of social media by academics is viewed as one measure to help address some of the deficits and challenges existing in their work environment. Twitter in particular is viewed as a space that facilitates career development needs and provides opportunities that help address institutional constraints (Jordan, 2019). However, it is not yet clear how novice (early career) academics as a distinct category experience and use social media for professional development. This gap is even more pronounced for early career academics working in the developing country context.

As a novice academic working in a resource-constrained developing country higher education context, I have been

challenged to seek alternative approaches to develop my career. In this context social media, including Twitter have proven useful for me. In this study I explore my professional development experiences with Twitter from an autoethnographic perspective.

Autoethnography according to Adams, Jones and Ellis (2017) is a method that facilitates the study of personal experiences through reflexivity within wider cultural norms and expectations. I reveal and provide a rich story of Twitter as a space for professional development and provide useful insights from my experiences that may be of use to others.

The following research questions guide my study.

Overarching research question: What are my experiences using Twitter for Professional Development?

1. RQ1. How do I as a novice academic approach professional development using Twitter?
2. RQ2. What are the benefits I obtain when using Twitter for professional development?
3. RQ3. What are challenges I experience when using Twitter for professional development and how do I manage these challenges?

The literature review that follows outlines the current state of knowledge on novice academics and professional development in the context of social media in higher education and in particular Twitter.

2. Literature review

In keeping with the aims of this research and the research questions addressed, the literature review below is organised to reflect (1) approaches to professional development, (2) experiences (benefits and challenges), and (3) management of challenges experienced in the course of professional development. In this review I place particular emphases on professional development of novice academics, Personal Learning Networks (PLNs), the use of social media (i.e., Twitter).

2.1 Novice academics and professional development

Academics at the early stage of their career are variously referred to by names such as 'novice faculty members' (Kiffer & Tchibozo, 2013), 'early career academics' (Acker & Webber, 2017; Haddow & Hammerfelt, 2019; Matthews et al., 2012), and 'new academics' (Behari-Leak, 2017) or by PhD and employment status (Haddow & Hammerfelt, 2019).

Though much literature on this group focuses on academics fresh from PhD studies, Kiffer and Tchibozo, (2013) adopted the term ‘novice academics’ (p. 278) to include those academics without a PhD but with previous professional experience. Irrespective of the description used, professional development is identified as a core need for academics.

Like the variations in definitions related to early career / novice academics, a definition for professional development is not conclusive either and is often used interchangeably with professional learning (Oddone, 2019). Nevertheless, professional development activities aim to enhance the capacities of academics through a range of activities and strategies. Zou (2018), for instance identified four activities central to continuous professional development: (1) knowledge sharing and help-seeking; (2) problem-solving and skills/knowledge development; (3) mentoring, modelling, and sharing good principles and practices; and (4) an on-going journey that transforms learning and teaching. To support these and other related activities, various approaches have been adopted. They include faculty inquiry groups as communities of practice (Bond & Lockee, 2018); development of professional learning networks (Trust, Carpenter & Krutka, 2017); scholarship network participatory practices to enhance scholarship (Stewart, 2015). At the institutional level notable approaches include faculty institutes (Derting et al., 2016), teaching and learning seminars and course orientation programmes (Zheng, Bender & Nadershahi, 2017). In particular, collaborative activities among peers are highly valued by faculty (Ferman, 2002).

2.2 Academics use of social media

Social Networks are increasingly used by academics in higher education for a range of professional development activities. A group of international academics reported the following uses of social networks for professional development: connecting with others, creating networks, promoting openness and sharing, giving and receiving support, publicising, and the development of research (Lupton, 2014). However, the literature also highlights that academics have concerns using social media for professional development and other activities. These include issues related to privacy, the blurring of the boundary between the personal and the professional, and injudicious use (Jordan & Weller, 2018; Lupton, 2014). Further, tensions between the personal and professional and the issue of scholar’s identity and its development were highlighted by Veletsianos and Kimmons (2013).

2.3 Personal learning networks, Twitter and professional development

Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) refer to connections among people and resources for the purpose of enriching learning in online and offline spaces (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). PLNs are characterized by openness, reciprocity, and willingness to share information, and connections, collaborations, and engagements (Siemens, 2004). PLNs are formed based on learners’ organization of their connections to learning communities (Kop, 2008) and are initiated by learners (Oddone, 2019). Several studies from higher education users have pointed to Twitter’s use for developing PLNs (Hughes, 2018; Li, 2015; McPherson, Budge & Lemon, 2015; Stewart, 2016; Veletsianos, 2011).

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is a microblogging social networking site used for connecting and sharing. Among its several features, Twitter allows users to “follow” other users, “tweet” content (up to 280 characters), and reply to tweets of others, “retweet” content of others, “like” content, “direct message”, create “list” of users, tag content using a hashtag (#). See (Powers, 2013; Emke, 2019, p.44; Jefferis, 2016, p.26) for full list/description of features.

Twitter facilitates various forms of connections, collaborations and engagements including: social commentary, requesting information and offering suggestions (Veletsianos, 2011); conference engagement through backchannels (Greenhow, Li & Mai, 2019; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2016; Li & Greenhow, 2015), participation in scholarly activities, discussions, public engagements (Lee, et al., 2017; Stewart, 2015, 2016); chatting and chat events (Carpenter, Kimmons, Short, Clements & Staples, 2019; Evans, 2017; Lee et al., 2017). Overall, Twitter is described as useful for academic networked learning (Quan-Haase, Martin & McCay-Peet, 2015).

Though PLNs are intentionally constructed, resulting social interactions can unintentionally lead participants to serendipitous learning. *Serendipitous learning* is learning that is neither planned by the learner or a teacher and which could result in connections between seemingly unrelated content and ideas (Buchem, 2011). *Informal learning* is learning that is principally self-directed through observing others, listening, asking questions, trial and errors, help-seeking, and conversing (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Several studies have reported Twitter’s facilitation of serendipitous and informal learning in higher education. Twitter offered educators accessible and informal means for keeping up to date with developments in education practice (O’Keefe, 2018). Similarly, through its ease of use, portability, and

instant access, Twitter provided educators with high quality material (Tucker, 2019). From a practitioner's standpoint, McPherson et al. (2014) highlighted how Twitter can be informally used to create new ways of working by making your practice visible to others.

While the literature identifies many beneficial uses of Twitter, several challenges exist. For novice academics these include fear of misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and confrontation; intellectual property uncertainties; perceived low value of twitter activity; and negative speech which may impact future employment prospects (Ferguson & Wheat, 2015). Other academics indicated several additional issues including: the time to participate; skills and guidance required; and limited support (Hughes, 2018). Further, low confidence in open participation and capacity to participate along with perceived knowledge gap between self and others made participants feel hesitant to engage with strangers according to O'Keeffe (2018). Additionally, fear of the potentially damaging power of posting due to the inability to edit tweets, and the risk of abuse were also reported by O'Keeffe (2016, 2018). Stewart (2016) suggests the collapse of context - a situation where it is sometimes difficult to separate the personal from professional, poses a challenge to communication by increasing the risk of trolling and harassment. Veletsianos (2017) suggests that Twitter can reinforce egalitarian structures which may impact participation by lowering the diversity of users.

While it is noted that academics use Twitter for professional development in various ways (Malik et al., 2019) little is reported on how early career academics explore professional development on Twitter (Singh, 2020). It is important to better understand the experiences and challenges of novice academics as they pursue professional development as these experiences could inform the design of professional development programmes by academic developers. These experiences may also offer novice academics with insights and strategies to undertake professional development independently.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Networked Learning theory (NLT) (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2016) is adopted as the theoretical lens through which this study is explored. Networked learning principles are used in two ways in this study: 1) as an analytical frame to make sense of my data and, 2) as a means for interpreting my findings. The following section outlines the principles of networked learning.

2.4.1 Networked Learning theory (NLT)

Networked learning is an approach to learning that has been influenced by the concept of open learning and focuses on the use of information and communication technologies to promote connections between learners, learning communities, and learning resources (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2016). The following eight core principles are central to networked learning: perceived value of learning to learners; shared responsibility of learning process; time to build relationships; situated and contextual nature of learning; collaboration; dialog and social interaction and the co-construction of knowledge, critical reflexivity, and the role of facilitator/ animator (Hodgson & McConnell, 2019, p45-46). Further, six pedagogic principles related to learning are identified by Hodgson, Dirckinck-Holmfeld and McConnell, (2012, p 8-9). These are: openness in the educational process; self-determined learning; a real purpose in the cooperative process; a supportive learning environment; collaborative assessment of learning; assessment and evaluation of the ongoing learning process.

3. Methodology

3.1 Autoethnography

This study uses autoethnography as the methodological approach to explore my experiences and tell the story of how I use Twitter to support career and professional development. My perspectives are to be understood in the context of an early career academic working in a developing country with resource challenges but where the expectations of excellence in teaching, research, and service are no less than those of better-resourced academic environments. I started my career as an assistant lecturer of computer science at the University of Guyana immediately after completing my undergraduate degree. As a novice academic new to a resource-constrained developing country higher education context, I was assigned responsibilities of teaching, with the expectation that engagements in research and service would naturally follow like it they do for more-seasoned and experienced academics. With no work experience and very minimal understanding of the requirements and expectations of an academic, I was challenged immediately to develop myself professionally if I were to survive and develop my academic self. Though frustrations and fear of failure were frequent experiences and persisted for several years, I was determined to explore alternative means to address the challenges I was experiencing.

In addition to pursuing a post graduate diploma in education to aid my teaching, and further studies at the master's level to improve my qualifications, I explored online social networks. Online social networks, which were very much at the infancy in the higher education context during these formative years of my academic career, provided me a space to explore professional development opportunities. In the beginning I used several social media platforms casually, but I was particularly drawn to Twitter because in the course of my casual engagements, I noticed academics from my domain (computer science) and from the wider education arena were using the platform to share information and interact with others. Looking on and learning from how other academics were using Twitter encouraged me to rethink my own strategy. I adjusted my own use of Twitter and it was from here on that Twitter became a more formal academic space for me.

At the time of thinking about this autoethnographic study I was reminded by Twitter that it is 10 years since I joined the platform and so it was a timely opportunity to reflect on my professional development use of Twitter. This autoethnographic study presented the opportunity to reveal my story of using Twitter as a space for personal and professional development.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method used to explore, describe, analyse personal lives and experiences (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2017). It allows for the exploration of intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions about the self (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2017) and to connect this experience of the self with cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography is therefore an appropriate choice in this project as it allows me to explore my research problem through introspection and critical reflection. I draw on an “analytical-interpretive” approach to autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2016) to tell a story of my own developmental trajectory, experiences, challenges, and emotions but with the view of a broader higher education cultural context in mind. One of the characteristics of the analytic approach to autoethnography is its commitment to the development of ‘theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 1). My autoethnography is aimed at developing theoretical insights from my own experiences but situated within a broader theoretical perspective of academic professional development.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data was collected using a triangulated approach from my personal Twitter archive and reflexive narrative.

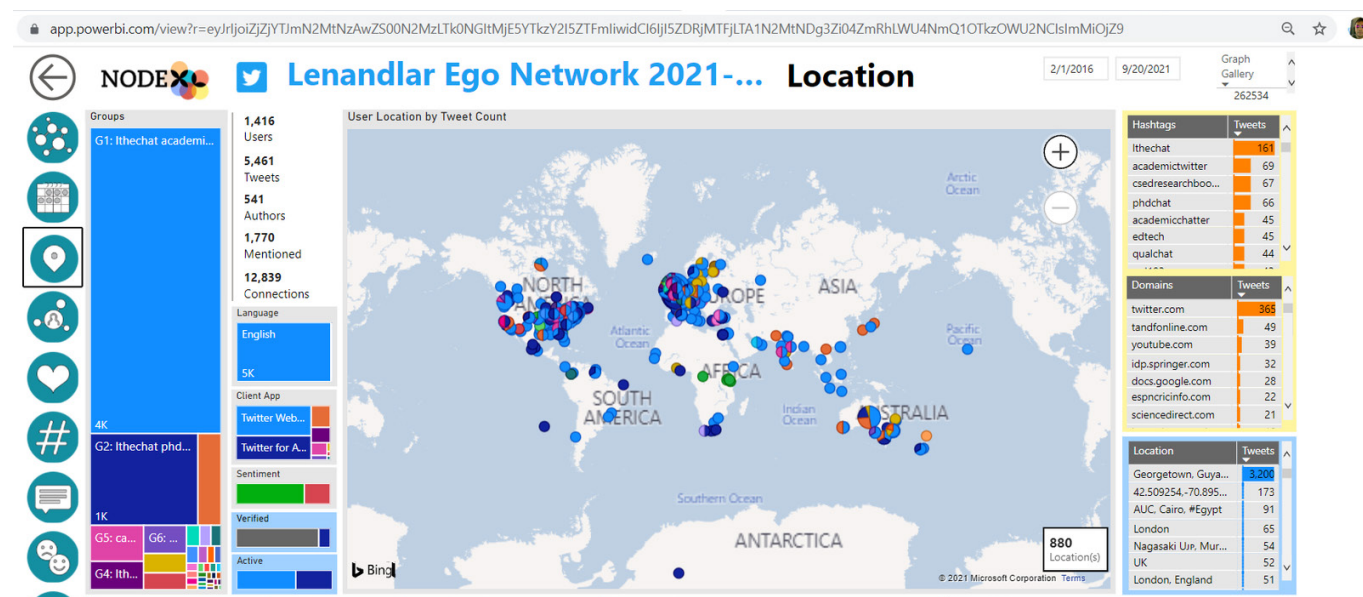
Twitter allows its users to download a personal archive of data as a single comma separate value (CSV) file of all tweets. My archive at the time of download for this contained 15,700 tweets spanning a period of approximately 10 years (2009 – 2019). This dataset contained all my personal tweets, my replies to the tweets of others, tweets retweeted and liked. I did use the content of the disaggregated categories for analysis in this study. The dataset was analysed as an aggregate of all activities. However, a numeric disaggregate between tweets and retweets (see Table 1). I used my Twitter archive to complement my reflective narratives by providing reminders of my activities and engagements. My Twitter archive allowed me to explore patterns of usage and observe trends of activities and engagements. These patterns and trends were observed from the results of the lexical analysis conducted on the aggregate dataset.

I wrote personal reflective narratives to document from memory my recollections, perceptions, judgements, and general reflection on my use of Twitter. These narratives were written before I explored and analysed my Twitter archive. Twelve self-interview questions (see Appendix A) guided my reflective writing. In total I wrote six pages of personal narrative of approximately 3660 words. After one round of reflective writing, I engaged my Twitter archive to crosscheck similarities and to identify important elements I might have missed in my reflection.

To be confident enough that my personal reflections captured my experiences in the broadest possible sense, I shared my personal narratives with a critical friend Sarah Honeychurch (@NomadWarMachine) who is familiar with my use of Twitter. Sarah provided feedback, made observations, asked questions, and offered suggestions for updating and reorganising my personal narratives. Further, to corroborate my personal narratives my Twitter archive was reviewed periodically for reminders of important engagements. In one instance my archive helped me correct parts of my narrative because my recollection of dates were inaccurate. This triangulation helped manage the challenge of reliance on memory and its potential effects on personal narratives as was identified by Chang (2016).

3.3 Data analysis

My Twitter archive comprises tweets from the year 2009 to 2019. My archive of Tweets was organised by year and analysed using Leximancer (<https://info.leximancer.com/>) for lexical analysis and NodeXL for Social Network Analysis (SNA) (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2010). Lexical analysis was chosen as it proved a more efficient method for analysing large corpus of text datasets such my 15,700

Figure 1. Use of Power BI to generate Map

tweets. The Leximancer software facilitated content analysis and produced visual concept maps showing connections, patterns and themes (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). For the lexical analysis the dataset was organised by year and analysed similarly to facilitate comparative analysis and to identify usage patterns and trends. NodeXL generated network graphs and summaries of my Twitter data. NodeXL Pro Insights (<https://www.smrfoundation.org/nodexl/nodexl-pro-insights-2/>) Power BI (<https://powerbi.microsoft.com/en-us/>) report templated was used to generate a geographic network map to show the geographic reach of my professional learning network.

I used thematic analysis to make sense of both my personal narratives and my Twitter archive data. Thematic analysis is a “flexible data analysis technique” (Oddone, 2019, p.134) which can “potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). Thematic analysis followed the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78). These stages are: i) familiarizing yourself with your data, ii) generating initial codes, iii) searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes, and vi) producing the report.

I used an inductive line by line coding to generate initial codes from my personal narratives. I deliberately used an inductive approach to coding at this stage because I did not want the constructs of my theoretical framework to overly influence the initial coding process. To arrive at the final list of themes, I integrated the list of initial codes with the

results of the data analysis of my Twitter archive. This was done deductively using the constructs of my theoretical framework (networked learning). To improve the trustworthiness of my findings, I used a cross-checking process comparing my personal narratives with my actual usage data to verify that the factual aspects of my narratives matched my actual usage of Twitter as recorded in the archive.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Like all research approaches, ethics is an important consideration in autoethnography (Edwards, 2021). The concerns of relational ethics in particular are amplified for autoethnographers (Ellis, 2007) as their research often have direct implications for associated institutions, family and friends, social networks, communities, and students (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Four potential ethical issues needed to be addressed in this study. First of all, I am conscious that my writing directly identifies my place of employment. To address possible issues, I refrained from identifying as best as I can personal information that may have potential negative implications for my institution. The issues related to my institution as noted in this study are very much structural and not as a result of the direct actions of any process or action as far as I understood and experienced these issues. Secondly, at the time of the commencement of this study, I was moving on from my early novice academic career status to a mid-career position. Therefore, one of the challenges for me during the writing of my personal narrative was to remain true to my

early career, novice academic experiences and not to include present experiences in my reflection. To minimize the potential for inaccurate reflections, I relied on the actual usage data in my Twitter dataset to help me develop a consistent recollection of my experiences. A third consideration relates to data usage. In terms of using Twitter data, I was careful to use my personal data as much as I needed to and not to include personal data of others from my network in the study without their consent. I could not avoid this entirely as I used a small list of top members in my network in this paper, but that data was limited to their Twitter handle which is publicly available. Finally, the potential for difficult past experiences to surface from both my reflective narrative and from my Twitter archive was initially a challenge for me. However, the actual reflections allowed me to understand that part of my challenging experiences allowed me to develop as an academic. I was particularly happy that I took the steps I took to address these challenges and that the reflections was an important part of this process.

4. Results

In this autoethnography I set out to address three research questions:

1. How do I as a novice academic approach professional development using Twitter?
2. What are the benefits I obtain when using Twitter for professional development?
3. What are challenges I experience when using Twitter for professional development and how do I manage these challenges?

Five themes were developed from the analyses of my personal narratives and Twitter use data. These themes are presented below.

1. Constructing a Personal Learning Network (PLN)
2. Managing an Evolving Space
3. Serendipitous Learning and Staying in Touch
4. Spontaneous Engagement and Opportunistic Collaboration
5. Adopting helpful behaviours

These five themes are consistent with the literature on the professional development needs of academics and the approaches adopted on social media towards meeting these needs. Further, these themes are connected to the principles of networked learning. Themes 1 and 2 relates to self-determined learning, shared responsibility, and time (needed to

develop the network); theme 3 connects with the situated and contextual nature of learning; theme 4 directly maps to the principle of collaboration, while theme 5 is an outcome related to the principle of assessment and evaluation of the ongoing learning outcomes. These five themes are presented in the following sections.

4.1 Constructing a Personal Learning Network (PLN)

The first and most strikingly obvious theme developed from my data analysis shows that I used Twitter to create and maintain a personal learning network. This theme encapsulates my approach to Twitter and is described below in terms of its development, structure, organisation, and usage.

4.1.1 Personal profile and PLN structure

My PLN is my personal construction of a space on Twitter comprising members I follow, tweets created, liked, retweeted, and the lists for organising my network. Figure 2 is a visual display of my Twitter profile.

Membership is critical to building my PLN. Presently I follow 1,563 members and followed by 1,282. I have approximately 15,800 (15.8k) tweets and retweets and 8,147 tweets “liked”. I have 28 lists.

The following ego network graph presents a snapshot of my Twitter network structure using the most recent 3200 tweets (approximately last two years of engagement).

My ego network (Arnaboldi, Conti, Passarella, & Pezzoni, 2013) is a graph that shows all the nodes I been socially engaged with on Twitter and formation of smaller networks such as *ethicalcs*, *csforall*, *lthechat*, *socmedhe18*, *sigcse2018*, *sigcse2019*, *engagemooc*, *clmooc*, *oer18*, *rhizo15*, *Rhizo15* (*#rhizo15* - Rhizomatic Learning: A Practical View) was a 6-weeks connectivist massive open online learning (MOOC) developed and facilitated by Dave Cormier (Bozkurt et al., 2016). My top followers and hashtags are presented in Figure 4.

Several of my top followers are prominent member of my PLN while some are co-authors. Several of the hashtags are chat groups while the *#sigcse2018* was an active conference backchannel.

Figure 5 indicates that many members of my PLN reside outside of country of residence (Guyana). However, this graph is generated from members who provide geolocation data in Twitter.

Figure 2. Twitter Profile: @lenandlar



Figure 3. My Twitter Ego Network

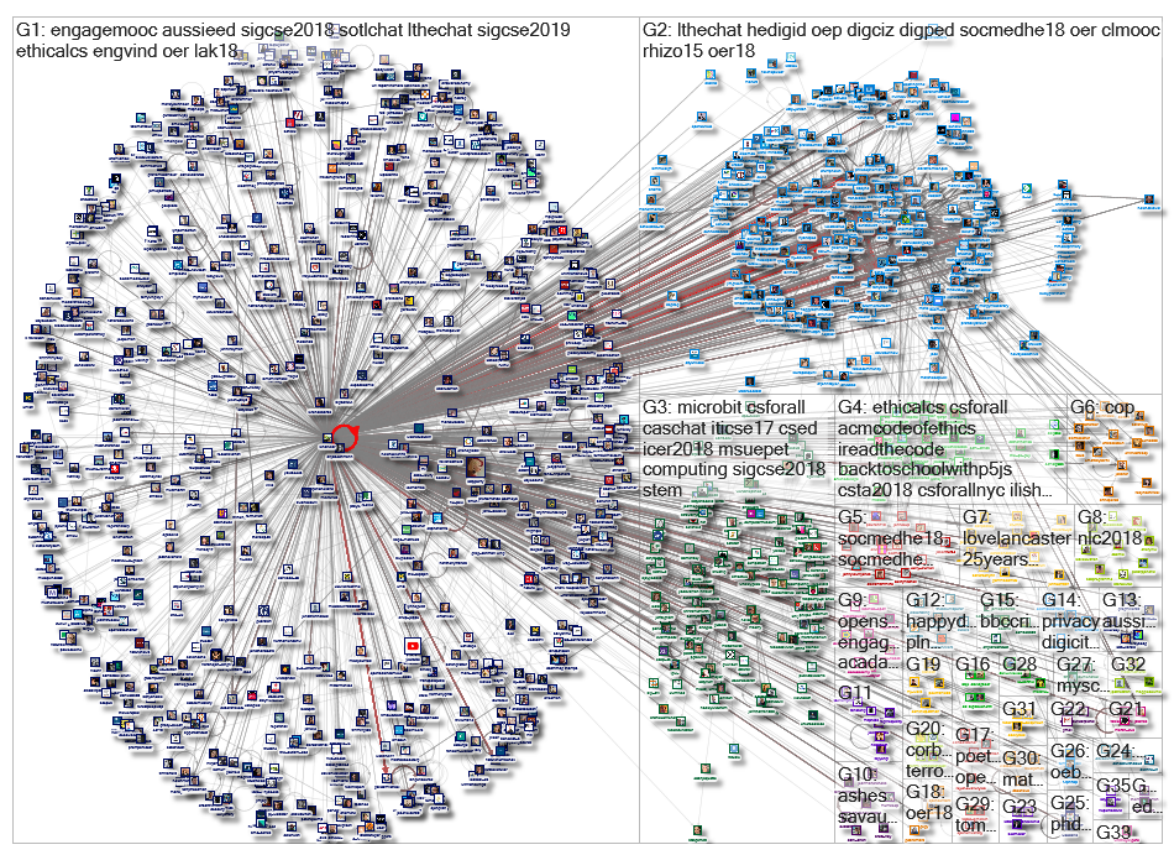


Figure 4. Top Followers and Hashtags

Uploaded on: April 26, 2019

Short Description: Lenandlar via NodeXL <http://bit.ly/2VrMU3b>
 @lenandlar
 @suzankoseoglu
 @bali_maha
 @ed_saber
 @crumphelen
 @nomadwarmachine
 @arasbozkurt
 @davidgbeer
 @whitneykilgore
 @scottturneruon

Top hashtags:

#lthechat
 #aussieed
 #engagemoooc
 #ethicalcs
 #hedigid
 #oep
 #digciz
 #sigcse2018

Most of the members I follow are located in North America and Europe.

4.1.2 Lists

Twitter lists allow users to “filter tweets” (Emke, 2019, p.45) and organise them as a named group. A sample of my most influential lists are shown in Figure 6.

These lists relate research, teaching and general interests. My largest list is computer science education (92 members, approximately 6% of all followed). Education and digital education lists are the second largest and accounts for approximately 4.5% followed. In total these three lists account for approximately 10% of my PLN. Some lists relate to general interest such as sociology, philosophy, and ethics.

4.1.3 Tweets/Retweets (RTs)

Table 1 shows my tweets and retweets disaggregated by year.

Figure 5. Map showing members followed

Figure 6. Sample List







Internet/Media 32 Members		STS 15 Members
Philosophy Favorite Philosophers to read 26 Members		Education 30 Members
Openness OA OEP OER OSS 10 Members		Digital Education 38 Members
Internet Research People, Groups, Unis, etc 12 Members		Sociology Favorite Sociology People 17 Members
ICT Research ICT4D etc... 8 Members		Internet/Media 32 Members
CS Education Computer Science Ed. + People 92 Members		Philosophy Favorite Philosophers to read 26 Members

Table 1. Disaggregation of tweets/retweets

Year	Total: Tweets/ Retweets	Tweets	Retweets	Ratio Tweets/ Retweets
2009	144	140	4	3%
2010	4217	4016	201	5%
2011	1212	1057	155	15%
2012	1557	1226	331	27%
2013	1012	545	467	86%
2014	2221	1820	401	22%
2015	992	871	121	14%
2016	1071	903	168	19%
2017	930	769	161	21%
2018	1979	1557	422	27%
2019	365	220	145	66%
Total	15700	13124	2576	

On average I tweet 3-5 times per day on average. Retweeting accounts for approximately 15%-20% (2576) of all (15,700) of my tweets.

4.2 Managing an Evolving Space

The second theme developed from data analysis relates to my management of Twitter and the changing nature of my engagement. Several sub-themes relate to managing my PLN; changing patterns of membership; and patterns of tweeting/retweeting.

4.2.1 Managing PLN

How do I go about building and maintaining my PLN from among the many users of Twitter? Perceived influential membership is a key characteristic that influences who I follow. I'm guided by my professional interests and follow those who I perceive can contribute to my development such as thought leaders, researchers, advocates for teaching, and public intellectuals. This is reflected in the following excerpt from my personal narrative.

Influential members of my network are those who I come to believe as thought leaders in their field. This could be in research, teaching or just as a public intellectual. They may be leading researchers with a strong publication and academic background. They may have a strong following and be seen as influential. It is not always possible to know at the outset who's influential, but I try to learn a bit about someone by checking their profile and timeline and so on. But largely influence is determined thru the passage of time in many cases. Sometimes someone I follow may not yet have as much influence but can develop this over time. I think of influencers as those who can shape and question my views, point me to important elements – people, papers, news, and general happenings.

4.2.2 Shifting patterns of engagement/network structure

In my first four years on Twitter, I followed sports personalities, celebrities and media personnel. I also followed several individuals randomly including personal friends and acquaintances.

The Graphs in Figure 7 is a snapshot of two points of my early years on Twitter.

Themes that appears casual (*lol*, *bat*, *dem*) and those related to sports (*cricket*, *west indies*, *bumblecricket*) are

noticeable. Also, the most dominant nodes in my network were related to cricket. By 2012 the *edchat* community was prominent along with themes such as *work* and *read*, indicating a shift away from casual tweeting. My network was also much larger by 2012.

By 2013 my network structure started shifting and I was beginning to identify with academic Twitter by engaging the educational technology, computer science education and general education community.

Figure 8 is a snapshot of my network structure and lexical analysis of tweets (2013-2014).

Themes such as *online*, *share*, *social* and *etmchat* indicated a shift in usage from casual to professional. By 2014 casual tweets had almost disappeared. Also, by 2014 several members from the educational technology community were in my network. The lexical analysis shows conversations related to my professional interest (*edchat*, *etmchat*, *work*, *online*). Retweeting (RT) was the dominant theme. The theme *thanks*, shown in both graphs, represents expression of appreciation to my Twitter network.

The 2014-2016 was very rich with professional development activities. The Rhizomatic Connective Massive Open Online Courses (CMOOCs) of 2014 and 2015 (<http://davecormier.com/edblog/2016/04/13/rhizo14-the-mooc-that-community-built/> and <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2015/04/10/a-practical-guide-to-rhizo15/>) were planned and executed. Figure 9 is snapshot of my network structure and lexical analysis of tweets (2015-2016).

My network at this point as largely comprised of influential members. Tweets were mainly related to Rhizo15 activities (nodes *rhizo15*, *Rhizo 15 Blog Posts*). During this period, I started following members from the computer science education community (nodes *mark*, *miles*). Retweeting (RT) was still dominant activity. The theme *thanks* also became a prominent node.

By 2017-2018 my PLN was dominated largely by my professional and developmental interests. Figure 10 is a snapshot of my network structure and lexical analysis of tweets (2017-2018) period.

The lexical analysis shows keywords related to my professional development (“read”, “work”, “learning”, “learner”, “open”). Retweeting (RT) continued to be a popular activity.

2009

2012

Theme Hits

Theme	Hits
lol	21
westindies	18
bat	10
Bumblecricket	7
wicricnews	6
mediaimran	6
day	5
RT	4
cricket	4
tweet	3
im	3

Theme Hits

Theme	Hits
RT	343
cricket	157
edchat	124
raggamuffs	91
lol	86
thanks	66
best	32
cricketaakash	31
need	20
interesting	19
amp	16
take	13

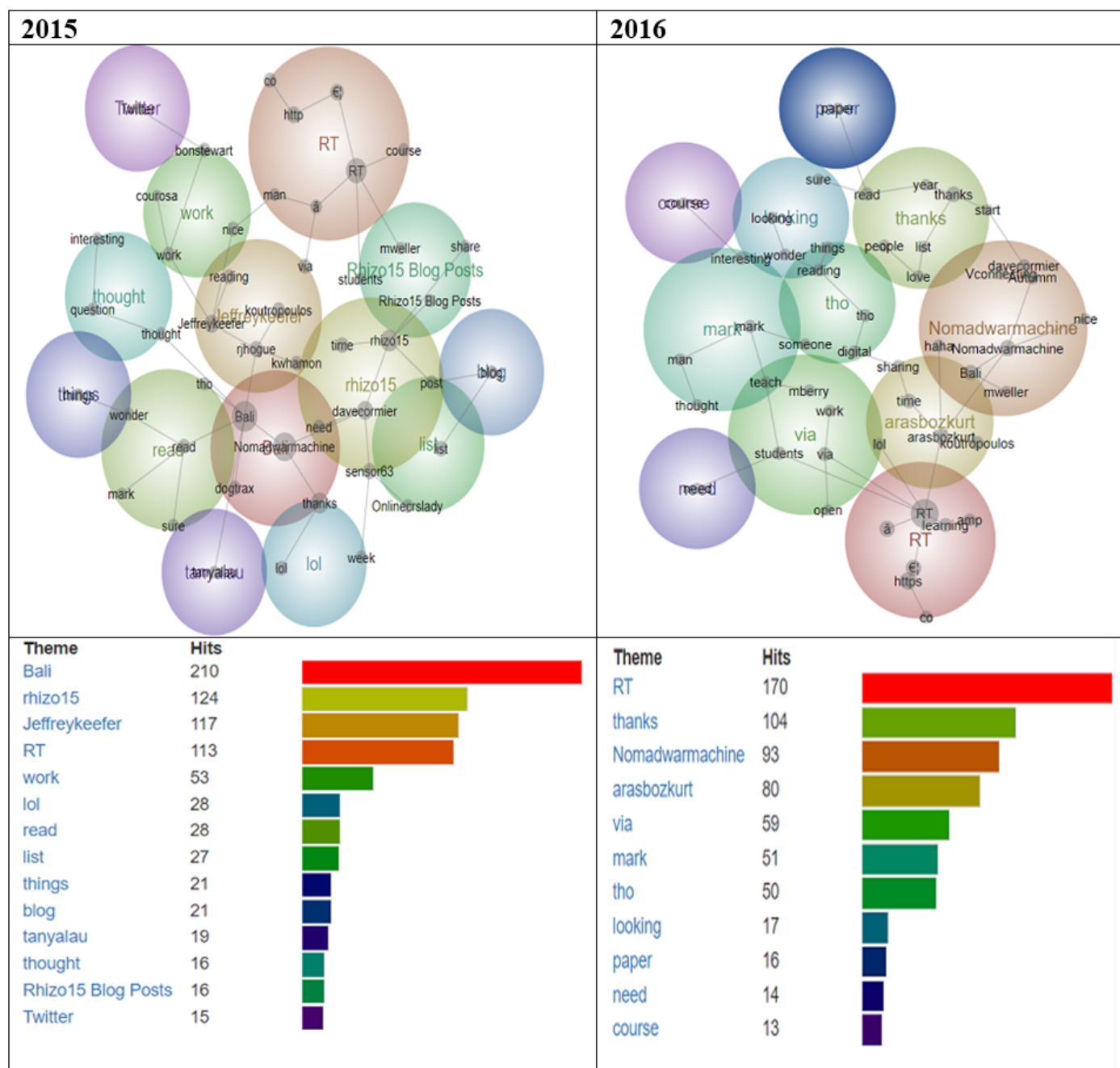
2013

Theme	Hits
RT	343
cricket	157
edchat	124
raggamuffs	91
lol	86
thanks	66
best	32
cricketaakash	31
need	20
interesting	19
amp	16
take	13

2014

Theme	Hits
RT	332
via	112
http	83
thanks	79
etmchat	75
share	74
work	67
online	60
lacigf6	36
social	32
Cnsome	20
access	16

Figure 9. Graph structure of members and lexical analysis of tweets (2015-2016)



2017

Theme	Hits
RT	170
read	96
â	76
arasbozkurt	61
time	53
Thanks	34
things	29
interesting	24
learning	23
learner	21
man	20
pgbovine	18
sure	17
carrigan	14

2018

Theme	Hits
RT	349
arasbozkurt	319
read	196
work	134
lol	96
Thanks	95
learning	88
open	86
suesentance	63
things	46
suebecks	46
man	45
question	34
co	31
stuff	29
suewatling	23

4.3 Serendipitous learning and staying in touch

While the first two themes are related to my personal actions in creating and managing a PLN, this third theme relates to the opportunities for learning on Twitter.

My day usually starts with a quick perusal of my timeline. I look for interesting bits of information, events, activities, papers, and articles. This pattern of scanning continues throughout the day depending on my schedule.

My day usually starts with a quick check on who's saying what. I scroll through my timeline looking for interesting bits of information in general. I check for significant bits and pieces of events, activities, papers, articles, and such things. I also look out to see who's sharing what. I am generally not too quick to reply, respond, or generally engage.

I describe myself mostly as an active lurker - someone who consumes content silently in general, this could include reading and thinking about something without visibly responding in this sense. This quick scan gives me a good sense of what might be the tone or theme of the day or what might be interesting topics presently under discussion. I think this approach works really well for me.

My Twitter PLN provides other opportunities for learning beyond day-to-day routines. For example, the Rhizo 14/15 CMOOCs run largely on Twitter provided excellent opportunities for me to learn and become familiar with developments around learning technologies. They provided a continuous stream of activities including chats, informal conversations, plans for research projects and so on.

The rhizo community was a critical link to influential people and content in the learning technology space It was like my formal induction to the educational technology space...

These CMOOCs provided further opportunities for collaboration. I worked on several projects with members of the rhizo community related to Rhizo14/15. The network graphs of 2014 and 2015 (Figure 8, Figure 9) show themes "rhizo14" and "rhizo15" indicating active engagement.

The computer science education community provided an induction to researchers, practitioners and teachers in computing education. The network graph of 2018 (Figure 10) depicts the learning opportunities presented by this community as indicated by the theme "learning" connected by the lines leading from "computing" to "research".

My learning is not limited to professional interests but are also personal. To this end I follow several philosophers and sociologists because their work is of personal interests.

4.4 Spontaneous engagement and opportunistic collaboration

This fourth theme relates to interaction with my network and the opportunities arising from engagement with its member. Spontaneous interaction with members in my PLN is an ongoing process that sometimes takes the form of chat sessions and random conversations. A spontaneous engagement for an upcoming event such as a live chat, a webinar, or a conference with a back-channel hashtag might be triggered by someone in my network for which I will make a quick mental note and commitment. Sometimes I cannot engage in activities that are of interest to me because of other offline commitments, however I do when I can. I do not feel any pressure or any sense of loss if I missed something. I know that there's likely to be a trail to follow. For example, I revisit hashtags for useful bits and pieces.

Brief conversations occasionally inspired collaborations. I worked on several projects that were conceptualized through connecting on Twitter resulting in several research papers including: Singh (2015), Bali et al. (2016), Honeychurch, Bozkurt, Singh and Koutropoulos (2017), Hogue et al. (2018), Bozkurt, Koseoglu and Singh (2019). Several of my co-authors were novice academics working on their PhDs or had just finished. Some may have now been thinking about their PhDs.

On another occasion a chance encounter resulted in the development of a project around computer science education in my country. This project 'advancing computer science education in Guyana' (<https://suesentance.net/2018/03/26/computing-education-in-guyana/>) started with a tweet exchange Computing Educator Sue Sentence from England.

4.5 Adopting helpful behaviours

This fifth theme outlines challenges experienced, and strategies used to manage these challenges. Sub-themes related to commitment of time, information overload, and decisions around informal engagement form the core of this theme.

My early encounter with Twitter was problematic in several ways and this motivated my choice to minimize informal engagement. The narrative below describes one painful encounter.

I recall responding to someone on the Duckworth/Lewis method used in cricket with a disagreement that resulted in a back and forth argument over many tweets and lasting several days ...then things turned sour, abuse resulted, I felt like I have been exposed....

That experience forced me to engage more selectively. I rarely follow friends or acquaintances and I no longer follow celebrities and other who I perceive to not be of value to my PLN.

Information overload and commitment of time are two additional challenges for me on Twitter. Information overload is not always avoidable as it depends on the activity of members. I use lists and hashtags to filter content.

The theme *time* shows up on several of my network graphs (Figure 8, 2015/2016, Figure 10, 2017) indicating issues relevant to time use and its management. To better manage time, I adopted a very deliberate approach to engaging others. Selective following and deliberate engagement help time and information overload management. Additionally, I revisit my lists to unfollow members who may not be perceived as valuable to my network. Managing different time zones is also important as the following excerpt suggests.

One has to do with the different time zones many on my twitter share. I am usually 4-6 hours behind those living in Europe and as such by the time I am awake there has

been a flurry of tweets already from those I follow from that time zone.

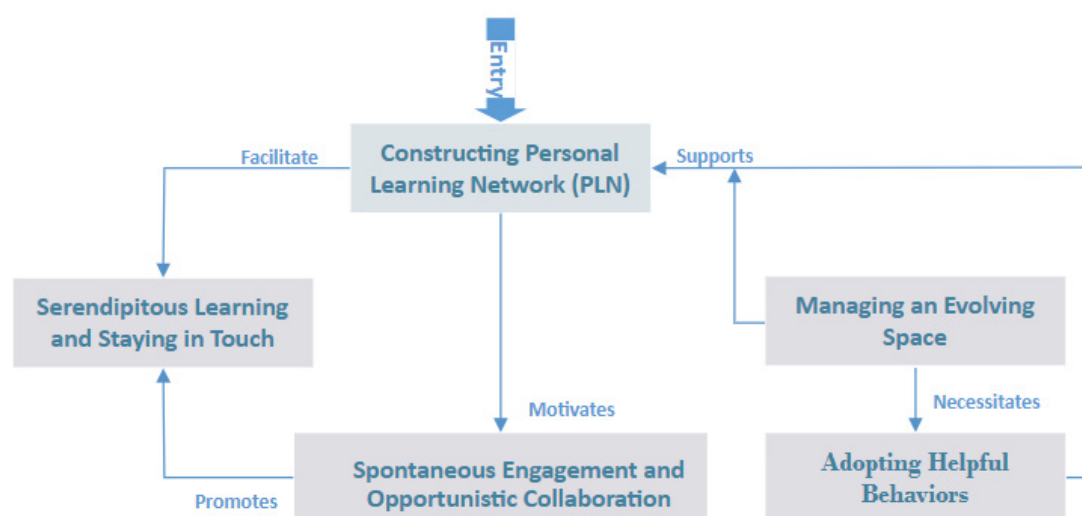
Managing my schedule around different time zones was especially critical for me if I wanted to engage with activities across those time zones.

5. Discussion

This study explored my experiences and use of Twitter as a space for supporting professional development using autoethnography. In response to the three (3) specific research questions, five themes were developed using thematic, lexical, and social network analysis. These themes show that I used Twitter to construct a personal learning network which facilitated serendipitous learning and connectivity which in turn fostered collaboration. This personal learning network also provided me a medium to keep in touch with my developments in my domains of interests. Significantly, the results show how I deliberately deployed strategies to shape the structure of my personal learning network. The model (Figure 11) shows the relationship among the five themes.

What are my experiences as I pursue professional development using Twitter? The following sections offer a discussion of my overall experiences using Twitter for Professional Development. This discussion is organised by research question.

Figure 11. Model of Themes and their relationship



Model Showing Relationship Among Themes

5.1 RQ1. How do I as a novice academic approach professional development using Twitter?

The study showed that creating a personal learning network was central to my professional development on Twitter. Several researchers previously reported similar findings - that educators use Twitter as a personal learning network to support their professional development (Oddone, 2019; Trust et al., 2017; Trust, Carpenter & Krutka, 2018; Tucker, 2019). However, unlike previous studies, this study revealed a detailed approach to constructing and managing a personal learning network. My network structure evolved over time from a casual and informal space to a very focused professional development environment. An essential element of my personal learning network is that it comprises influential members of the academic community related to my professional and personal interests. This method of networking on social media through association with influential others was observed by Donelan (2015). This deliberate approach to the construction of my personal learning network looked at through the lens of networked learning theory, aligns with three principles of networked learning: self-directed learning, shared responsibility, and time (McConnell, Hodgson & Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2012, p 8-9). My personal learning network developed over time which allowed for relationships to become solidified and reciprocated through shared experiences which in created opportunities for collaborative projects and shared informal learning experiences.

5.2 RQ2. What are the benefits I obtain when using Twitter for professional development?

My personal learning network of influential members from beyond my work and geographic environment afforded me learning opportunities that are not normally accessible to me. For example, I am unable to physically attend conferences because of resource constraints but I can experience conference activities via backchannels on Twitter (Greenhow, Li & Mai, 2019; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2016; Li & Greenhow, 2015).

Networked learning theory places high value on the principles of relationships, collaboration and dialog and social interaction (Hodgson & McConnell, 2019, p.45-46). Collaboration with others is perceived by educators in higher education as an important element of professional and academic development (MacPhail et al., 2018; Shagrir, 2017). Novice academics in particular have expressed the need for collaboration (Acker & Webber, 2017; O'Keeffe, 2016) In this study, collaboration emerged as one of the central benefits arising from my use of Twitter. Collaboration with others from my network has helped me develop my research profile

through publication and presentation of research papers which has helped me improve my capacity for research through the development of personal capabilities and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000) while increasing my chances of external recognition, rewards and positive assessment (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and simultaneously addressing the emerging challenges of productivity, metrics and identity faced by young academics (Haddow & Hammarfelt, 2019).

McConnell, Hodgson, and Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2012) sees openness and the support for ongoing learning as central to networked learning. The openness of Twitter and my personal learning network provided persistent access to wide range of learning resources and activities which facilitated facilitating serendipitous and informal learning (Buchem, 2011; Kop, 2012; McPherson et al., 2015; O'Keeffe, 2018; Stewart, 2015, 2016; Tucker, 2019). Trust et al. (2017) describes this approach to professional development as 'moving beyond silos' (p.1) and found that it supports "anytime, anywhere availability of expansive PLNs" (p.1), with the "capacity to respond to educators' diverse interests and needs" (p.1) that fosters new learning experiences. This continuous support for learning was critical to my own development of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as it allowed me to learn about issues and ideas from different contexts that I adopted to suit my local needs.

5.3 RQ3. What are challenges I experience when using Twitter for professional development and how do I manage these challenges?

Using Twitter posed several challenges similar to those reported in previous studies. These include: confrontation and risk of abuse (Ferguson & Wheat, 2015; O'Keeffe, 2018), time to participate (Hughes, 2018), poor understanding of context (Stewart, 2016), and low confidence (O'Keeffe, 2018). To address these challenges, I adopted deliberate strategies to reduce negative outcomes. These include a reduction in the informal use of Twitter in order to minimise the threat of abuse and confrontation reported by Ferguson and Wheat (2015). In addition, I spent more time lurking and being a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 2001), which is a positive and active engagement strategy on Twitter (Honeychurch, Bozkurt, Singh & Koutropoulos, 2017). Further, my strategy to reduce informal use of Twitter helped with the reduction of possible tensions that may arise when the personal is not separated from the professional (Stewart, 2016; Veletsianos, 2013). To manage my time efficiently I engaged selectively by adding occasional responses when I had something substantial to contribute or highlighted and retweeted content, I felt may be useful to my PLN.

Selective posting as a deliberate strategy helped me to minimize the potential risk of abuse that may occur due to the permanence of tweets as reported by O’Keeffe (2016, 2018). Stewart (2016) found that the sharing of content was a common practice among scholars on Twitter and it helped to ‘build public identities’ (p.69). Simultaneously the sharing of content is a tangible demonstration of appreciation for the benefits received by academics on Twitter. This practice helps academics “cultivate publics” (p.72) which may further support the creation of value and opportunity for academics through network engagements (Stewart, 2016). Further, the adoption of ‘helpful behaviours’ was a noted strategy used by teachers to facilitate their development of e-learning capacity (Flavell, Harris, Price, Logan, & Peterson, 2019). The adoption of helpful behaviours was an integral part of my networked learning strategy and reflected a deliberate process of the ‘evaluation of the ongoing learning process’ (McConnell, Hodgson, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2012).

5.4 Summary of my experiences

As a novice academic the opportunity to network with academic others in my domain of interest is central to my developmental needs and perceived relatedness to satisfy my desire of feeling connected and associated to others. Twitter enabled me to create a “hybrid space” (Trede, Markauskaite, McEwen & Macfarlane, 2019). This hybrid space is one where different “ways of knowing, doing and relating in and through practice are intertwined and enmeshed” (Trede et al., 2019, p.19). This space has set me on path to developing “epistemic fluency” (Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2019, p.1) by providing different opportunities for learning and knowing about the world and my profession. These flexible opportunities for learning and engaging in an environment like Twitter are useful for professional development because “professional knowledge and skills extend beyond the individual human to their physical, technological and social environment” (Trede et al., 2019) and “learning to be a professional means learning to extend and entwine one’s knowledge and skills with ‘intelligence’ that is embedded and embodied in a distributed technology–human environment” (Trede et al., 2019, p.14). However, these opportunities for professional development are not without related challenges.

6. Conclusion

This autoethnographic study is one of the first offer a detailed account of Twitter’s use from the point of view of an individual academic. The findings from personal reflective narratives, social network and lexical analysis suggest that

my personal learning network supported my professional development by affording opportunities for learning through networking with others aided by the use of deliberate strategies. Ito et al. (2009) genre of participation would suggest I engaged less in casual activities related to “hanging out” and “messaging around”, and more with academic and professional pursuits or “geeking out”. However, it should be noted that this pattern of usage developed over time as I initially started Twitter for personal entertainment and got used to the habits of using it before purposely shifting to using it more professionally. This pattern of change in use over time and transition from informal use to more professional undertakings is affirmed by findings from Veletsianos, Johnson and Belikov (2019). Overall, this study demonstrated how the need for professional development motivated me to seek out opportunities using Twitter and that this professional development journey has taken several years which I believe is due to persistence and an open mind to learning (Bezuidenhout, Ratti, Warne & Beeler, 2019).

This paper’s potential contribution to scholarship and practice must be taken with care when generalizing its findings. As an autoethnographic study it is not intended to provide generalizable outcomes because relied on a single dataset gathered from memory, personal experiences, and the constraints of an externally managed platform which may raise questions about data quality. Further, this study is situated in the context of a novice academic with particular needs and challenges in a developing world university and therefore its findings should be interpreted with this context in mind. However, one observation from this study that may have external implication for practice relates to the emphasis of a deliberate strategies to manage Twitter to maximise professional development potential. This managed approach could help academics address some of the challenges they wrestle with as they negotiate “a multitude of personal, professional, sociocultural and sociopolitical factors” (Veletsianos, Johnson & Belikov, 2019) in their day-to-day Twitter use. And finally, the networked learning principles proved a useful lens to explore the use of Twitter for professional development. The principles were sufficiently abstract to capture the range of my experiences yet specific enough to offer theoretical accounts of them.

6.1 Future work

This study is one attempt at understanding in detail how Twitter is used for professional development by a novice academic. It noted differences of usage in the literature between groups such as PhD students and professors but also highlighted a paucity of research addressing novice

academics. Future studies could investigate novice academics as a group to generate more nuanced understandings of their use of Twitter

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Appendix A: Questions that guided my narrative writing

1. What is my general usage pattern of Twitter? – **RQ1**
2. What kinds of activities am I engaged in on Twitter? – **RQ1**
3. How has my usage patterns and attitude to twitter changed over time? – **RQ1**
4. What are the things of value I do to contribute and enhance the value of my network? – **RQ1**
5. How do I go about building my network? – **RQ1**
6. What are the things that will draw me to engagement and away from just being a lurking? – **RQ2**
7. What do I consider successful twitter experiences? What do I find most valuable? – **RQ2**
8. What do I consider challenges and difficult twitter experiences? – **RQ2**
9. How do I perceive my own contribution to twitter? – **RQ2**
10. What strategies do I use to overcome challenges and difficult experiences? – **RQ3**
11. Who do I follow and engage and what prompts and motivates me to engage, follow? – **RQ3**
12. How has my views of twitter changed? – **RQ2**



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Identity and academic performance in higher education: The effects of racial profiling on the motivation and psychological needs of foreign students in Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to outline the effects of racial profiling and stereotypes on the motivation of foreign students and their academic performance. Foreign students tend to attribute a lack of motivation and low academic performance to the struggle they face when they are classed as a minority. Many exhibit and adapt myriad social identities to survive such struggle. This study explores this struggle and its effects on foreign students' perception of their identity and how they employ that to boost their academic achievement. This study approaches the above issue through autoethnography. The methodology is based on a reflective autoethnographic account, which sheds light on my personal experience as a foreign student from the Middle East in the UK. My autoethnographic accounts employ a set of timelines during which I experienced many racial profiling incidents that affected how I perceived my identity and how that affected my academic journey in the UK. The analysis of my reflective accounts outlines that foreign students' identity is hugely impacted by racial profiling and negative stereotypes. As I explored my motivation through relatedness and autonomy, the study concludes that racial profiling could be invested as a threshold for autonomous motivation. Foreign students may channel racial profiling's negativity to achieve autonomous motivation and therefore better academic performance.

1. Introduction

The interests of investigating the impact of racial profiling on foreign students' motivation and identity stem from my personal experience as a Middle Eastern foreign student in a university in the UK. Throughout my undergraduate years, I had encountered numerous incidents of racial profiling within university premises and classroom settings. Reflecting on those experiences through autoethnography, the research focuses on how those experiences have been affecting my academic and social perceptions and how I have altered my behaviour to survive and fit in. Exploring those experiences, I am certain, will shed a light on the way many students in higher education, in foreign countries, behave with their peers and academic community, succeed in accepting incidents related to their race and ethnicity or fail to adapt and confront those incidents and preserve their native identity.

Foreign students, Middle Eastern (my case in particular), tend to attribute lack of motivation and low academic performance to the struggle they face when they are classed as a minority (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). Many exhibit and adapt myriad social identities to survive such struggle. This calls for a thorough investigation of the students' personal experience and their psychological perception of each incident. Racial profiling has long-term psychological effects on foreign students, which will surely influence their success levels at the time of the incident or even 13 long years after their first encounter, my case.

Racial profiling can act as a powerful tool that aims, at least to the foreign students' understanding, to detach them from the dominant others. Foreign students can interpret this act as an act against their race, culture, religion or even the way they dress which affects directly on how they related they feel towards the dominant others (Pepanyan et al., 2019).

This study has three interlinked aims which serve as the foundation to answering the research questions below. Firstly, the study explores foreign students' motivation whilst battling stereotypes on daily basis in higher education. Secondly, it focuses on types of motivation within classroom settings will be outlined in relation to students' academic performance. Thirdly, the research will attempt to investigate how students' psychological needs are affected by what they encounter on the social level within university premises.

Feeling detached and consequently demotivated, can lead foreign students to academically struggle and in many

cases fail to achieve their academic goals (Chin & Vernon, 2015). Throughout the methodology section, which is based on my personal experience and autoethnographic account, I will explore how racial profiling affected my relatedness and motivation and how the latter affected my academic performance. This inquiry will be guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does racial profiling affect the perceived relatedness of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE?
- RQ2: How does racial profiling affect the autonomous motivation of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE?
- RQ3: How do foreign students' perceived relatedness and autonomous motivation affect their academic performance?

2. Literature review

Investigating racial profiling and student identity effects on the academic performance of foreign students requires exploring specific areas of literature. In this section and in light of the research questions, racial profiling and social identity will be investigated further to unpack their influence on foreign students' academic performance. Using the keywords mentioned earlier, I have used Scopus to explore previous studies on the topic and to build a parallel study that could interpret my unique experience with racial profiling. Therefore, this section explores the definition of Racial Profiling and Social Identity and their connection to students' academic performance.

2.1 Racial profiling and academic performance

Racial profiling is described as an act or a discriminatory activity against a minority or a group of inferior individuals within a certain community (Noor, 2011). This act is based on generalized perception of a certain minority group based on their race, ethnicity, religion and country of origin etc. Racial profiling is also described as a prejudgment based on stereotypes- which simply means an individual from a superior group acts against another inferior individual or group based on a particular preconceived notion "stereotype" (Pepanyan et al., 2019). Racial profiling occurs nearly in all facets of society, one of which is education.

Many may perceive education as a safe haven from the outside brutal world. Students often develop a feeling of being shielded and protected from abuse and stereotypes when they enter the university campus (Bliuc et al., 2011).

Students see university or college as a progressive community of elites that does not approve of inequality and social injustices. This is definitely not the case (Tehrani, 2009). As novel as it sounds, the educational community is hugely influenced by stereotypes and racism. It may not be as explicit as what individuals experience those incidents off campus, but they do exist (Arevalo et al., 2011). Racism and stereotypes are used in forms of codes within a certain group, unconsciously to a huge extent, due to being so deeply embedded in society- such as study conducted by Aguirre on the harmful effects of racial profiling on the Hispanic Identity of Mexican American students in the USA (Aguirre Jr, 2004).

Racial profiling minorities in education, staff members or students, is portrayed in insidious actions such as applying disciplinary policies- in case of a staff member from a minority group, or being subject to harassment and abuse from a peer student on campus. Actions of bullying and racism are often subtle and extremely harmful. Students from a minority group may at a later stage of their studies exhibit poor academic performance and apparent negative impact on their psychological health (Greer 2015).

Being classed as a minority and a target of racial slurs etc. may encourage foreign students to devalue education and perceive performing well as a trait that does not pertain to their identity. Foreign students may develop strategies to battle/pivot racial profiling in HE, which ultimately influences their academic performance such as not attending group-based tasks, classroom participation and other extra-curricular activities such as field trips (Bie, 1976).

2.2 Social identity and academic performance

The concept of identity is often defined by individuals as the way we see ourselves and how we are not influenced by others (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). However, identity is often dependent and shaped by the groups we are a part of and the groups we are being distant from in any context (Fernández-Larragueta et al., 2017). Groups therefore are important in a way that they provide us with a sense of belonging and an identity. Tajfel (1981) suggests that we use groups to form our social identity through which we define ourselves as part of a certain group and distant from other groups. According to Tajfel (1981), social groups are defined through three components: Social Categorisation, Social Identification and Social Comparison.

Social Categorisation is sorting groups based on their likes and dislikes, culture, religion, race and social class etc. This component often leads to social prejudice and

racism. Social identity is highly context-dependent and multidimensional which as a result affects individual's sense of belonging to a particular social group (Cameron 2004). Social Identification is a process through which group members modify their behavior to match and please their group's expectation- such as a non native English speaking student's attempt to master a native like language skills to gain access to a group of native speakers in a classroom setting. Social Comparison however determines access to a particular social group. A certain social group's expectations dictate its members' qualities in comparison to other groups. This particular component, Tajfel suggests, encourages members to a healthy competition to earn access and become a member or leads to an extreme level of prejudice.

The above components (Tajfel, 1981) have immense influence on learning. According to Bliuc (Bliuc et al., 2011), learners who exhibit strong social identity tend to view learning in a positive way and therefore achieve high marks in contrast with learners who identify themselves as alien from the surrounding groups perceive learning negatively and therefore achieve considerably lower marks.

3. Knowledge gap

This research focuses on one particular intrinsic psychological need, relatedness, which is directly affected by racial profiling to enhance/suppress motivation. There will also be slight incorporation of the effects of autonomy on motivation, and how both relatedness and autonomy can be internalised and earned by individual learners. The notion of the effects of motivation on academic performance in higher education has not been well represented in literature. Ryan and Deci's work on SDT only explores institutional and peer pressure and how they impact motivation and academic performance (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

The importance of conducting this study is that it explains how learning takes place with and without motivation. In addition, a clear focus throughout the study will elaborate on specific psychological needs, relatedness and autonomy, affected by specific social situations (racial profiling). Findings aim to help educators understand what minority students may encounter in higher education and to adapt techniques to foster the integration of the learner's psychological needs to enhance motivation. When the latter is provided within a learning environment, positive consequences and higher success outcomes will emerge (Niemic and Ryan, 2009).

4. Theoretical framework

This section explores motivation, relatedness and autonomy and their effects on academic performance in the lens of SDT. Those particular sections will attempt to interpret the academic performance of foreign students who experience pitfalls on the social level. Motivation is what “moves” us to perform an activity. In education, motivation is key to success and failure- students often attribute their achievement due to being enthusiastic and motivated to reach a certain goal in their educational journey (Arevalo et al., 2011).

To perform well in any given activity, education for instance, learners need to be motivated to achieve the goal of the learning activity. Those who feel enjoyment and develop a sense of value during an activity, possess Autonomous motivation. On the other hand, those who feel the pressure to achieve a certain result possess Controlled motivation. Ryan and Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009) argue that to achieve greater performance, learners need to be autonomously motivated (*ibid*).

The needs of being acknowledged as part of a group (related) and appreciated after performing a task (valued) lead the student to be autonomously motivated. According to Ryan and Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), identified as a part of a group as well as being valued are core components for optimal performance. To achieve autonomy and therefore positive academic performance, relatedness and being valued have to exist in any learning environment.

4.1 Autonomous motivation

Autonomous Motivation is defined as an inherent tendency to perform an activity. According to Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), autonomous motivation describes performing an activity with full sense of willingness, volition and choice. In education, when learners exhibit the latter in any learning activity, they are likely to perform well and achieve their learning goal. Deci also believes that there is a set of prerequisite psychological needs which are required to exist so that a learner achieves Autonomous Motivation; these needs are: Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness. For the purposes of this research, Autonomy and Relatedness will be further investigated as Competence will be interlinked with Relatedness in later sections of this study.

4.2 Relatedness

Relatedness refers to the feeling of connectedness to other human beings. Human beings are profoundly social, we seek social interaction and relatedness in any social situations (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). When this feeling is disrupted, individuals develop a sense of deprivation and isolation from the surrounding others. In education, being distant from others, learners' sense of belonging could erode and consequently affect their academic performance (Jin & Hahm, 2017).

Being a vital psychological need for positive engagement in learning, relatedness is likely to be influenced by prejudices and stereotypes (Tsurkan et al., 2020). Incidents which entail being distant from a certain social group, such as racism, eliminate chances of assimilation with other groups and demotivate learners- that means lower/poor performance, academically.

This particular psychological need, relatedness, has a great impact on both Autonomy and Competence. It enables learners to integrate the three needs and in some cases omits the least salient for the purpose of being motivated (Pepayan et al., 2019). A learner can be easily motivated and engaged if Relatedness existed, regardless of Autonomy and Competence. Once Relatedness is achieved, a learner is motivated to perform better so that he/she is more competent.

4.3 Autonomy

The learning activity does not occur in vacuum. Students are often influenced by their surrounding circumstances; teacher and peer's support, institution pressure and expectation and the impact of the learning and social community (Johnston, 2017). Autonomy is likely to perish in any learning environment when a student senses any external pressure placed by the teacher or their surroundings- such as their peers (Salas & Amurrio, 2015). The influence of peer and teacher pressure is daunting and has direct impact on how learners perceive education and therefore limits their academic performance. External pressure is not only manifested by the institution's academic performance expectation, learners' autonomy also relies on their social identity and how they are perceived by their social groups.

Students from minority groups often exhibit struggles to achieve autonomy in learning. This is due to the fact that they, in many instances, feel inferior in the learning community. Many factors could influence that and one major factor is how this particular minority is portrayed in the learning and social communities (Bahou, 2016). Academic

achievement is then affected by how the student feels he/she is perceived by their surroundings, mostly culturally, and therefore determine how autonomous their motivation is based on their value in the educational community. Students' psychological well-being is then vital in constructing autonomous motivation and therefore greater academic performance is achieved (Duffy, 2013).

5. Methodology

5.1 Autoethnography

As this research calls for in depth analysis of personal experiences to explain a social phenomenon (Ellis et al, 2010), autoethnography was chosen to be this research methodology. Autoethnography is considered as a method of representing others through the analysis of lived experiences of the author- the latter being part of a particular social group (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009). This deeply personal research approach that is concerned with knowledge creation based on the personal understanding of the research process. Through reflexive narrative, autoethnography unmasks personal experience and links the researcher's culture and identity and the connection to surrounding social groups (Ferdinand, 2009).

Through autoethnography, this research intends to investigate at a micro level the role of racial profiling in shaping foreign students' motivation and learning in one of Europe's Higher Education Institutions. Through a narrative of a series of personal racial profiling incidents within university premises, autoethnography provides a detailed account of those incidents for a thorough investigation. The research questions require an in-depth examination of the data that is, in my opinion, difficult to deduce from observation and interviews of participants.

5.2 Data collection

This research's data is based on my personal experiences in the form of short narratives. As recalling past experiences is not practically sufficient to deeply unpack the issues raised in this research, I aim to reflectively approach each narrative and reach a conclusion that could best answer and challenge the questions posed in this research.

The Data is based on narratives of incidents which had occurred during my Undergraduate and Postgraduate study between the years of 2008 and 2014 in the UK. Through each narrative, I describe the incident in context, express my feelings which had been stimulated by the incident and

briefly evaluate the consequences of that incident on my identity as a foreign student in the UK. The narratives were firstly written based on a distinctive event related to racial profiling, then recollected the dialogue in which the event had occurred and finally presented it in short story format to serve as my primary data source. The amount of data was endless and I have reduced to the particular aims of this study. All of my narratives have incidents which serve as a racial profiling example as well as instances of relatedness to my surrounding community- peers and tutors.

5.3 Data analysis

Analysis of the narratives attempts to outline the context of each incident, my feelings in relation to each narrative and a critical overview of the impact of each incident on shaping my identity and motivation as a foreign student in UK's higher education (Gibbs, 1988). Using this reflective approach is essential in answering the question posed by this research as it helps to critically address each incident in setting standards for future experiences to self and potentially others who feel related to what has been outlined in each narrative.

The narratives are short dialogues with brief reflection between myself and my peers and tutors during my undergraduate and postgraduate study in the UK. In order to be able to answer the research questions, the narratives were analyzed to identify themes and patterns- through AtlasTi, themes and patterns were grouped and presented as comments from the narratives and displayed in a graph later in the discussion section. Throughout the thematic analysis, recurring codes appeared to help shape the analysis and reach a conclusive conclusions to answer all of the research questions.

A final step in the analysis involved collecting data from Twitter to verify my narratives. Data was collected based on trending hashtags such as racism, racial profiling, foreign students, and discrimination in higher education in UK etc. The comments "Tweets" were grouped to form categories, which aim to validate my narratives (Ahmed et al, 2017)- names, and pictures were blurred and have been kept anonymous.

6. Findings

The findings of this research are based on two study programs during my time in UK universities, undergraduate and postgraduate. The first section focuses on my first year in my undergraduate program which is split into timelines-

year 1 June 2008 to September 2009 and February 2009. The second section focuses on my postgraduate program which is also split into timelines- year 2 August 2013 and April 2014. Both timelines were chosen as they carry prominent incidents which practically present two images of my identity as a foreign student. The timelines illustrate my progress from being a demotivated student with poor academic performance to autonomously motivated student with improved academic performance.

6.1 Undergraduate programme: Year 1 2008-2009

Reflecting on my social experiences from my undergraduate study in 2008, it is worth noting that my very first encounter affected and sort of laid the future path of my future interactions with peers, tutor etc.

Enthusiastic at first, demotivated after all...

How things began - June 2008

After arriving in the UK from Iraq in 2007, I was *keen* on *completing* my studies at a *university* level. Filled with *enthusiasm* after *passing* the admission interview and test. I received a phone call for admission on the day I did my entry test- it was just me for some reason and the *anticipation* started to build up. I walked into the *Admission* office to hand in my high school certificates and other official documents. The admission officer went "It's is *unbelievable* that the *likes* of you managed the test!" I walked out without saying anything back to her, but kept wondering what she could have *meant* by that! Maybe, I was too young or did I not *dress well* for that particular occasion. Things started to *clash* in my head about *interpreting* her statement.

This very short yet extremely vital interaction had made question my relatability to my entire surroundings not just the academic community. This has affected the way I perceived higher education in the UK and on the long term hugely influenced my academic performance. Relatedness to the community I am about to enter remained questionable as I wanted to delve in and pursue my education regardless.

After recovering from the first encounter, mentioned above, it was finally induction week (August 2008) and my enthusiasm was not how I expected- much lower than anticipated. Unfortunately, in this stage, I had to interact with the same person from the previous encounter and things did not change as I hoped. I was not contacted prior to induction week, so I initiated communication with admission. Clearly, what I experienced in June was not a unique incident.

Clear signs of being an unwanted outsider - August 2008

The programme starts in a week and I still *haven't* heard from *admission* about where to go and what to do next. So I called admission again and the same officer picked up the phone. After introducing myself she said "Oh, that's you again! Thought you'd never *come back*". Didn't again say anything apart from "would you please tell me what to do for next week as I haven't heard from you since June". The officer then said "*Whatever*, just show up and try not to blow up anything" Here I started to put the two incidents together and *concluded* that it was directed to *who I was* and where I *came from*. I showed up prefilled with a lot of negativity and whether I should actually continue with my studies.

This particular incident triggered something new, which was not expected. I was clearly objectified as an outside/foreigner whose ethnicity is accused of a certain activity. Directing such accusation impacted the way I perceived my interaction and behavior around my peers and university community. Here, I felt unrelated and unconfident in my skills and abilities to continue with my study. It is vital though to mention that both incidents occurred outside classroom settings and in the initial process of admission.

Ups and Downs - September 2008 and February 2009

It was finally induction week in September 2008. I entered the lecture hall and orientation activities had already started. I sat next to a classmate, we were asked to introduce ourselves to other classmates, and my classmate immediately initiated the conversation:

"Hello, where are you from?"

Here I was skeptical of any interaction with native speakers/home students fearing that I would experience similar incidents to the one with the admission officer. I thought that this question was not appropriate to start a conversation with as I expected we start with introducing our names first. I knew something as appalling as my previous encounter would happen again but I continued anyhow.

"I am Mohanad from Iraq"

My answer here included my name, which I also thought could trigger a problem.

"Oh, Really! You shouldn't be here then, go back to your camel".

This encounter was different. My classmate was blatant and direct. He said it all in one sentence; I did not belong; I did not fit; I did not have the skills to compete and that I should simply go back to, where he believed, I belonged. He managed to actually break me at that time. I was furious and no motive to continue my study. I questioned every skill I had gained over the years to earn entry to this program.

After battling the first few months on the program, results for my first assignments were announced and as expected, performance was below average to disastrous. I failed two modules and was summoned to a meeting with the program director. Here I anticipated the meeting to be a harsh warning with a deadline or just a dismissal from the program.

“How are you getting on?”

I was not expecting that opening. I then was thorough about what I had encountered since the start of the program. The director was surprisingly sympathetic and agreed with everything I said.

“Look, people can think and say whatever they want and don’t let that have any impact on your studies”

As a director, he did not question my abilities after he had heard what I went through. He agreed that those incidents had substantial impact on my performance, but he then said:

“My parents are originally from Poland, they were bullied and racially abused, but here I am a director at this university, this could be you someday!”

I felt at ease and related to his story. I then realized that I was not a unique case. Students could encounter such incidents from different backgrounds and ethnicities not just my own. My enthusiasm and motivation, as I walked out of the meeting, were enhanced with what I heard from the director as I learned how to channel those incidents to my benefit.

6.2 Post Graduate Programme: Work Placement 2013-2014

Related, stronger than expected- August 2013

After successful completion of my undergraduate programme, I decided to embark on a teacher training programme at the same university. Another admission

interview and test past successfully, the experience of admission was completely different. I didn’t forget what had happened in my undergraduate admission and expected the same would happen but thankfully it didn’t. Induction week was amazing and I already felt that I belong from day 1. When it came to introducing ourselves, I stood in front of my cohort, hands shaking and in a complete mental breakdown. I said “Hello, my name is Mohanad and I come from Iraq” I didn’t know why I emphasized on that part and looked my classmates in the eye for negative reaction. They all smiled and gave me a warm welcome. I was approached by a couple of my classmates and said “Hey Mohanad, you must know a lot of languages, would you teach us Arabic?” I was over the moon after this simple yet massively positive interaction.

Years have passed now, I have become more fluent and mastered a good level of the English language. This entailed being able to confront those who may racially abuse me, discuss misconceptions about my identity and isolate what triggers my motivation from my daily encounters.

My postgraduate study was a different story. Mild experiences had definitely occurred but with null long-term effects. During the new programme I felt welcomed and seamlessly assimilated with my cohort- mostly native speakers/home students. The feeling of being foreign did not exist, my peers and tutors were interested in my personality and background; they wanted to know more about my culture and religion. Pronouncing my name correctly, nodding to me as I spoke, sharing their personal stories, all of those seemed natural interactions with my peers during my post graduate study.

Stronger than ever- April 2014

This time of year in my PGCE course, I was placed in an FE college and was set to teach ESOL classes. During my work placement period, I experienced yet another incident. This time it was slightly difficult for me to interpret the reasons behind this encounter. One of the teachers at that college ran into me in the hallway and said:

“Are you really going to teach here?”

A teacher in a derogatory tone said this to me. I interpreted this encounter in many ways; was I being racially abused? Did this person intend to shake my confidence and demotivate me?

I by then was ready for this sort of interaction as I felt

well equipped to handle any type of degrading and derogatory tone.

“Of course I am, you better watch out”.

7. Discussion

This section discusses the most salient findings in the light of the literature presented in earlier section. The discussion revolves around three themes; Relatedness to others, Autonomous Motivation and Academic Performance. Those three themes will attempt to provide answers to the research questions: RQ1: How does racial profiling affect the

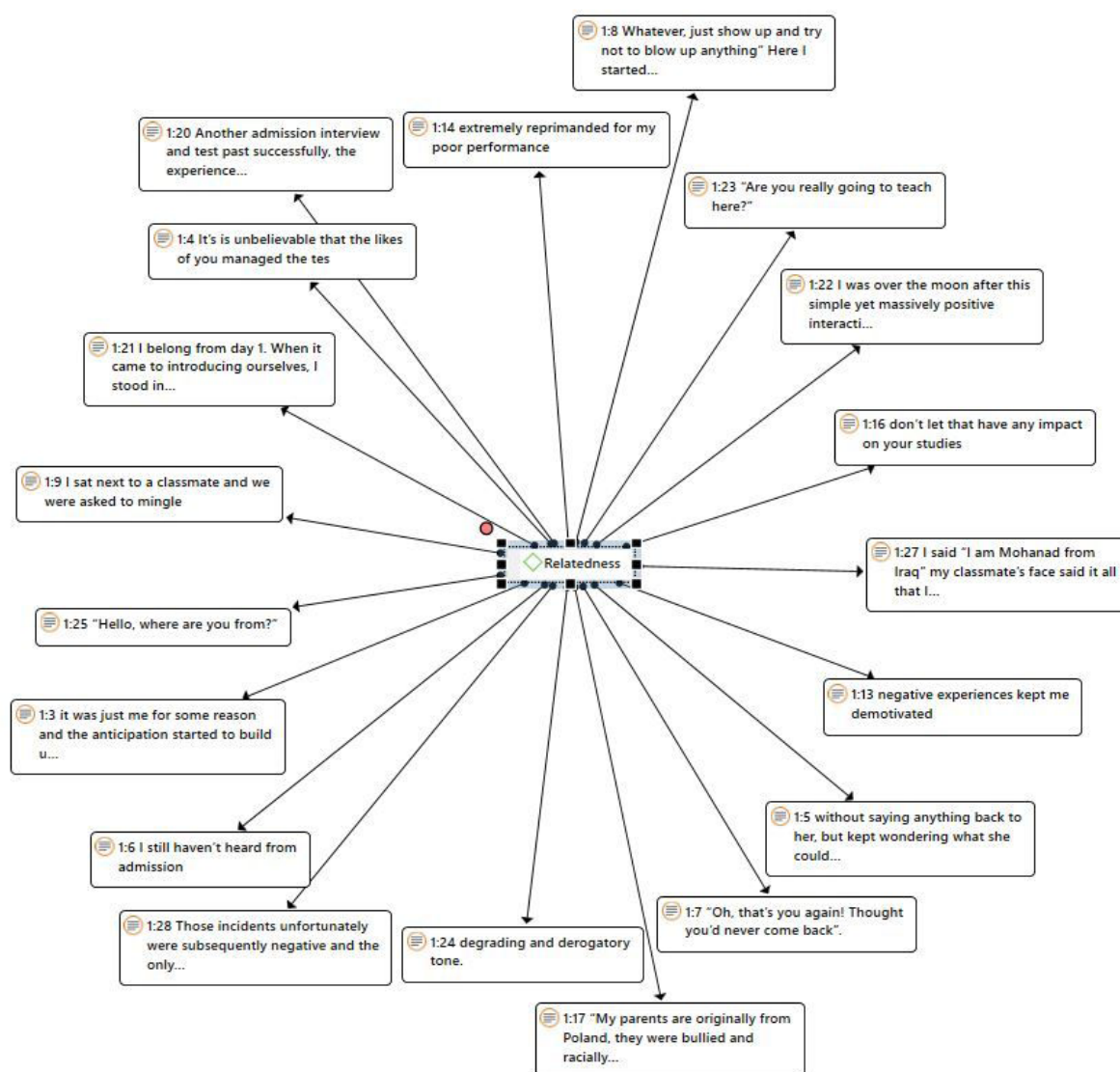
perceived relatedness of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE? RQ2: How does racial profiling affect the autonomous motivation of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE? RQ3: How do

foreign students' perceived relatedness and autonomous motivation affect their academic performance?

7.1 Relatedness to others

Relatedness is a vital factor that influences motivation. It is interlinked with identity- how this identity is formed within a particular social group. It is also crucial to outline that relatedness is hugely influenced by how others perceive

Figure 1. Comments from the narratives which highlight Relatedness



us within a certain community. Racial prejudices and stereotypes affect how we treat each other in any social event. I may look and speak differently to the way others do, which signifies a potential compromise of my relatedness to that particular group.

In education, students seem to exhibit better relatedness when they are placed in a mono-cultural/ethnicity institutions. Individual learners placed in educational institutions where they are classed as a minority, will question their relatedness to that particular community which therefore has a great negative impact on their relationship with others.

Throughout my time in UK universities, I have encountered various types of racial profiling and stereotypes. Those incidents may not at first sight seem very influential but the accumulation of those encounters made me question whether I really relate to my class settings/classmates or simply not. The figure below sums those encounters during my first year during my undergraduate programme in the UK.

The impact of the above encounters has been both constructive and in many occasions negative. The initial stage of the assimilation had experienced the most negative encounters. As seen in Figure 1 (examples 1:3, 1:4, 1:6, 1:7 and 1:8), my very first encounters were extremely vividly based on negative prejudices and stereotypes. Those encounters did affect how I perceive myself as a foreign student, they did in some instances affect my assimilation in the dominant group and clearly had long term psychological stance (Desai,

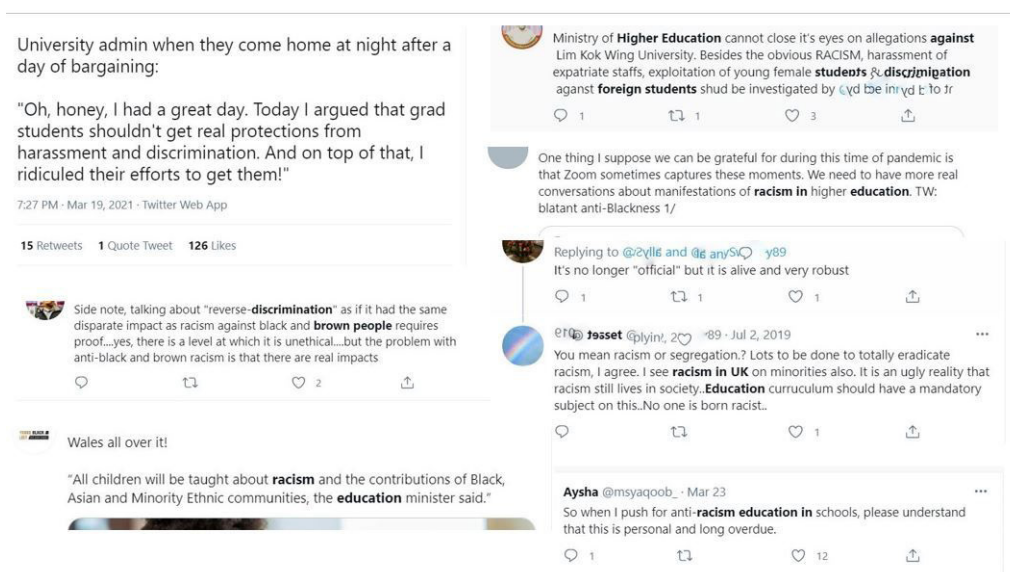
S. R. 2019). Minority individuals are aware of the social and racial prejudices and in many occasions teach and train each other those differences as a survival skill in difficult situations. This is portrayed in Watson's (2012) letter to her daughter which relates closely to the above:

I pray that your teachers will not look at you through hurtful racial preconceptions. I pray that they will do the work necessary to eliminate racist practices in themselves and in those around them. . . (para. 18)

Figure 1 also shows instances of manageable encounters, incidents where I managed to face my encounter and defend myself, which did not seem to influence how I perceived my relatability in university. Examples (1:20-1:27) indicate acknowledgment of the encounter with minimal effects on how I had seen myself, as a foreign student, amongst others- I had reached an understanding of how different I may sound and look and how other perceived me as part of their community.

Although I have experienced both negative and constructive encounters, Twitter data based on the keywords and hashtags in Figure 2 indicate otherwise. Many encounters seem to be overly negative and lead their victims to announce them publically. The fact that those issues are publically displayed on such platform shows that foreign students, minorities and ethnic groups perceive themselves as different and such behavior is the norm of the community they interact with (Bahou, 2016).

Figure 2. Data collected from Twitter based on the following hashtags: #discrimination, #higher education, #foreign students, #racism in higher education, #racism in UK and #racism in education.



7.2 Autonomous motivation

I have always described myself as a very motivated learner. Things which have been motivating me were, before exploring motivation through SDT, pretty generic such as good career, above average marks in my exams and so on.

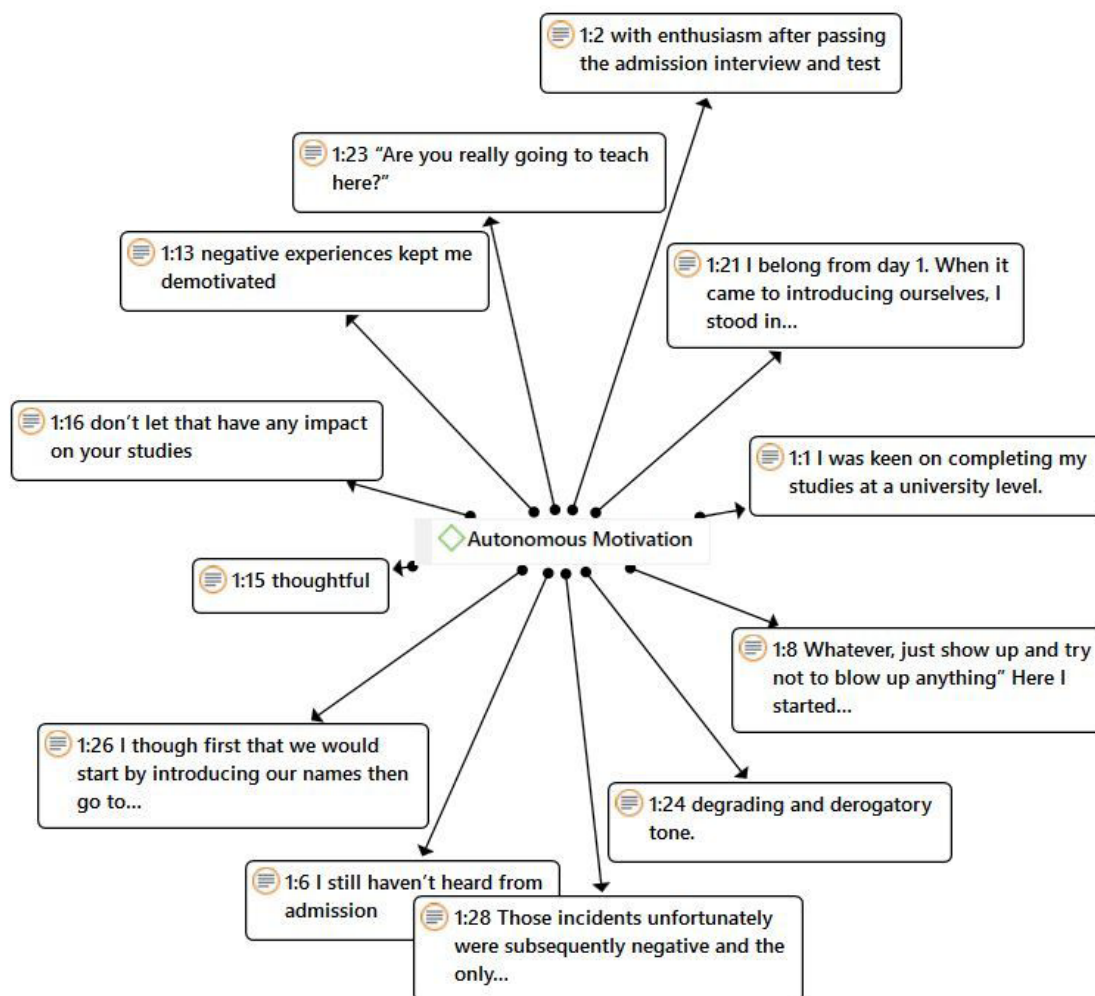
SDT defines motivation as an innate virtue to strive through an activity. Many factors could influence motivation and can even class it based on the impact of these factors such as peer pressure, situational and context based behavior- such as being classed as a minority or victimized as an outsider in a certain community.

To be able to achieve autonomous motivation, I have exhibited many social identities so that I can be accepted in native speaker dominated groups in the UK. Being fully aware of the charade I had put so that I can access other

groups, the struggle to find autonomy outside the pressure of others had been accumulating which as a result affected how I had interpreted motivation. According to Bahou (2019), autonomy is at the risk of being perished if the peer pressure, through a number of racial profiling incidents, existed in any activity the learner is performing.

Examples from Figure 3, particularly (1:1, 1:2, 1:13, 1:26 and 1:28), show my acknowledgment and how self-conscious I have become about each incident. I can clearly see why my motivation was not at all autonomous and how poorly I dealt with most of the incidents. Each insidious comment or even a blatant encounter about my race, culture or even educational background did in fact and still has demotivated me as a foreign learner in UK higher education.

Figure 3. Comments from the narratives which highlight Autonomous Motivation



In other cases, as seen in examples (1:16 and 1:21), I had experienced quite the opposite. In some of the incidents where I was comforted and welcomed with null insinuation about my race etc. I found enthusiasm and a reason to continue regardless of how negative and aggressive the other encounters have been. Up to this day, I still recharge my motivation with those little encouraging conversations which, according to Duffy (2013) promote the learner's psychological wellbeing which help the learner to achieve autonomous motivation.

7.3 Academic performance

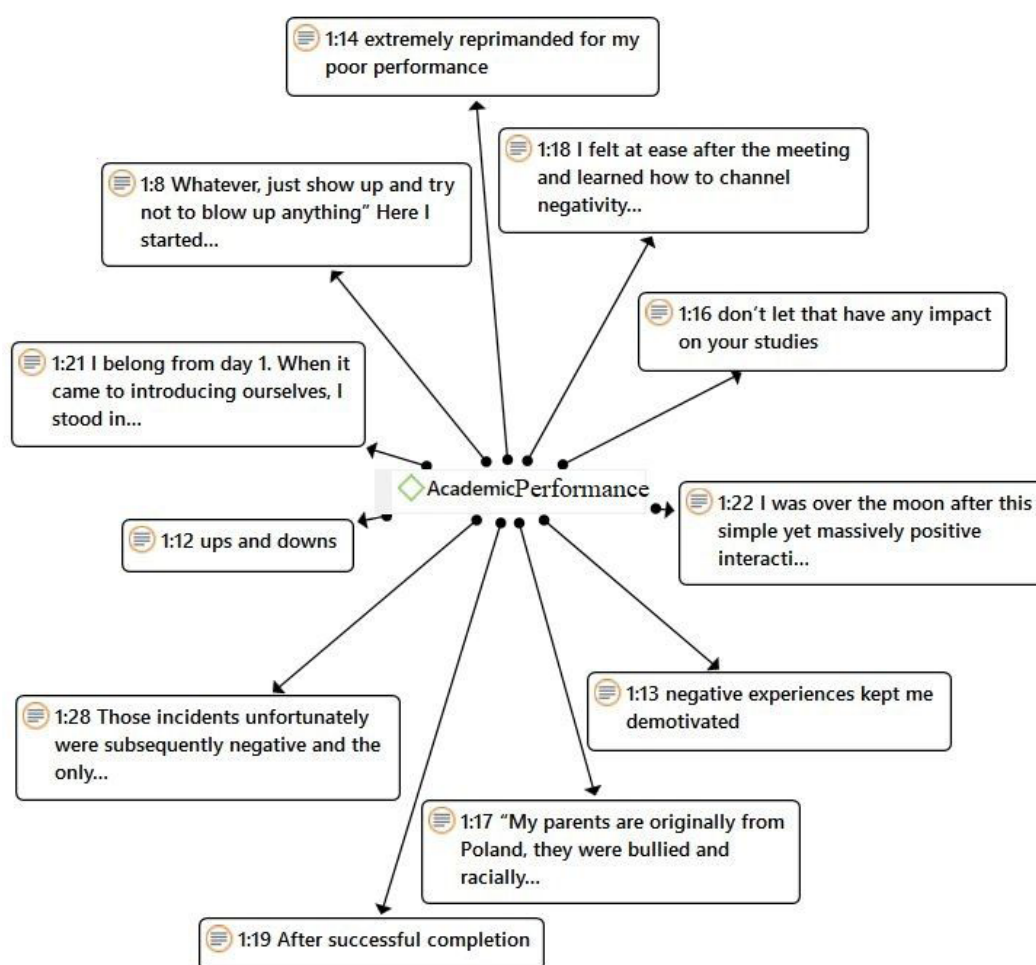
During my first year in my undergraduate programme in the UK, my academic performance fluctuated and I tended to blame my surrounding for most of my academic failures. The struggle to identify myself with a solid and acceptable social identity affected how I performed at university. Furthermore, a number of racial profiling incidents added insult to injury

and influenced my academic performance in general.

Greer (Greer et al., 2015) outlines that learners may exhibit an apparent decline in their academic performance if their psychological well-being was at stake- be it from a simple teacher-student conversation to a prejudice based peer pressure. The psychological well-being is hugely affected by how individuals are classed in a certain community and their identity is categorised (Bliuc et al., 2011). Those categorisation, as outlined by Tajfel (1981), dictate in many instances how individual learners should behave and sometimes set limits to their academic performance.

Figure 4 shows some instances of comments from my findings. In examples (1:8, 1:14 and 1:16), there was a clear evidence of comments which had affected my psychological wellbeing. Those comments from past encounters did blur my view to what my identity was and whether I was competent enough to continue my study.

Figure 4. Comments from the narratives which highlight Academic Performance



Nevertheless, examples (1:12, 1:13, 1:16, 1:17, 1:18, 1:19, 1:21 and 1:22) show quite the opposite. I have managed to recall and reflect on those incidents as being fairly positive and did motivate me throughout my study. Comment (1:17) in particular resonates a sense of acceptance by others, which had influenced how I could steer each comment/incident to my psychological well-being. Achieving a healthy and strong identity had helped my academic performance to improve and retain strong autonomous motivation.

8. Conclusion

This research has outlined the relationship between social identity (perceived through stereotypes and racial classification) and academic performance (perceived by individual learners' motivation and academic achievement). The prospect of being part of a group and the feeling of belonging was the prominent factor through which academic performance was gauged- both failure and success.

Foreign students, regardless of their background, are at the risk of being isolated and not fully integrated in their classroom environment. Some could battle their way in and accept the majority group's expectations- such as language proficiency and academic performance. As we have seen in this research, foreign students' relatedness can be achieved and those students can in fact recover from racial profiling incidents and reach full access to the majority group.

Racial profiling and negative stereotypes have proven, throughout this research, to affect foreign students' motivation and adaptation to the learning environment. Autonomous motivation is influenced by many factors, one of the most vital ones is peer pressure- through racial profiling mostly. Foreign students can overcome this potentially sensitive factor, as proven earlier in this research, through channeling negative stereotypes and racial profiling incidents to boost their motivation.

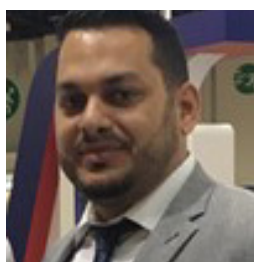
Throughout my autoethnographic account, it was clear that racial profiling and negative stereotypes did in fact affect my academic performance at a certain stage. However, after examining my autoethnographic account (with the data collected from Twitter) in terms of relatedness and autonomous motivation, it can be deduced that academic performance is interlinked with how we are perceived by others; the key to unravel our true potential is within us if we learn how to relate to others and use it to achieve autonomous motivation.

With access to detailed narratives about every single event that I had encountered which involved an instance of racial profiling would have been handy for this study. Recollection of past events require extreme emotional and physical effort (Gibbs, 1988), which at some point prevented me from elaborating on particular dialogues or interactions. Future studies could delve into those issues in depth so that a clearer conclusion is then to be reached. Moreover, the relevance and application of the results were not tested on other foreign students which calls for a more inclusive study, perhaps a mixed method future studies, so that this research would reach a wider audience.

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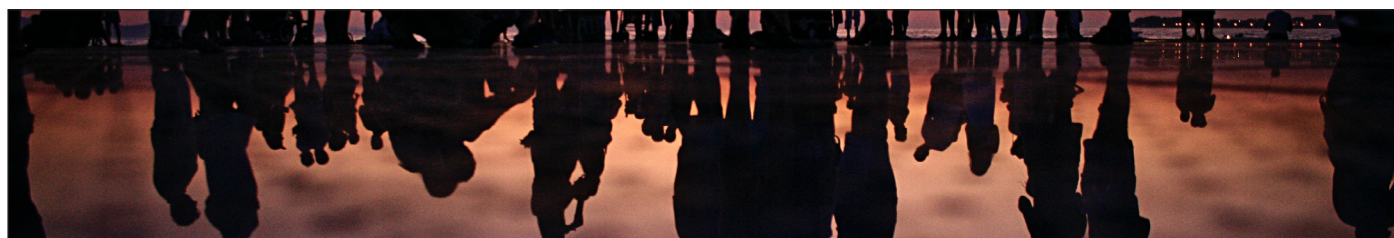
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Finding “your” people: The impact of mentoring relationships in overcoming barriers to academic achievement in underrepresented student populations

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Abstract

First generation college students, especially those with intersecting identities within other marginalized groups, face many barriers in navigating academia. Among these barriers is the long-established set of negative beliefs about the self, known as Imposter Syndrome. Imposter feelings are often invisible to others, but manifest as anxiety, self-doubt, self-handicapping, or irrational fear of failure in light of previous successes (Craddock et al., 2011). Through an autoethnographic study, this paper explores how mentoring relationships facilitate persistence and academic achievement for underrepresented students. I will analyze the manifestation of imposter feelings in my academic activities and how I was able to overcome these with the assistance of mentoring relationships. This study contributes to the existing literature on the impact of mentoring in overcoming imposter syndrome by providing a unique perspective through the lived experience of both mentor and mentee.

1. Introduction

Although I did not come to learn about or understand imposter syndrome until later in life, I had always felt like an imposter before I even knew its definition. Whether it is the fact that my parents left everything behind in Brazil to give me the

opportunity at an education that they never had, the fear that followed living undocumented in the United States for close to a decade or experiencing first-hand the racism and discrimination that is part of the life of many students that come from working-class immigrant families; at every turn of my life, since a wide-eyed 9-year-old me arrived in the U.S, I have fought against imposter syndrome whether I realized it or not.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the stars align for me in my academic journey to where I found several mentor figures; all strong women that I saw myself in. Figures that I wholeheartedly believe were integral to me becoming a proud, albeit anxious, PhD candidate today. These women were unapologetically smart, resilient, and dedicated. Women that came from poor families, that had immigrant mothers or parents born in other countries or were the first in their families to go to college, just like I was. Despite whatever obstacles they had faced, they had made it to where I aspired to be. These mentoring relationships were crucial in understanding and overcoming the infamous imposter syndrome and developing a sense of belonging that ensured my persistence and continued academic success.

I often question if the stars had not aligned for me to collect all these experiences, would I have completed my undergraduate degree? Would I have applied to graduate school? Would I now be authoring this paper as a 1st year PhD candidate? As a present-day higher education professional working with underrepresented students, I see me in so many of the students that I work with daily. In this paper, I present a self-reflection on my experiences over the years in overcoming imposter syndrome as a student through the mentorship of Dr. J, Dr. T and Dr. F. In exploring my lived experiences as a first-generation college student with intersecting identities as an immigrant, Latinx woman, I would like to explore the impact of mentoring relationships within a higher education context to strengthen the educational pipeline for underserved students.

2. Literature review

As this study focuses on mentoring as a way to overcome imposter syndrome, the literature review has been separated in two sections to support this main theme: First, understanding imposter syndrome, and how this condition relates to academic achievement. Second, overviewing mentoring in an educational context and the link to academic success.

2.1 Imposter syndrome and academic achievement

The term Imposter syndrome (IP) was first coined by Pauline Clance & Suzanne Imes (1978) to define the internalized experience of intellectual phoniness especially present amongst high achieving women. In working with highly accomplished women in various fields, Clance and Imes found that those experiencing imposter syndrome maintained a strong belief that they were intellectual frauds whose lack of ability could be exposed at any moment (Wilkinson, 2020). While early studies focused on IP as only affecting women, subsequent research shows that men experience these feelings at a comparable rate and that gender is not a contributing factor (Clark, Vardeman & Barba, 2014). Other reported symptoms were of generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to the inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement (Clance & Imes, 1978). There is substantial research indicating that any one or a combination of these symptoms can negatively impact the potential for academic success in various student groups.

The research shows IP manifesting in all student groups from young undergraduates (Kolligan & Stenberg, 1991), doctoral students (Craddock et al, 2011), mature students (Champman, 2014), minorities (Peteet, Montgomery & Weekes, 2015) and first-generation students (Garder & Holley, 2011). Those suffering IP are prevented from achieving to their fullest potential, whether academically or professionally. IP sufferers do not have a realistic sense of their own competence and are not fully empowered to internalize their strengths (Clance & O'Toole, 1988) and if these feelings are strong enough, this could result in IP sufferers turning down advancement opportunities or giving up on their dreams to instead settle for what in their view is certain or deserved. Anxiety, self-doubt, fear of failure and guilt about success undermines their ability to function at their highest level (Clance & O'Toole, 1988).

IP has been identified as one of the barriers to academic achievement in various student groups, especially underrepresented students. While examining the experience of students that began at a Community College and transferred to a four-year university, Shaw et al (2019) identified overcoming self-doubt and uncertainty of belonging associated with IP as a great challenge for student success. Another study by Ramsey & Brown (2017) also identified this inability to internalize accomplishments and its adverse effect on academic performance in a variety of student types, including first generation students, minorities, and other marginalized groups. Research has also shown a commonality between underrepresented groups and lower

rates of academic persistence, low retention, and graduation rates.

Although there are many contributing factors to the underperformance of Latinos and other underrepresented groups, IP may certainly be included as one of these factors. It is projected that by 2025 nearly a quarter of all US public school students will be Latino and although the number of Latino students in college is in an upward trajectory, retention rates for these students is stagnant (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). According to census data compiled by Zalaquett & Lopez (2006) in 2000, only 64.1% of all Latino 18–24-year-olds completed secondary education compared with 92% of white young adults. A more recent analysis by *Excelencia in Education* (2020) has shown that a decade later, while progress has been made, there is still a 22% equity gap in degree attainment for Latino students compared to their white non-Hispanic peers. Interestingly, the top degree awarding institutions for Latinos identified by *Excelencia in Education* are mostly Hispanic serving institutions (HSI) located in states with predominant Latino populations such as Texas, Florida, and California. According to the US Department of Education, HSIs are colleges or universities where Hispanic students comprise at least 25% of the total full-time undergraduate enrollment. An HSI is one that expands educational opportunities for and is intentional about improving the attainment of its Hispanic/Latino students. In looking at IP as a possible factor for underperformance of Latinos in higher education, the data from *Excelencia* supports this. We see that that Latinos are indeed performing better at environments that are intentional about creating opportunities such as mentoring programs, where they will feel a sense of belonging, be more empowered to internalize their strengths and overcome imposter feelings.

2.2 Mentoring and academic success

Mentoring is inarguably seen as having a positive effect on academic achievement and persistence. The issue of student attrition is a withstanding problem for higher education. In response to the large number of college students failing to persist to graduation, many mentoring programs have been established at colleges and universities across the country to resolve this issue (Nora and Crisp, 2007).

Mentoring relationships provide a space for students to feel connected, supported and empowered. They may be facilitated through formal programs or be informal in nature; developing spontaneously between students and their mentor figures. While these figures tend to often be faculty, mentoring relationships can develop between students and staff, peers, family, religious figures, and others outside of

the campus community. According to Lunsford, Crisp and Wuetherick (2017) mentoring relationships may take a variety of forms and be distinguished by their duration, function, and source(s) of mentoring. Most research focuses on formal mentoring programs at university campuses. These formal programs can vary greatly in terms of structure, frequency, mentor training and mode of interaction. Crisp et al (2017) identify these as: orientation programs, mentoring programs designed to support targeted populations (STEM, First-Gen etc.), peer mentoring, undergraduate research, and honors programs. Some programs may meet frequently and provide support from high school through graduation, such as the College Success Program, part Boston Foundation's Success Boston initiative, which offers participants year-round one-on-one coaching by trained mentors beginning senior year of high school and ending at college graduation. Other programs may be less structured, count on volunteer mentors or like many first-year programs, only be available for students through their first year of college. The amount of contact and duration of mentoring relationships can also vary greatly, anywhere from one meeting to lasting over a decade.

Overall findings indicate that mentoring efforts, in one fashion or another, increase student retention rates (Nora and Crisp, 2007). In their case study focused particularly on undergraduate Latino/a students, Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) identified mentoring as one practice that can aid students in attaining successful educational outcomes and they stress the social and ethical responsibility of implementing mentoring programs to help at risk minority students to pursue higher education (2006). Mentoring can also help students renegotiate their academic identities which in turn can assist in overcoming IP. Sense of belonging is an important aspect of student retention. A student that is suffering from IP, is going to feel out of place or disenfranchised and the fear and anxiety of being discovered are going to make it so that it is less likely for the student to connect with existing services that could help them succeed and persist at the institution as IP “undermines the ability to negotiate a resilient academic identity and also impedes the growth of a sense of belonging” (Ramsey & Brown, 2017). On the other hand, if the student can connect with someone they see as a mentor figure, that mentoring relationship may aid in renegotiating the IP sufferer's self-image to include a sense of their essential place in academia and belief in their ability to successfully complete their academic goals (Ramsey & Brown, 2019).

2.3 Gaps in the literature

Mentoring literature seems to have evolved in the past decade, however there are still limitations in the development of a more cohesive definition of mentorship. Research seems to be disconnected due to the varying definitions, methods, and theories within mentorship research. Definitional, methodological, and theoretical issues have made it difficult to accurately measure the impact that mentoring has on college students or to understand the components and aspects of mentoring that are associated with positive student outcomes (Crisp, 2009; Crisp & Cruz 2007.) Although there is substantial research that indicates mentoring relationships have a positive impact on underrepresented students (Nora & Crisp 2005; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006; Hagler, 2018; Mishra, 2020), such as promoting educational success and attainment for student groups with historically low high school and college graduation rates in the U.S. (Hagler, 2018) there is a lack of research providing a deeper analysis into what aspects of mentoring relationships are associated with positive experiences and to which extent.

Much of the literature on the impact of mentoring on underrepresented student groups seems to be concentrated on students in high achieving academic paths such as Engineering and Medicine. Additional research is needed to understand the experiences of all underrepresented students and not only those the literature categorizes as "high achievers," which are students with above average grade point averages, attending highly selective universities or highly competitive programs. These are smaller subsets of students and more research is needed on the experiences of underrepresented students across the spectrum. The experiences analyzed in this study are important in providing this needed perspective of marginalized students outside of the "high-achieving" spectrum. Addressing this knowledge gap is important for the development of high impact mentoring programs and practices across campuses to support underrepresented students and aid in closing the achievement gap for this important group.

3. Theoretical framework

To define what constitutes a mentoring relationship and its definitional characteristics, the data for this research will be analyzed using Crisp and Colleagues' (Crisp & Cruz 2009; Nora & Crisp 2007) four constructs of undergraduate mentoring relationships. This theoretical framework builds upon Kram's (1988) work, which defines what mentoring is and what aspects of the mentoring relationship promote growth and development. Crisp et. al (2007; 2009) devel-

oped a framework based on Kram's model, grounded within the higher education context, which made it the evident chosen framework to evaluate these experiences.

The following four constructs will be applied to evaluate my mentoring experiences:

1. *Psychological and Emotional Support*: a sense of listening, providing moral support, identifying problems, providing encouragement and the establishment of a supportive relationship in which there is mutual understanding and link between the student and the mentor. This construct also incorporates Kram's view that a "mentoring experience incorporates feedback from the mentor regarding certain fears and other issues on the part of the student" (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).
2. *Goal Setting and Career Paths* (Degree and Career Support): represents the idea that mentoring encompasses an assessment of the student's strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and includes assistance with setting academic/career goals and decision-making. Crisp et. al (2007,2009) provide six perspectives as the main variables as the focus for this construct: (1) a detailed review and exploration of interests, abilities, ideas, and beliefs (2) stimulation of critical thinking skills with regard to envisioning the future and developing personal and professional potential (3) reflective process (4) discussing specific suggestions regarding current plans and progress in achieving personal, educational, and career goals (5) a respectful challenge of explanations for specific decisions or avoidance of decisions and actions relevant to developing as an adult learner (6) facilitation in the realization of the mentee's dream.
3. *Academic Subject Knowledge Support*: Centers on the acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge; educating, evaluating, and challenging the mentee academically.
4. *Existence of a Role Model*: Focuses on the presence of a role model in the mentee's life as well as the opportunity for the mentee to learn from the mentor's current and past actions, achievements, and failures. Crisp et al (2007, 2009) note that in this variable, the emphasis is on sharing, or self-disclosing, life experiences and feelings by the mentor to personalize and enrich the relationship between himself/herself and the mentee.

4. Methodology

Traditional forms of analytical and evocative autoethnography were adopted as the methodology for this study. In an

analytic autoethnography, the autoethnographer is a member of the community being studied, reflects on experiences to provide theoretical analysis, and uses the research to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena. The self-reflective process of autoethnographical research allows one to fully recall, retell and analyze experiences from an insider's perspective in a way that "outside" researchers never could (Adams et al, 2014). An evocative approach, where the narrative is styled as to create a personal connection with the reader and provoke an emotional response, was employed primarily in the retelling of my experiences and in the interview dialogue. Through this autoethnographic account, I deconstruct my experiences, relationships, and their impact on my academic development. I also reflect on how they relate to available research on known barriers to academic achievement such as imposter syndrome and sense of belonging.

4.1 Research questions

- What are the challenges that students from marginalized groups face in terms of persistence and academic success in HE?
- To what extent does imposter syndrome impact the persistence and academic success of marginalized students in HE?
- What are different supports marginalized students receive through mentioning experiences in HE?
- To what extent do these supports impact marginalized students' overcoming imposter syndrome?

4.2 Sampling method

Data collection employed my personal recollections of several points throughout my academic career, starting from high school through present day. These recollections centered around three mentors I have had (Dr. J, Dr. T and Dr. F) and the impact of these relationships. Additionally, a face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the mentors, Dr.J. This interview was conducted at the participant's home on May 1, 2021, lasting approximately 2.5 hours. The interview followed a semi-structured format, with the conversation focused primarily on her recollections of our mentoring relationship and her experiences as a mentor of underrepresented students. The conversation was recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

4.3 Data analysis

A thematic approach was applied to data analysis. I divided all the data into themes according to Crisp et al's

(2007,2009) four constructs (Psychological and emotional support, Goal setting, Academic subject knowledge and Existence of a role model) and employed reflexivity as I compared my experiences to that of my mentor. Relevant excerpts from the interview are woven into the discussion of my recollections. To further interpret the findings, I drew from the literature on impostor syndrome by Clance & Ines (1978) Clance & O'Toole (1987) Shaw, Spink & Chin-Newman (2018) to categorize my experiences and isolate any recollections associated with imposter feelings (e.g. feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy and not belonging) and to what extent did the mentoring relationships in question assist in overcoming these feelings. In analyzing my mentoring relationships and their impact on my academic performance/achievement, the data was compared against the literature on mentoring and academic achievement by Zalaquett & Lopez (2006), Crisp & Cruz (2010) and Ramsey & Brown (2017).

In order to ensure a more comprehensive data set, the initial plan for this study was for interviews with all three mentors from my recollections. Due to scheduling availability, only one mentor was able to participate in the face-to-face interviews. The lack of participation from the two mentors provides a limitation in the data as their participation would provide further validation of the data or different outcomes of the study.

All of the mentors mentioned in the study continue to actively mentor students. Given their active roles in higher education, more specifically in their close work with students, it was important to protect their identities. In order to ensure this, mentors' names were removed from the study and aliases assigned.

5. Results

I remember feeling like my heart would jump out of my chest the first time I visited North Shore Community College, in the summer of 2005, to register for classes. I had to ask my mother to come with me. I did not tell her at the time, but I needed her to walk in with me so that I could overcome the urge to run away from there and sabotage my dreams once again.

I did not know it then, but that crippling desire to run away, was the anxiety brought on by imposter syndrome.

I had felt this before. I had been a stellar student in high school, learning had always come easily, and I had big dreams of becoming a veterinarian. The only problem? I

had no idea how, and the more I thought about it, the more this felt unattainable. I was an immigrant whose parents did not speak a word of English. They had never finished high school, let alone gone to university. I had no references to start from, no one to turn to, how could I make it? And my dream of becoming a veterinarian seemed to be just that. During my last year of high school, I received a full scholarship to a public university due to high standardized test scores. While I was excited about the possibility of not paying for school (one less obstacle to overcome) I immediately began to think that I was not fit to go to any of the public universities I had guaranteed admission to. I was not good enough, this must have all been a mistake, right? So, I enrolled at the local community college.

5.1 I didn't make it past my first semester

An academic advisor gave me a sheet of paper and told me to check off which classes I wanted to take that semester. At the first 75 mark on a statistics exam, I decided I was going to fail out of school and to save myself the embarrassment, I stopped going to class. I stopped going to all my classes, that I had straight A's in, because of one “bad” grade. Oh, if only I had known that this feeling of utter failure and the depression that followed me for the next few years had a reason and a name!

Well, it is 2008 and here I was at North Shore to try again. Only this time, it was different. The woman who was helping me register for courses could see that I needed assistance beyond just which section of PSYCH101 I should take. She registered me for a class and told me that I would like Dr. J, she was easy going and fun. Little did she or Dr. J know that they had just changed my academic trajectory forever. In our interview, I ask Dr. J if she is aware of this with me or with any of her students:

“I never formally mentored a student, even when I tried to participate in formal mentoring programs, they've always been informal. And to be honest I did not know I was doing it. I did not know that that was what was happening, it is my role as an educator to empower people. That is my job... I see my role as mentoring everybody. With that being said, I do think the mentoring has been probably more impactful for women and particularly minority women and women of color. I think it has been much more impactful for them, which makes me feel good, but I don't know that there was something purposeful there, it wasn't intentional, not intentional at all.”

As a minority woman of color, I certainly felt that connection immediately. Here was this incredibly smart, talented, hilarious woman. Dr. J. I was immediately taken with Dr. J as she introduced herself to the class as a black feminist with Jamaican roots. She was a woman of color with immigrant relatives, and she had a PhD. I wanted to be her; I needed to be her. In my most recent conversation with Dr. J, I asked if she found that students latch on to her because they see a connection, do they see her like I did, like someone they can look up to and be inspired by? Her answer was as if she had studied Nora and Crisp's (2007) first construct herself. As a clinical psychologist, Dr. J is naturally drawn to treat her students as clients. She described how she listens, tries to understand their perspective and what else in their lives might be impacting their academic disposition.

“When I meet with a student, my mindset is not that this is my student, my mindset is this is my client. my approach is very therapeutic.”

5.2 Finding support as an imposter

Dr. J's approach is the definition of the psychological/emotional support construct, encompassing the sense of listening, providing moral support, identifying problems, and providing encouragement while establishing a supportive relationship in which there is mutual understanding between both parties (Nora and Crisp, 2007). And establishing a supportive relationship is what we did. She understood that I did not raise my hand in class because I was crippled by the thought of being discovered as a fraud. That I would say something, and everyone would discover that I was dumb. Or that the fact that I sat quietly and never said a word did not necessarily mean I was not listening or paying attention, simply that I was so consumed with all different symptoms of imposter syndrome, that I could not speak up in class and she never called me out for it. It was quite the opposite. Dr. J constantly told me I was smart, so much so that eventually I had no choice but to believe her.

“I don't know that I have ever seen myself formally as a mentor. I mean with you I just saw somebody who had such incredible potential. I feel like I was feeding off of you. You inspired me to help you and I Just went with your lead. I thought, wow she's really talented and she has a lot of aspirations and I want to be a positive influence on that person.”

It is so interesting to hear Dr. J talk about feeling like she had to empower students, like she was being driven to do this for us. She says that “*My desire to empower people and being able to do that as a woman of color is not lost on me.*”

At the time, as her mentee, and even now a decade later, I only saw this powerful woman of color that I could look up to, that I saw as an example of all that I could become. Especially as we became closer, and she told me about her background and her own struggles in academia. Dr. J started out in a completely different academic and career path; she gave up on her aspirations to work in sports due to lack of representation. For most of her life she was the only black woman in the room and then the only black woman with a PhD, she was also an outsider like me and despite all these obstacles she made it and she got it. She got me.

“When I applied to my PhD, I had also auditioned for this touring group that went around the world, singing and dancing about how great humans were. This was perfect for me! to travel around the world singing and dancing about love and acceptance and coming together.

They offered me a position. I called my mother to tell her I was going to defer my PhD for a year to tour. She said “Dr.J, there are so few black women with PhDs, you are going to be a role model. Not by touring, but as a woman with a PhD and you need to do it.” and so I did. And I am not going to lie; it was a lot like a burden. To be a role model...but when I started working, I was like: you are absolutely totally right, mom. *My presence is mentoring.*”

Zalaquett and Lopez (2007) talk about the importance of the mentoring process for Latino students to navigate the educational system where it allows them to learn how to cope with the everyday pressures that arise. This process was crucial for me in building confidence and learning how to silence the inner voice that told me I was a fraud. Back in 2010, while I was still at North Shore Community College, Dr. J introduced me to Dr. T, or as Dr. J calls her: the smartest person I know. Notorious for being astute and a hard grader, taking her classes and developing a close mentoring relationship with Dr. T was my preparation for the next step in my academic journey. Unlike Dr. J, we did not have much in common, but Dr. T still got students like me. She is incredibly knowledgeable, perceptive, and sensitive to each of her students’ needs and how to empower them. Through her mentorship and guidance, and Dr. J’s constant compliments, I was able to develop enough confidence to believe in myself enough to finish my Associate degree at North Shore, transfer to a four-year university, apply to the Oxford University visiting scholar program and eventually make it across the pond.

“Part of being a mentor is countering that narrative, being a person of color and a woman is to always counter that narrative. If you are mentoring first Gen women of

color, assume that they have the narrative of they don’t belong and counter it. Always.” (Dr. J)

And yes, us sharing so many intersecting identities, Dr. J perhaps “got me” at a different level that somebody else might not, but I would argue that it does not necessarily mean that every mentor needs to match the background of their student, but they need to get it. Jennifer’s story models the second construct dealing with degree and career support and another mentor would do the same a few years later. The goal setting and career paths construct represents the notion that mentoring includes an assessment of the students’ strengths and weaknesses and developing their personal and professional.

Anyone can be a mentor if they understand the need for empowering the student, understanding what they need and where they are coming from. When I was looking at different colleges to transfer to for completing my bachelor’s degree, I made a list of esteemed colleges in the Boston area and some of those names just seemed like the right thing to do, for no reason other than this is where all these smart people go, and I need to show that I am a smart person. I was still so caught up in my own self-doubt and need to belong, my need to overcome, and that feeling of being a fraud. I will never forget a conversation I had with Dr. T where she said:

“I want you to understand that I don’t doubt for a minute you can get into these places, but you are not going to do well there, this school is not right for you. It is not that you will not do well academically, you’re going to be fine academically but personally, I don’t know that you are going to be happy there”.

I really took that to heart and began to look at places considering all of what made me, me. I looked at places where I thought I would feel that sense of belonging and where I could counter that narrative. and I thank her every day for telling me that, because she was right. I chose the University of Massachusetts, an institution that is known for being minority serving, and I was extremely successful there. I flourished and I am certain that the main reason for my success was due to my mentor Dr. F, whom I met on my second week at the University, and the sense of belonging in being in a place where I could see myself in not only my peers but faculty and staff. I am certain that had I been anywhere else, I would have not been able to overcome my imposter feelings and applied to the Oxford University visiting scholar program.

5.3 Finding new supports

I graduated from North Shore Community College in the summer of 2011. By that point I felt confident, like a true part of the campus community and comfortable in my own skin. As a last piece of advice, Dr. T told me to “*remember that UMass is not North Shore. It is a much bigger pond. The resources are there but they will not be in your face like here. You will have to advocate for yourself and find your supports,*” and that is exactly what I did. The years spent with Dr. J and Dr. J empowered me to not be ashamed to maximize the resources available to me. As soon as I started at UMass that fall, I sought opportunities at the campus where I could “find my people” and create a sense of belonging at this new place like I had done at North Shore. I found a mentoring program through my department where they would pair up undergraduate students with graduate student mentors. I filled out the application and a few weeks later I received an email from Dr. F, a PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology, to schedule our first meeting.

On paper, Dr. F and I had nothing in common. She was an international student coming from a very privileged background, but she was an extremely empathetic and insightful person. While we did not share many commonalities, I could still see a mentor figure in her and she still had sensibility to understand what students like me were going through. As the years passed, our mentor/mentee relationship conquered all of the four constructs. Dr. F served as an invaluable emotional support, with our weekly meetings turning into therapy sessions when my IP feelings were especially strong. As a graduate student, Dr. F was crucial in assisting with goal setting and providing academic support. She challenged me to take advanced classes, participate in research projects and make an academic plan beyond just my undergraduate degree.

In 2013 I was accepted to be a visiting scholar at Oxford University, and I broke down crying in Dr. F’s office. I told myself that the reason I was crying was because I could not afford to go, the program was too expensive. The real reason was that once again, I was overcome by IP. I could never make it there, if there was one place in the world I could be discovered as a fraud, it would be at Oxford. Like Dr. J’s mother, Dr. F sat me down and explained what this experience would mean for me, how many doors it would open. Perhaps her clinical training allowed her to see right through me, to get what I was going through. Like I needed my mother to come with me to register for classes so that I would not give up and run away, Dr. F was there to make sure I did not run away from this incredible opportunity that would open so many doors for me.

And this is a worldview that you are not going to get oftentimes in a formally structured mentorship program. When Dr. T advised me to seek my supports once I arrived at UMass, she knew that I would need the supports in place to continue to succeed as I had done at North Shore. She understood who I was as an individual and what my own struggles with IP were. Because we found each other, or rather, I found her and saw something in her and she understood what someone like me was struggling with and how to work through it, that mentoring relationship was more powerful and effective than any one size fits all model. Due to the lack in research, formal mentoring programs follow a one size fits all model of topics to be covered across a number of meetings between mentor and mentee without taking into consideration the nuances of these relationships and the individual’s needs such as Dr. T felt in that conversation and had the foresight to warn me. In her 2007 conceptualization of the college mentoring scale, Nora Crisp suggests that mentoring scales and/or interventions that are not specifically designed for different groups of students might be invalid, concluding that a “one size fits all” approach to mentoring may not be effective for a diverse group of students. A diverse group of students like me and the many students Dr. T and Dr. J and come across daily.

5.4 One size does not fit all

This lack of specificity in mentoring program design is where underrepresented students miss out. Where programs use a standard that was not created for them, ignoring the entire ecosystem around this person, without considering what might be best for them and their academic achievement. As a poor, Latina immigrant who was working 45+ hours a week while I pursued my undergraduate degree, I had the opportunity to join a generic mentoring program run by the student activities office at UMass. It was a program designed with only one subset of students in mind, all meetings were scheduled in days and times that only students without jobs or other responsibilities could attend. I tried joining, attended two meetings, and was left with an extreme sense of failure when I reached the realization that I could not keep up with those scheduled meetings and formulaic engagements.

When programming is created in a one size fits all model that does not consider the diverse backgrounds and needs of students like me, who have so many intersecting identities; they are immigrants, they are parents, they are working full time and they are doing all these other things that a traditional mentoring program is not enough. Instead of helping, it becomes a burden. It is one more worry, one more thing to fit in their schedule and when eventually they cannot fulfil

this commitment, it becomes one more reason for them to feel inadequate, left out and a failure. This could lead to the opposite outcomes of what the program was intended. In order to remediate this, we must understand what kinds of interactions will empower the student, something Dr. J does quite well:

“As an educator, my role isn’t to teach you about the difference between operating classical conditioning, no. No. No. that’s not my job. My job is to empower you, so that YOU can learn the difference yourself. To empower you so that you find some confidence in your ability to learn how to learn because you can take that and do whatever you want with it.”

The confidence that Dr. J talks about, is the most important piece when it comes to the impact of mentoring for underrepresented students. Looking at the multitude of identities I carried, and constantly dealing impostor syndrome, with this feeling of “I’m not good enough” and “I can’t do this;” building confidence is crucial for academic success. Building confidence goes beyond just the moral support that comes from the praise of telling someone they are doing a good job. Confidence building happens at every stage of the four mentoring constructs. In addition, the reflexivity and challenge that comes with constructs two and three, Goal Setting and Academic knowledge, also assist in confidence building. As soon as you find someone that challenges you to take that advanced class or commit to that semester at Oxford, when they say: “you can do it, you’re smart” then you are able to silence that voice telling you that you are destined to fail. You see them as a mentor, as a figure to aspire to and perhaps see yourself in that person, then your reaction is to say: “OK ! I believe you, you’re in charge, you wouldn’t be telling me this if I didn’t know better.” and this is the point where you feel a sense of belonging, of identification. You start to believe that you can indeed succeed, that you are able to suppress those feelings even if momentarily, because you genuinely believe that you can do it. This sensation is hugely important in carrying over to the finish line. Individuals like me, who suffer from IP, even if they are performing at the highest level, do not believe it, they will find every excuse to justify their success and self-sabotage. My interview with Dr. J highlights the importance of mentors understanding this:

“When I see somebody like you, somebody who is really nailing it, the expectation is Franci DaLuz level of work, right? that’s the expectation, so I don’t praise you because you’re doing what is expected. Because people like you don’t know that you are doing fantastic work.”

For me, I still need these reminders that I am worthy, even now. Years later and I still feel inferior and out of place, those feelings are still there, I’ve gotten to a point where I can acknowledge that the feeling isn’t real, but it took a very long time to get to that place and it would not have been possible without the mentorship of women like Dr. J, Dr. T and Dr. F and others whom I seek for advice to this day.

“I had this other student that went to Smith College, and the perspective that she brought to class that even her professors didn’t get. Her professors didn’t know what to do with her challenges and her worldview being, you know, a single mother immigrant from Africa.”

For a student who is already struggling with feeling like they are a fraud, to have their professors, advisors, or anyone they contact with that could serve as a potential mentor unable to understand where they are coming from it just further exacerbates that alienating feeling of being an imposter. The sense of belonging of having a mentor figure or someone that marginalized students can relate to is crucial in their success. As Dr. J points out, it’s your job as an educator. It should be part of your training to understand where your student is coming from. *And if you can’t do that, then what is the point?*

6. Discussion and conclusion

Brown and Ramsey (2018) present a clear link between imposter syndrome and lower rates of academic achievement between first-generation students and other marginalized groups in higher education. The fear of failure is just one of the many negative effects of imposter syndrome. The anxiety that comes out of this fear of failing or living up to the negative stereotype for the students is a detriment to their success and academic achievement. Ramsey and Brown (2018) note that “out of this fear, “imposters” tend to either overwork, spending more time than necessary on assignments, or underperform out of a sense of the inevitability of failure”. I find it extremely ironic to read these words as I put together this research. As I began to write this autoethnography, I thought of my experience as an example of someone that lucked out and found the formula to overcome the impact of imposter syndrome. Needless to say, this is not exactly the case. I find myself at 2 AM days before my deadline and still I must fight to not give into the fear of failure by self-sabotaging. I find myself acting out Ramsey and Browns words, where I spend countless hours over analyzing every thought about this study, to the point where I have been crippled for an entire day before I could finally,

silence that inner voice, push through and sit down at 2:00am to write about all of it.

While I thought my research would take form by analyzing my experience, what I did not realize is that the process of carrying out this research would be part of it as well. But this is the role of an autoethnographer, to reflect on hindsight, call on memory and dive deep in order to talk to others about occurrences they might otherwise not be privy to. One cannot properly reflect on lived experiences without bringing feelings to the surface. Especially given that the subject matter, IP, deals with feelings and thoughts that are ongoing. I find myself taken over by the anxiety and other feelings I have learned to recognize so well. The self-sabotaging, overworking, and the underperformance that comes with the sense of inevitable doom. This only serves to remind me that while I may have been able to learn how to silence this inner voice, that there is no simple formula to cure "imposter syndrome" it is something we need to learn to recognize and train other higher education professionals to recognize as well. And if we, as educators and higher education professionals want to be able to assist our students in overcoming imposter syndrome so that they can persist and perform at their highest level academically, it is imperative that we understand how to navigate this with our students. That like Dr. J, we understand that no matter how silly it may seem to do so, that our students need to hear that they did a great job speaking up in class or finishing that assignment and that for many of them who are working through silencing that inner voice, it may take three or four times before they believe us when we compliment them.

I invite readers to reflect on the central themes that evolved from this study: imposter syndrome, sense of belonging, mentorship, and academic achievement. While I do not recommend that HE institutions only employ clinical psychologists as mentors, something is to be said about the therapeutic approach of some of the mentors discussed in this study. Having an integrated approach to student interactions, seeing the student as "client," especially in dealing with marginalized student groups is essential in understanding their needs and motivation. Administrators also need to reconsider their training and professional development practices if they genuinely want to bridge the gap of academic achievement for underrepresented students. The entire campus community is full of potential mentors, staff and faculty that fit within these pillars of what constitutes a mentor, that understand exactly what students might be going through and what they need is extremely impactful and important. Administrators should look at all faculty and staff within an institution as potential mentors and should consider embedding Crisp and Cruz' constructs

of mentorship in training and professional development for anyone that is in contact with students and therefore increase marginalized students' sense of belonging and lessening imposter feelings.

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The student experience in higher education reshaped by the pandemic: The autoethnographic perspective of a business school staff member

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Abstract

Covid-19 has impacted the lives of millions of students who experienced various well-being-related difficulties due to the lack of social relations. Contrary to what most studies suggest, it is challenging to delineate particular categories of students significantly affected by the pandemic. Therefore, this research relied on autoethnography as a method to study students' lived experiences through the author's subjective lens. It considers developing a digital and inclusive student experience to overcome the lack of social relations and provide a fair opportunity for the students to find their path in life during and after the pandemic. The findings show that we need to consider the student experience as a holistic experience, including the academic, professional, social and extracurricular experiences. Moreover, the individuals live it differently depending on their traits. The research confirms that the lack of social relations profoundly affects their well-being. It suggests developing a social constructivist approach and notably authentic learning activities, linking the academic, professional and extracurricular experiences to support students in engaging with their peers online, adapting their behaviour to a new environment and developing new, meaningful perspectives beyond the meritocratic notion of "success" in higher education.

1. Personal story

I have been working as a digital transformation director for a leading French business school specialising in technology-enhanced learning and apprenticeship of which the motto is “the new paths to success”, and I cannot help but wonder how both our current staff and students understand this expression.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic occurred in March 2020, I did not reflect on what the students’ paths to success could be anymore. The school has been closed, yet we maintained all courses online and the apprenticeship track. I must admit: I only thought of the pandemic as an opportunity to show how our strategic focus on technology-enhanced learning could make the institution stand out in these turbulent times and how it could support a larger crowd of diverse students to access quality education. Since the campus closure, the directors, including myself, only interacted with a few students through webconferences. Although they did not explicitly express concerns about their well-being, some staff stated that students lacked motivation and did not successfully engage with various projects and extracurricular activities during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, my wife and I said something that may seem shocking to most people: “2020’s been one of the best years in our life!”. From my perspective, working from home and spending my entire time with her felt like a luxury I was not ready to give up. However, on 1 February 2021, a year after the pandemic started, I encountered a transformative moment in my life. I returned to work after months of absence and finally met a few students in person. I did not realise how the lack of social experience impacted some of them, quite negatively in some cases, which called me to question my role as a director. Indeed, the student experience cannot be merely reduced to academic programmes and work experience. Interactions among students are vital to their well-being and development, especially undergraduates that are just discovering adulthood. How can I claim to provide an inclusive education while some students are left aside? Where are their paths to success?

Although there does not seem to be a simple solution to drastically improve their life in the current context, my study aims in the long run at creating a more inclusive student experience. I have a sense of urgency that drives me to think about how an institution could better support and care for all students overcoming their personal difficulties during the pandemic and beyond.

To make sense of the student experience from their perspective as well as from my own, I wrote an autoethnography. This methodological approach is centred on the self and shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live and the meaning of their struggles” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p111). Before diving into the interviews with the students to analyse these struggles, in the literature review, I investigated the negative impact of covid-19 on the students’ well-being and their experience as well as the opportunity for the students to grow as authentic beings able to adapt to such new environment.

This context led me to study the following research question:

- How can an institution provide a more inclusive experience to students by maintaining social interactions and improving their well-being during and after the pandemic?

The previous question was guided by the following two sub-questions:

1. What lessons can I draw from talking and interacting with students about the negative impact of Covid-19 on their student experience and their positive attitude to cope with it?
2. As the digital transformation director of a business school, how can I help students by enhancing their experience through online interactions during and after the pandemic?

2. Literature review

Research about Covid-19’s impact on students primarily focuses on negative psychological consequences. At the same time, few articles conceptualise the pandemic as an opportunity to self-reflect on the situation and adapt oneself to establish a new meaning and purpose in life. Accordingly, the following review features these two opposite views and delves into two concepts exploring how patterns of behaviour influence well-being.

Well-being can be defined as a sense of satisfaction and happiness, a healthy mindset conveying its perspective of an authentic, future, accomplished self (Sherman, 2021). Cooper (2016) defines it as fair, equitable consideration of all people contributing to their capacity and growth in synergy with others without disadvantaging their peers. Therefore, the students’ well-being is intrinsically linked to the student experience, which may refer to their social, professional or

academic experience in the literature (Costambeys-Kempczynski, 2015), whereas most articles referring to Covid-19 limits its impact to the academic dimension (Laslo-Roth et al., 2020; Petillion & McNeil, 2020; Veletsianos, 2020; Westbrook et al., 2021).

2.1 The essential components of psychological well-being and student experience

Two essential concepts stress different factors that play a role in both student experience and well-being. The first concept from Wilson et al. (2020) interprets the student experience during Covid-19 through four themes or patterns of behaviour: accountability, awareness, socialising and environment. The second concept from Ryff (1989) advances six prerequisites for psychological well-being: autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relation with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. From these two concepts and the literature, I have refined broader personality traits and characteristics that seem to play a significant role in the students' well-being.

2.1.1 A sense of agency and self-determination

"Autonomy" is a synonym of freedom of choice (Ryff, 1989) and works in pair with "accountability", defined as how we feel responsible for our actions (Wilson et al., 2020). In sociology, "agency" includes both notions and can be interpreted as how we act, make decisions and account for our actions. The students' agency contributes to their emotional engagement, self-awareness, motivation and their resilience towards adversity as a group (Wilson et al., 2020).

Indeed, the self-determination theory illustrates how people's psychological needs influence their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to grow. It also corroborates how the student's psychological needs, such as autonomy and the will to socialise and be compassionate (called "relatedness"), lead to intrinsic motivation when fulfilled and contribute to their well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation can arise from academic interactions and informal interactions between peers or peers and educators. Thus, it is not solely related to the individual but can also be fostered through group interactions when students challenge each other, work toward a common goal (Wolfe et al., 2018) or simply enjoy the activity in itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The lack of motivation resulting from a lack of social relations is considered one of the most critical difficulties the students have faced during the pandemic (Magson et al., 2021).

2.1.2 Self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-actualisation

Accordingly, students who have a sense of agency and are engaged display self-awareness (Wilson et al., 2020). Self-awareness illustrates the students' ability to self-reflect (Wilson et al., 2020) and is acknowledged as a critical factor to grow (Merryman W. et al., 2015), while self-acceptance relates to their ability to maintain a positive mindset toward themselves (Ryff, 1989). Self-awareness and self-acceptance combined with creativity help design responses to adapt to our current situation (Greening, 1992). Creative people can find a new purpose and grow toward self-actualisation, fulfilling their full potential (Larcus et al., 2016; Maslow, 1943). Pervin and Rubin (1967) contended that students achieve satisfaction when their perceived self-awareness converges toward self-actualisation.

Nevertheless, experience has proven that self-awareness alone might not be sufficient, and students may lack the will to act towards their well-being or do not feel entitled to act (Bolumole, 2020; Lynch et al., 2020). Although the literature describes self-awareness as an intrapersonal process, social distancing has prevented students from developing social relations and self-awareness in various online environments, according to Merryman W. et al. (2015). Thus, self-awareness would not only be intrapersonal but potentially related to sensemaking: a social process, an attempt to collectively rationalise our subjective thoughts and perspectives by interpreting symbols and cues from the environment (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005).

2.1.3 Social relations

Subsequently, social relations are considered crucial to each individual's development (Berger et al., 2020), notably for first-year students transitioning from high school and undergraduates in general (Elmer et al., 2020; Meuwese et al., 2017). Interactions enable students to apprehend social norms and develop a shared culture (Wilson et al., 2020). They enable academically marginalised students to succeed (Browning et al., 2021). Peer-group associations appeared to be the most critical interactions to create engagement and improve resilience (Tinto, 1975; Wilson et al., 2020). Similarly, educators' formal and informal interactions with the students are of utmost importance to foster self-determination (Hartnett, 2012).

Ryff (1989) characterises them as "warm" relationships. Warmth is an element associated with "growth" and a characteristic of self-actualisers who develop deep, caring relationships with others. Hence, students find meaning in

these interactions and might discover their wants, purpose and increase their well-being (Knowles et al., 2005; Larcus et al., 2016; Wang & Delaquil, 2020). However, due to Covid-19, when students moved from physical to online interactions, they seemed to have lost bearings, their sense of accountability, engagement, and sense of belonging (Wilson et al., 2020).

2.1.4 Environment

Consequently, I questioned how such an unexpected event and change in the environment might have impacted students. Wilson et al. (2020) defined the environment as external factors that impact the academic, professional and extracurricular experience. According to these authors, any change in the environment influences the student well-being, self-awareness, self-determination and self-actualisation. It is aligned with person-environment theories advance that the environment shapes the society's behaviour without considering the individuals' characteristics and behaviour.

Conversely, Holland's theory considers how individuals react to environmental pressures based on their personality (Walsh, 1973). However, the six personality types he defined seem to disregard the complexity of one's personality.

Finally, Ryff (1989, p. 1071) construed "environment mastery" as one's ability to "choose or create environments suitable to its psychic conditions". Thus, the individual is in control and not subdued to the environment. However, he did not conduct extensive research on the nature of change in the environment, the individual or learning.

Hence, all of these studies may contradict one another; however, they all establish a link between environment and people. I find it worth investigating how a change in a particular environment, such as social distancing which constrained students to study online and limited social interactions, impacted the student experience.

2.1.5 Growth mindset: Meaning to life and purpose

Last but not least, Ryff (1989) defined personal growth and purpose in life as two essential prerequisites for psychological well-being. The author associated "meaning to life" with "purpose in life". He correlated them with the definition of self-actualisation, where one finds what is meaningful and fulfils its highest need for personal growth (Maslow, 1943). Meaning-making is a core concept that goes beyond the definition of sensemaking, where students make sense of their current self, envision and aspire to their

future self through their experiences and apprehend their existential purpose. Ryff (1989) added that a positive person who has a purpose and is self-directed finds meaning to life and refers to it as maturity, the cognitive and emotional growth. Although not defined by Wilson et al. (2020) as one of the critical conditions of well-being, the authors highlight the relationship between self-determination and growth and how each student's level of motivation can positively or negatively impact its growth, its engagement with the class and its resilience. In the two following paragraphs, I looked at how Covid-19 negatively impacted students and, conversely, how it can be seen as an opportunity to reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions about the student experience and reconnect with the world.

2.2 The negative impact of Covid-19

The literature investigated how some phenomena relate to a "nonconstructive, emotional experience" that negatively affects the students' academic life (Sherman, 2021, p59). The consequences on the students appeared to be a lack of engagement with the social, extracurricular life and an outburst of negative feelings (stress, depression, anxiety) leading to mental health issues as well as alcohol, drug and violence (Sherman, 2021). These problems affected students as well as their parents, who might have experienced similar issues, job loss, and financial pressure (Brooks et al., 2020);

Social distancing was also a factor resulting from the Covid-19 context that aggravated the situation. On the one hand, the students often had to give up their independence and return to live with their parents, which negatively impacted their self-perception (Gaviria, 2021). On the other hand, those living independently have not been able to maintain a relationship with their friends and show symptoms of depression. (Gaviria, 2021). Mental health issues seemed to be related, in essence, to their isolation and the lack of social interactions (Elmer et al., 2020). In 2021, little is known yet about the long-term consequences that Covid-19 could have. However, such mental illnesses could have detrimental effects over the lifetime of these young students (Magson et al., 2021).

Moreover, some studies suggested that the lack of social interactions triggered considerable distress among young people compared to the fear of being infected (Magson et al., 2021). The literature stressed that the difficulty to access technology caused a lack of authentic online interactions. Some technology-enhanced learning researchers argued that online interactions did not help to maintain engagement, motivation and even worsened the students' isolation and capacity to learn when they were the only

alternative to face-to-face interactions (Hill K., 2020; Kahu et al., 2020). Conversely, others, including Westbrook et al. (2021), described webconferencing as “therapeutic forms of student-lecturer collaboration [...] for enhancing well-being” as the nearest lifelike interactions that we can experience online.

Finally, the literature substantiated the belief that some populations were more impacted by the pandemic than others. The undergraduates seemed to have been severely hit by social distancing and school closures (Karasmanaki & Tsantopoulos, 2021). Data evidenced Covid-19’s impact on “marginalised students” with disabilities or coming from minorities (Song et al., 2020). Quantitative research also highlighted that female students have been more affected than male students (Karasmanaki & Tsantopoulos, 2021).

2.3 Covid as an opportunity for change?

Contrary to the research about Covid-19’s negative impacts, the literature about existential-humanistic psychology helped me make sense of the current situation and find meaning. Any difficulty in life can be seen as a challenge that disrupts what we take for granted.

Greening (1992) stressed that we should accept an environment that cannot be controlled, live fully, remain open, self-aware, and adapt to find new meaning and purpose, contributing to our personal growth. Ryff (1989) also corroborated that self-actualisation contributes to the students’ growth and is characterised by openness to experience and perpetual change. Finally, Bland (2020) added that we should embrace “positive freedom” (Bland, 2020, p715): seizing opportunities while being aware of our limits regarding others and the context; we should engage authentically with others despite the hurdles while showing empathy and altruism to support those who need it the most. Thus, the literature unveiled two different views of the pandemic as a calamity and an opportunity.

2.4 The gap in the literature

To sum up, most of the literature about student experience during the pandemic focused on the academic experience and related how well-being could not be sustained in online environments.

Moreover, it emphasised Covid-19’s negative impact on students. However, it seems hazardous to delineate distinct types of students with specific needs solely based on quantitative data. For example, Karasmanaki and Tsantopoulos (2021) only conducted surveys with closed-ended questions

to gather socio-demographic data. Some authors, such as Song et al. (2020), did not explain the rationale behind these categories. Although scholars might have done so with good intentions to provide customised support to clear-cut categories of students, it may lead to the exclusion of others who do not fit into these. I contend that we should strive for an inclusive education considering each individual’s needs and potential within our society.

While Covid-19’s aftermath prevails in the literature and cannot be underrated, I intend to debunk the common discourse acknowledging the pandemic as a fatality. Through qualitative research, I will attempt to conceptualise an ontological approach to advance it as an opportunity to improve the student experience in the long term, considering how social interactions and well-being can be leveraged by distance.

3. Autoethnography

3.1 The story behind the methodology

Through an existential-phenomenological approach, I intended to understand retrospectively the subjective students’ experiences and the meaning I made of them (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Indeed, phenomenology studies behaviours through phenomena of experience. It attempts to comprehend the interviewee’s knowledge of a particular phenomenon by analysing its reasoning and the process that resulted in its knowledge and understanding of a situation. I looked at the pandemic from the students’ perspectives and brought an existential approach that focused on making sense of the students’ “lived experiences” through a reflexive process (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

To do so, I chose autoethnography as a methodology: it intricates autobiography, or “the craft of life writing” (Adams, 2021), with ethnography which studies cultural life and practices through artistic narratives (Adams et al., 2014). According to Adams, such a reflexive process on the self and a cultural phenomenon harmoniously combines an academic and scholarly tradition with storytelling.

Allow me to digress from the methodology to my own story and my institutional context to better explain the rationale behind the choice of an autoethnography: The business school has 60 years of existence and is one of the “Grandes Ecoles”, a category of selective, accredited institutions in France which are known for the quality of their education and, to my great disappointment, are often considered as elitist, recruiting only “the best” students and

requiring them to pay high tuition fees.

However, in comparison to other Grandes Ecoles and despite the lack of communication from the institution on the topic, this business school has always been inclusive and wears values such as “Openness, challenge and empathy”. Indeed, I cannot seem to remember any utterance from the management board to the staff or students explicitly explaining what we meant by “the new paths to success”. In the only written evidence of institutional discourse that I found, the words “path” and “success” were not clearly defined. Only a reference to “success” as “a state of mind rather than a social norm” supported by the claim that “success can emerge from failure” suggests that the institution possibly gives a rather existential meaning to the word, rather than the shared, accepted definition of success in our meritocratic higher education system that considers it as achieving good academic results.

Nonetheless, to me, the expression bears meaning: providing an inclusive education to students regardless of their background and skills, to help them access education and succeed in finding their path in life and career, achieving their personal goals. Indeed, the admission exam has never excluded students who did not score very high, provided that they showed motivation and a keen interest in the disciplines studied. The tuition fees range from 7,000€ to 10,000€ per year at the undergraduate level. Nevertheless, the institution was the second in France to develop apprenticeship, enabling students to finance their studies while gaining work experience. It is a reasonably small institution with over 500 students where the staff is proud to “empathise” with students from various backgrounds, providing them with personal support to find their path in life and overcome the challenges they will face.

An inclusive, online education is what attracted me to this business school when I heard of its project to bring education to Africa in partnership with UNESCO. I had a passion for studies and always wanted to be an educator. I worked for many years in business development in various industries before finding my way in higher education. Nonetheless, I worked in international student recruitment. To me, it was about providing an opportunity to these students to access a high quality education. However, to the university, it was just a mean to achieve revenue, and it did not resonate with me. When I finally discovered online education as a postgraduate student, it changed my perspective beyond what I imagined. I learned so much from both my peers and tutors and had more support online than in any course on campus.

I finally came across a French business school that

seemed to share the same ideals of online and open education that I had. Initially, I joined it as a business development and communication director. And eventually, the institution allowed me to find my path as a digital transformation director, managing the change from on-campus to online education and designing e-learning programmes for all students.

Nevertheless, I felt like something was missing to provide the online experience the students deserve and this became more apparent during the pandemic. I needed to know their experience to provide them with the support they needed. Although most autoethnographies rather lean on the author’s life story, in this research, I deliberately chose to include the students as “co-participants” (Chang, 2008, p65). I relied on my professional experience in technology-enhanced learning and management to discover myself as a complex, emotional being while exploring their personal experiences to better grasp this social phenomenon and strive for a better, inclusive education.

To put it simply, I conducted qualitative research in which I reflected on my own experience and emotions in relation to others (Chang, 2008). Indeed, every time I broached this topic, I could not help myself but quaver. I felt deeply emotional when thinking about what students were going through. Therefore, I aspired to produce research that embraced my own sensitivity to understand my emotions and how I could benevolently support the students to improve their lives (Ellis, 2016).

From my perspective, autoethnography was also a mean to communicate about these disregarded students’ lives to a broad audience and make institutions reflect upon this situation to make education more inclusive and provide equitable support to all students.

3.2 Method

On the one hand, I collected data using “friendship as a method” (Adams, 2015), approaching interviews as friendly relations and caring for the interviewees beyond the interview. This method fitted well with my personal convictions: it was not about extracting data from students but rather interacting with them to support the students with compassion and help them overcome their potential difficulties. Hence, it required me to prioritise the relationship by accommodating the students’ needs and considering any ethical issues. I adopted a flat relationship and casually conversed with them to make students more open and comfortable in discussing their personal issues without feeling oppressed. Such a method helped me understand them more authentically.

They were able to ask me questions or discuss topics I would not have brought up.

I initially contacted all the students by e-mail, specified who I was, what was my research about, why I was writing it and how I was planning to conduct it. Eight students volunteered to take part in this research. I also proactively contacted two of the interviewees as I knew them personally. They had mentioned their difficulties prior to my research, which triggered my interest. In total, I selected five of them and chose diverse profiles (see Table 1 below). I focused on undergraduates who have been described as a particularly vulnerable population in the literature. I considered their gender, as research highlighted that women are more affected by the pandemic. However, I could only interview one female student I proactively contacted, as all other students who responded to my e-mails were male students. Therefore, I might not have substantial data regarding female students, as they did not express their interest further to my e-mail. I also considered the students' nationality, as international students far from their families might feel more isolated than local students. I selected students from the first year of the Bachelor to the last year of the Master's degree across various programmes. The aim was to analyse not only their maturity but the diversity of their experience, whether or not they had an academic experience on campus and a professional experience (by distance or on campus) before or during the pandemic. I also chose students who never had any experience in the institution I work for (two international students and a first-year student) to understand whether they had built a sense of belonging by distance without knowing any of their classmates. Therefore, I could analyse whether their characteristics aligned with the groups defined in the literature.

I conducted individual interviews through Microsoft Teams which lasted between thirty minutes and one and a half hour. We also exchanged messages through this app occasionally. However, these messages were not used in this paper. There were simply a mean to support the students with their current difficulties beyond the research. Indeed, friendship as a method did not limit the relationship to a planned interview. It allowed the students to discuss with me through their favourite mean (Microsoft Teams) after the interviews were completed as well.

I wrote down all the conversations from the interviews and conducted a horizontal analysis: I identified the qualitative data that aligned or differed from the themes and issues in the literature, cross-referenced the common themes in each dialogue and arranged them in the following sections, namely impact of Covid-19 and socialising, growth mindset, self-acceptance, self-awareness and self-actualisation. Highlighting the differences which make each story unique also enabled me to identify solutions to answer the research questions in the later discussion section.

On the other hand, I used a hybrid systematic self-observation to collect my thoughts when engaging with emotions related to my research (Chang, 2008). The hybrid model is based on a pre-structured chart in which I complement my emotions with a narrative to express my thoughts and specify the time of each event. I then wrote an evocative dialogue made of the students' dialogues interwoven with all these personal emotions and thoughts.

3.3 Ethical issues and limitations

Each student signed a consent form and volunteered for the interviews. I have used fake names in the autoethnography and did not provide any specific details about their life

Table 1. list of participants and their characteristics

Name	Programme	Experience in the institution before Covid-19	International student	Course delivery during Covid-19	Work experience
Emilie	Master 1 GE	Yes	No	by distance only	by distance only
John	Bachelor 3 IM	No	Yes	by distance only	No
Pat	Master 2 IB	No	Yes	on campus + e-learning	No
Nicolas	Bachelor 1 EBM	No	No	on campus + e-learning	No
Adrien	Master 2 GE	Yes	No	by distance only	Yes. Entrepreneur

and origin to protect their identity.

I intended to conduct the interviews face-to-face, but they had to occur via Microsoft Teams due to the ongoing school closure. It was not always possible to see the interviewees due to some access to technology and broadband quality issues. However, the students willingly shared their feelings about their experiences, and I could still apply “friendship as method”.

Finally, my research happened within a short timeframe. Thus, it will not be possible to compare the evolution of the students’ well-being over a long period.

4. Findings

This section introduces each interviewee’s unique experience as dialogues arranged by themes. The emotions I felt during my research are also outlined.

4.1 Student experience and socialising during Covid-19

I asked the students what “student experience” meant to them. Most of them did not know this term, but all mentioned every aspect of the experience: learning, working, socialising. Everything was linked.

“The student experience, to me, it’s the experience with others. When you’re a student, you discover social life, what’s closer to adult life. You have courses [...], the professional life. [...] I have to be an adult and be accountable for what I do”, said Emilie.

Socialising was the most emphasised aspect among all students.

Pat, an English-speaking international student from Africa who came to pursue a Master’s degree in my institution, said:

“It’s about meeting people, socialising with them, getting to know their way of socialising. We come from different backgrounds, countries. We come to share our ideas. There are students from China, France...but we’re not together, so it’s been difficult.”

I could feel Pat had many difficulties adapting, yet he kept a smile on his face during the entire conversation so far...

The pandemic’s impact varied from one student to another.

“How did you feel being isolated?” I asked Nicolas, a first-year Bachelor and local student who did not have many opportunities to experience life in a business school:

“Well, I wasn’t isolated. I lived with one of my colleagues. We still met with my friends and played football. I was never depressed or low in spirits”, he said with enthusiasm.

Conversely, Pat lived a very different experience:

“How was your experience [in the business school] so far?” I asked.

Pat scratched his head. The smile faded from his face.

“This Tuesday, I was at the hospital to see my doctor and explained to her that I’m feeling pretty depressed. In a sense, I don’t have anybody to talk to. So, it’s just me and my computer all day long [...]. It’s just been ME, ME and MYSELF...ALONE. I tried to connect [with my peers], I tried my best...”, Pat replied, desperate.

When our discussion ended, I realised how life was difficult for some isolated students and how lucky I was to work from home with someone by my side. My wife looked at me and asked what had just happened. As soon as I started telling her Pat’s story, tears came to my eyes.

Adrien, a Master student and entrepreneur from the region, gave me a more nuanced view:

“It’s a paradox. There are students like me who are really fine. I can’t complain, but for some others, it sounds almost like a catastrophe. [...] I know it can be tough psychologically, and some may have after-effects. But being stuck for months and not being able to a nightclub is not such a big deal.”

Then, Adrien added:

“Nevertheless, what hurts me the most is that I can’t play my [favourite sport] at a regional level anymore. [...] I understand that we need to support each other and follow the rules, but I miss playing”.

John is an ERASMUS student doing his Bachelor's degree in France who inspired my research. I felt terrible when I saw him in February 2021: he seemed so happy, discovering the campus for the first time, but all I could think of was that he missed a chance to live a life in France, discover a new environment, socialise with friends, learn our language and culture. When I interviewed him, I asked John if he still made some friends despite the lockdown.

John added:

"It's hard to meet some people. Everything is closed. Since last year, you can't enjoy restaurants, bars, night-life, social life... so friends become even more valuable. I'm one of the few that don't live near the university's residence. [...] I need to socialise with people, to talk, have conversations."

After talking for one and a half hour, John asked me to stop the recording to tell his story. He did not mind me writing about it, but he was ashamed of being filmed. He wanted to tell me how social distancing was hard to live, and his only way to develop some relationship was to meet someone through Tinder, an online dating app. "90% of my friends in Brest did use such app" he added. It saddened me, yet I could see that the young generation did not stop living because of Covid. They relied on technology to build and maintain relationships.

Emilie was the most enthusiastic student I knew on campus. She came to this business school after being a victim of bullying in her previous institution. Remembering her past life, she said:

"That year, I didn't wanna study anymore. I worked to avoid going to class. I didn't even want to get up in the morning. I preferred going to the doctor instead."

"How's been your experience been so far at [this business school]?" I enquired.

She replied with her usual boundless enthusiasm:

"It changed everything! There's a good atmosphere in the class, although we don't really know each other well. People are caring. The support from Elsa (Student affairs officer) that I didn't have in my previous school, it's really what I like! This year, it's peculiar... I didn't meet with my cohort, and it's hard to develop relations with it. But there's really a lot of mutual support and benevolence. We have small cohorts; we work and live together.

Even if we didn't have a chance in life to grow, here [in this business school], we've been given this chance."

This last sentence about inclusion made me suddenly feel emotional. I almost burst into tears, but I contained myself, a lump in my throat.

Emily qualified her experience since social distancing:

"Nonetheless, to me, social distancing is terrible, frightening... My buddies who are introverts, they're happy" she commented. "But I NEED to meet people!" insisted Emily.

I realised how such social relations mattered and that despite all the efforts our institution (and probably most institutions) had made to maintain courses and apprenticeship, this was far from enough to support students.

4.2 A growth mindset towards the pandemic

Despite the lack of social events, I tried to understand how students interacted:

"Do you communicate with your entire class or a smaller group of friends?" I asked each student.

Emily, Nicolas and John all said that, during classes, the group works "forced" them to interact, and they benefitted from this engagement and the support from their peers and tutors.

John added:

"This would be nice if it could apply to our social experience too. We could imagine group activities, workouts, etc. by distance to create this engagement".

Nicolas replied enthusiastically:

"The entire class, it's a fantastic cohort, no one's left behind!" he said enthusiastically. "If you have a problem, you just ask, that's all! If you're late, you tell your friends to let the lecturer know, and you can be sure they'll do it."

I couldn't be happier hearing how they all got along together, had such a group cohesion and sense of agency. They sounded like close family members who were always there for each other. "No one's left behind!". These powerful words touched me and echoed in my mind, even long after

the interview. I hoped it was the same in every class, in every institution.

John put things into perspective:

“I’m pretty positive, I think my situation is not the best, but it’s cool.”

“You seem quite positive. How do you keep yourself motivated?” I asked.

“I can still make a lot of contacts. I don’t feel left out. I didn’t come here to stay sad...”

My question triggered some emotions in John, who could not contain himself. He took a break and came back a minute later saying:

“Being far from home makes you stronger. You can’t call your parents when something goes wrong. You become more independent.”

I could perceive how some students adapted to their environment, being autonomous and accountable.

Emilie added:

“We had group work, and we gathered in my home. It was just unbearable to work all day long without meeting anyone. We decided to eat next to each other, but we were accountable. If someone had any symptoms, we were all getting tested. We didn’t meet anyone else, just the four of us. It’s up to us to be careful outside.”

However, without any help, Pat, who did not have anyone to rely on, could not overcome his difficulties.

“Some of my classmates already have connections and a circle of friends here”, he deplored.

His class lacked the warm feeling of cohesion from Nicolas’ Bachelor class where everybody supported each other. I then wondered how I could create a consistent experience across all cohorts.

4.3 Self-acceptance, self-awareness and self-actualisation

Some students maintained a positive mindset despite the unusual environment in which they had to pursue their studies, without meeting their friends, far from campus:

“I was confined in my parents’ home. I’m lucky that I had a house, a garden. It must be tough to be stuck in an apartment. I have good relations with my sister and parents, even though we have a few scuffles, I feel like I’m really lucky”, said Adrian.

I also asked everyone how they maintain their motivation to study, work, socialise and simply live their life.

Adrien replied:

“It’s in my nature. I’m very optimistic and always see the bright side of things. Especially since I joined [this school], I’m very entrepreneurial. [...] I need to always have this sense of urgency and to challenge myself.”

Emily reacted:

“Ouch! It’s hard [to be motivated]! Often, I just fake it. I mean...it’s not easy, but it’s harder for others...”

She then talked me through her experience as a child traveling through many countries:

“...In Cambodia, I learned about the totalitarian and repressive Khmer Rouge regime. I was shattered. Yet, Cambodians look always happy although they went through hell.”

What Emily said then resonated with me:

“...So, I’m a social chameleon: I adapt myself so that I seem to be alright. I consider that it’s up to us to create happiness. If you consider you’re happy, you’ll be happy. If you smile at others, the others will smile back at you. Smiling is about survival. If you make others smile, you live happier. So, I smile all the time, even when I’m sad. If you suffer atrocities, you can bounce back!”

I could appreciate how Emily’s exposure to such international contexts and people really opened her mind.

I was also impressed that all students knew what they wanted to do in life. They discovered it through authentic learning activities where they explored real-world problems (Lee, 2018) or the few social events that were maintained.

Emilie said:

“I transpose what I do in my personal life to my professional life. By organising events, I gain skills in HR, leadership. I must motivate others.”

5. Discussion

This discussion section interprets the previous interviews and provides an answer to the research question: “What have I learned, from talking and interacting with students, about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their student experience, well-being and social interactions?” in the first part. In the following one, I suggest some future solutions based on the findings and the lessons I have drawn from them.

5.1 What the students taught me

Firstly, this research underlines that each student has their own characteristics and evolves differently based on their environment, as Ryff (1989) previously illustrated. Therefore, it is challenging to define particular groups of marginalised students. Institutions need to look closer at each individual and provide more inclusive solutions.

Some expressed a strong sense of belonging. However, it was not the case in every class. According to the interviewees and the literature, it seems to be correlated with the small class size (Walsh, 1973). However, this requires further studies to understand other potential underlying reasons.

Secondly, the interviews evidenced that the term “student experience” is not commonly used or understood in France, where extracurricular activities and social relations are referred to as “student life” and considered separately from learning and professional experience. However, they also suggest that student experience could not be restricted to extracurricular activities and should bind all three dimensions and the social interactions between them.

Nonetheless, the academic experience was the only experience that some students benefited from. Therefore, their engagement and well-being depended on the only interactions with the lecturers and their peers (Wilson et al., 2020).

Overall, I would define “student experience” as *the holistic, unique, lived experience of individual students, enabling them to grow together, make meaning of life, and attempt to fulfil their purpose through self-discovery, freedom of choice, and positive social interactions*. In other words, I would argue that student experience is an individual experience that cannot be fully lived without developing “a self and social awareness” (Lee, 2020, pp. 572-573).

Thirdly, both the literature and the interviews corroborate a relationship between the various personal characteristics contributing to their well-being and social experience. Indeed, students need to build a sense of agency to develop their motivation and confer their peers the same confidence and motivation to work together toward a common goal and overcome the difficulties together.

Self-acceptance and self-awareness also appear to be critical elements to maintain a positive attitude in all circumstances. During this challenging time, some students were able to accept the situation, focus on the positive aspects of their life and live authentically by finding creative ways to cope with the lockdown. In other words, they successfully adapted to their environment or shaped it to meet their needs. They reached a certain maturity through this event. However, not everyone could cope with such difficulties, especially isolated students who lost their motivation and felt unable to adapt and develop themselves.

Indeed, their adaptability was positively related to their social relations. The interviews confirmed they were essential aspects of the student experience and well-being. Nevertheless, every student adapted differently to the situation: students describing themselves as extrovert and social were the most affected by social distancing.

5.2 How meaningful interactions could lead to future solutions

In this section, firstly, I explain how my interactions with the students had meaning, no matter how small my contribution was. Secondly, as the digital transformation director of this business school, I provide some insight into how I could enhance their student experience overall through online interactions beyond the pandemic to encourage socialising.

The interactions I had with students not only had meaning to them but to me as well.

Similarly to Adrien, I also felt like my positive mindset enabled me to appreciate what I had, but one year of isolation made me more withdrawn. Through the few social interactions I had with the students, I unearthed the altruism I had buried in me for too long. Conducting this autoethnography during the pandemic convinced me that I had to develop a sustainable way to help students find their paths and succeed in their life. It felt like a new step in the evolution of my consciousness to become a better self.

“Friendship as method” enabled me to extend the relationship with some students beyond the interviews. I offered my help to John. Although he was not fluent in French, I could help him find an internship and finally experience life in France.

I helped Pat find a doctor and a university to pursue his studies in France later. He is probably not the only one suffering, and I feel the urge to improve everyone’s situation.

Finally, when I asked Adrien what the school could do to improve everyone’s situation, he said:

“The school may wanna try to communicate better, to go and meet students like you do today, to accompany them individually and engage the conversation”.

I realised how such simple conversations had meaning to them. I needed to develop a solution that could facilitate the social interactions between students and staff so that no one was left behind.

Students had difficulties articulating their own solutions, in particular, to replicate extracurricular activities online. Nonetheless, they provided me with insights that could be further studied in future research.

As a digital transformation director, these insights encourage me to think of using a social constructivist approach, notably through online discussions across all the institution’s departments and the students on the one hand. The newly implemented LMS, Canvas, could be used to create such an environment to support the students all along their student experience by making them active contributors on forums, Wikis and other types of online social interactions. As part of their extracurricular activities, I could also involve them in designing part of this student experience themselves to answer their own needs, help each other and ensure that all cohorts benefit from a consistent experience where “no one is left behind”. The intercultural aspect could be emphasised through the forum discussions so that students develop a global mind and openness.

My role implies supporting lecturers to become online tutors. However, my own experience supporting students during the pandemic urges me to think that all the institution’s staff could better support students online. I would need to consider involving all the administrative staff (Student affairs, Talent Centre-Student Life, Apprenticeship departments) and conduct further research to study how they could take on such roles to support students online across their professional and extracurricular experience.

On the other hand, the students’ insights also lead me to think of developing authentic learning activities in groups, including extracurricular activities, which trigger their motivation and help them connect their learning experience with their future self.

Authentic learning incorporates group work where students experience real-life situations across various disciplines and use their unique, personal skills to solve a complex problem while self-reflecting and making meaning of it to transform themselves (Herrington et al., 2010; Lee, 2020, p572-573). Such a learning approach enables students to become authentic beings, support each other to grow and find meaning in their endeavour together and make a difference in society (Kreber, 2013).

Yu and Bryant (2019) evidenced that the students’ routines in group work influence how they interact online through their academic experience and social experience. Therefore, the institution should consider designing additional authentic learning activities in the classroom, facilitating social interactions in informal settings and linking every activity to the overall student experience.

Nevertheless, there are four limitations to this digital student experience.

First, extracurricular activities contribute to the students’ growth, notably because they volunteer and choose to do the activities with whomever they want. Embedding them into the curriculum might have a counter-productive effect and increase the risk of negative social interactions such as conflicts or bullying (Berger et al., 2020).

Second, while a comprehensive digital student experience may help to facilitate communication with and between students, all interviewees valued having “real interactions” on campus. Consequently, online interactions should only enhance and not replace face-to-face activities beyond the pandemic.

Third, authentic learning activities may be challenging to implement and are time-consuming for the educators and staff who will interact with the students online.

Finally, developing a consistent experience across cohorts will be challenging in a bilingual environment with French and English-speaking students. While it is possible to design a course with an immersive reader in Canvas (translating a course page in one click), it is unlikely that students speaking different languages communicate on the same forums.

Therefore, a divide between English-speaking and Nicolas' French-speaking cohorts may subsist.

6. Conclusion

Karasmanaki and Tsantopoulos (2021) emphasised that "online learning became the new normal".

Covid-19 had such a significant impact that I took a stance, considering it as an opportunity to re-think how we learn, interact with one another and experience life inclusively.

The research has highlighted emerging issues related to the pandemic and made visible pre-existing issues that need to be addressed.

My interactions with the students highlighted how the lack of social relations threatened their well-being. I argue that a more inclusive student experience based on a social constructivist approach where both staff and students actively use online discussions could help improve the students' well-being and growth. This study also contends that authentic learning activities need to be further developed as part of the entire student experience to enable their self-actualisation. They need to closely mirror reality to give them a sense of purpose.

To conclude, further research needs to be carried out to identify how such an experience can be designed in practice. There is also a need to study how different types of activities influence individuals with different personality traits and skills and how each one results in well-being. Nonetheless, I would like all the staff in higher education to think of the role they can play to support the growth of our students across the entire spectrum of the student experience, from the student's registration to graduation and beyond. I would like the students to also think of the active role they can play in designing their own experience. We all have the duty to strive for making the student experience more personal and meaningful.

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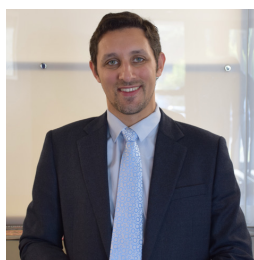
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Embracing humanities in computer science: An autoethnography

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Abstract

Humanities enrolment in higher educational institutions across the globe has been falling considerably in favour of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers, like Computer Science. While students eagerly pursue these disciplines, in doing so, they have simultaneously lost the possible grounding Humanities can provide in contextualising their knowledge. The overall purpose of this study is to use my unique perspective as a student of both disciplines to show the value Humanities can bring to the field of Computer Science and make a case for the need of an interdisciplinary approach for these seemingly unrelated disciplines. Because the study uses my experience as the basis for making this case, the research methodology used was an Autoethnography. The data was sourced from my own recorded self-reflective narratives and supported with my assignment feedback forms, assignments and excavation log. The findings were coded and organised by emergent themes which were then analysed using the interdisciplinary knowledge integration theory. The results show that while Humanities and Computer Science have a polarised approach to methodologies and perspectives that makes it particularly challenging for the integration of knowledge, it does provide significant competencies that can transfer and transform the learning experience and skills of students. These include communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and self-learning skills. It is for

these uncovered benefits to students' development that institutions should consider an interdisciplinary approach to higher education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

"The best of the past, with all the hopes for the future".

It is often my response when I am asked why History and Computer Science. My passion for technology evolved at a young age and though I diverted to History for three years, earning my Bachelor of Arts in History, I quickly returned to my passion and earned my Bachelor of Science and Master's in Computer Science. During my years of working in software development field, I found myself often volunteering to teach kids web development and programming during their school vacation in the months of July and August. This sparked my love for academia, that resulted in me now being employed as a lecturer in the Department of Computer Science, Mathematics and Technology at a local university.

At my current institution, as part of any undergraduate programme, students are introduced to courses outside their field of study. As Computer Science majors, my students were introduced to courses in history, academic writing, theology, and languages, to name a few. Very often students would express their disdain for and lack of interest in doing these courses, for which I would try to assure them that the point is to develop a wider range of ideas and diverse levels of thinking and are just as deserving of their time and effort. My arguments stemmed from my own academic background in History, an experience I held in high esteem as a contributing factor to my academic pursuit in Computer Science. My attempt at bringing to their attention the benefits were quickly met with a lengthy dialogue about these courses contributing nothing to their development. It was in this moment that I questioned my accuracy of my pursuit in promoting Computer Science and wondered if I might have been on the wrong side of the argument all this time.

Fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, often recognised by the acronym STEM, has often been heralded as progressive fields that are more directly linked to economic development (White, 2014). This possibility of economic prosperity and productivity and international competitiveness have sparked governments and industries to intensify efforts in fields such as these through educational policies (Barkatas et al., 2018). Countries such as Finland, Korea, Taiwan, China, Singapore, and Canada have seen considerable success in boosting the inclusion and

performance in schooling and research (Marginson et al., 2013). Perhaps the value that is placed on these disciplines gives the misconception that they are more essential than the humanities, hence the perceptions of the students in my class. Research has shown a steady decline in enrolments, shrinking job prospects, and growing condescension for the field of humanities (Ikype, 2015). In 2013, Harvard University showed a decline in Humanities from 21% to 17% over the period 2012-2013, while an article published in New York Times, showed that graduates in the Humanities plummeted from 165 to 62 between 1991-2013 (Berube & Ruth, 2015). Such a trend has continued to be seen worldwide in countries such as United States, South Africa, Japan, Australia, and Russia (Yu & Pillay, 2011). These perceptions and the glaring decline in enrolment figures in Humanities begs the question of whether our emphasis on promoting the importance of disciplines such as Computer Science simultaneously undermined the importance of Humanities. Though this question is not easily answered, one thing that is often neglected is that the Humanities can be exceptionally important to the development of skills for students in Computer Science.

1.2 Research aims

The value of Humanities can only be fully appreciated through knowing what it contributes to the development of students. Using my own experience, this autoethnographic research attempts to examine the impact of Humanities on Computer Science. This examination will be done through the lens of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education. Computing and computational methods now play a significant role across most industries and as result computer scientists are now required to work in an interdisciplinary environment that requires an understanding of aesthetic, cognitive, ethical, and communicative issues when developing applications. Despite this, students in Computer Science at higher educational institutions are spending their learning years in isolation with a single-minded focus on solely the technical aspects.

Through the exploration and analysis of my personal experience as a student of both disciplines, this research intends to provide a unique perspective on an interdisciplinary approach by examining the impact of Humanities on Computer Science. In knowing its importance, this research intends to raise awareness for the need to revive the emphasis on Humanities and inform of the need to secure its inclusivity with other 'unrelated' disciplines.

2. Literature review

This section evaluates several books, empirical studies, and scholarly articles that were explored while researching the topic of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education in Computer Science. Scopus, Google Scholar and One Search were used, with the initial search of *interdisciplin**. A varied number of searches were conducted using a combination of the keywords: learning, teaching, higher education, computer science, and humanities. A total of 64 articles were downloaded; of these, 39 were relevant publications. The sources reviewed and analysed for this research were chosen because they extensively covered the impact of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education.

2.1 Approaches to higher education

2.1.1 Traditional approach

The traditional view of education centres around an academic discipline with its own area of study, process, methods, and content, which sets them apart from other disciplines. Discipline in this sense refers to a self-contained and isolated domain of human experience (Davies & Devlin, 2007; Nissani, 1997). This traditional view offers the benefit of knowledge specialisation, and the refinement of skill sets within a focused discipline and catalyst for productivity (Tarrant & Thiele, 2017). For instance, most Computer Scientists consider the discipline one of perfecting machine computation (Koch, 1991). This can be attributed to the traditional approach to Computer Science in which students are solely trained to become productive software developers capable of innovation by algorithms, representation and reasoning, and human machine relationship (Regli, 2017).

Therefore, it can be agreed that this form of disciplinary approach attributes itself to having the presence of a community of scholars who contribute to its body of knowledge, provides the existence of a tradition of inquiry, methods and interpretation of data and an existence of a communication network (Davies et al., 2010). This approach produces like-minded individuals with a set of codes of conduct, values, and knowledge. While these can be seen as a case for the continuation of the disciplinary approach to education, it is this self-contained and isolated nature that can also lead to the compartmentalization of knowledge (Buchbinder, et al., 2005) and can no longer suffice in the changing nature of knowledge that now requires an incorporation of social, political and economic ideas and values to address problems. Simply put, complex problems do not present themselves

in a disciplinary package and neither will their solutions (Tarrant & Thiele, 2017).

Computer Science comprises several specialities that include computer engineering, computer science, software engineering, information systems, domain-specific applications, networking and communication, and computer systems. Each of these specialties have penetrated almost every aspect of other fields such as agriculture, communication, education, manufacturing, and medicine, not only as tools of operations but also as designed solutions and systems (Denning, 1999; Hopcroft, 1987). As a result, when designing solutions for such systems, computer scientists are required to work and operate in an interdisciplinary environment. Drawing on the emerging technology of artificial intelligence as an example, Microsoft Corporation (2018) in their publication *The Future Computed: Artificial Intelligence and its role in Society* noted that “*as computers behave more like humans, the social sciences and humanities will become even more important. Languages, art, history, economics, ethics, philosophy, psychology and human development courses can teach critical, philosophical and ethics-based skills that will be instrumental in the development and management of AI solutions.*” Therefore, it can be argued that it is necessary for replacing the traditional approach with an interdisciplinary approach.

2.1.2 Interdisciplinary approach

Interdisciplinary education aims to bring together different components of two or more disciplines in a single mind, research or programme and it is done by integrating information, methodologies, techniques, skills, or theoretical perspectives (Songca, 2006; Tarrant & Thiele, 2017). Kidron and Kali (2015) extended the definition of interdisciplinarity by outlining four processes by which learners integrate knowledge. These four processes include:

1. Creating a framework for the integration of knowledge.
2. Identification of relevant knowledge domains that can be transferable.
3. Formulating connections and integrative insight between the disciplines.
4. Refining the insight to develop new knowledge.

This process indicates a symbiotic relationship between the disciplines. Over the years, computer science has increasingly become closely related to other disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology (Denning, 1999). When examining the literature, most of the research related to an interdisciplinary approach to computer science

was primarily with the related disciplines stated above, rather than humanities. For instance, Klaassen (2018) offered a case study in which their aim was to design interdisciplinary education through the parameters of level and nature of integration, constructive alignment through problem definitions and design and execution of education. However, their study was based on Clinical Technology where there was a logical integration of science, technology, and medicine. Tadmor and Tidor (2005) highlighted MIT's efforts at an interdisciplinary curriculum in which they introduced an undergraduate programme that integrated biological research with approaches from engineering and computer science. The purpose of the programme was to reconceptualise life sciences, such as genome sequencing, based on the development of quantitative and predictive models. Caudill et al. (2010) introduced interdisciplinary research projects at the University of Richmond that integrated biology, chemistry, mathematics, computer science and physics, and found that such interdisciplinary projects served to motivate students and later was used to inform course development.

On the other hand, there were two examples found in literature that integrated Computer Science and Humanities. For instance, the University of Southern California introducing an "Interdisciplinary Teaching Grant Program" to fund the development of interdisciplinary curriculum. The aim of the program is to encourage the development and dissemination of teaching methods that supports interdisciplinary education and to engage in research that utilizes interdisciplinary approaches (Quick, 2018). Similarly, Stanford University in 2014 began offering joint majors in Humanities and Computer Science with the aim of "...cultivating and providing academic structure for a new generation of both humanists who can code and computer engineers whose creativity and adaptability is enhanced by the immersion in the humanities" (Hayward, 2014).

Added to this under representation of interdisciplinary approach between Computer Science and Humanities, there is also an overall lack of research done in an interdisciplinary approach to computer science. Heikkinen and Raisanen (2018) conducted a literature review study of published articles on interdisciplinary higher education between the years 2000 and 2016, and it showed that Computer Science remained less than 3.5% throughout this time, compared to a steady growth from 21.7% to 31.8% in Social Sciences' publications, and nursing publications remained about the same at around 20%. Although publications in the field of Medicine declined by 6.9% over the stated period, it remained the highest at 58.3% in 2000 and 51.4% by 2016.

2.2 Interdisciplinary learning experience

Much of the literature provides insight into the interdisciplinary learning experience from the standpoint of other disciplines. The current literature considers interdisciplinary education as an integration of knowledge that assists in developing a range of skills and thinking (Nissani, 1997; Spelt et al., 2009). These learning outcomes include improved written and oral communication skills, teamwork skills, ethical decision making, critical thinking and the ability to apply knowledge in a real-world setting (Bear & Skorton, 2019). These skills are developed because students become more receptive to new ideas and new ways of addressing solutions and combined it enhances a student's ability for problem-solving, critical thinking and employing multiple perspectives (Lattuca et al., 2004). Lattuca et al. (2004) based this conclusion on the study of two specific courses that had an integrated approach. The first was "Environment Studies" offered by the University of Chicago, which combined the approaches of sciences, social sciences, and humanities and the second was "Toys and a Modern Society" offered by Miami University that combined humanities with arts and creativity. Kali & Kidron (2015) in their study introduced an interdisciplinary course to students at a university in Israel and discovered that 70% of the students reported that they gained the skills of critical thinking, writing skills and time management skills from the course. Nissani (1997) goes further and categorizes these benefits into three categories: growth of knowledge, personal rewards, and social benefits. However, the author also noted that interdisciplinary knowledge and research can have its share of downsides that includes an impossible ideal of the unity of knowledge, and fragmentation of knowledge from each of the disciplines can lead to the mastery of the subject becoming unattainable.

2.3 Research context

The literature has shown that an interdisciplinary approach to education has several benefits that include problem-solving, critical thinking and the ability to employ multiple perspectives, with few drawbacks. However, research related to an interdisciplinary approach in computer suffers from a focus on integrating disciplines that are closely related to computer science, where the methodologies, skills and theoretical perspectives are easily transferable. Unlike the existing literature, this research aims to explore the impact of an interdisciplinary approach between Computer Science and Humanities by reflecting on my educational experience as a student of both disciplines.

3. Research methodology

This section justifies autoethnography as the methodology chosen for undertaking this study and highlights the research questions that will be answered. It also details how the data was collected and analysed. It also addresses the ethical concerns that may arise from conducting this study.

3.1 Autoethnography

The aim of this research is to provide a unique perspective on the impact of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education as a student of two different disciplines. This research explores how and if Humanities can have an impact on the higher educational experience in the field of Computer Science. The research methodology chosen for this research is guided by the research questions that were posed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The research questions that will guide the addressing of this overarching issue are:

- RQ1: What specific methodology or perspective from Humanities was I able to use in my Computer Science studies?
- RQ2: What are the specific competencies did I acquire in my study in Humanities that made my learning experience different from other computer science students?

This research is a personal inquiry and for its undertaking the methodology chosen is autoethnography. Computer Science is not typically integrated with non-related disciplines. Therefore, the autoethnographic method provided a unique opportunity of using my personal experience as a student of both humanities and computer science to present a unique perspective and analysis on the possible benefits of integrating the humanities with computer science.

Autoethnography is an emerging qualitative research methodology that uses a form of self-narrative that places the researcher within a specific social context with the aim of offering a complex and specific knowledge of personal experiences, motivations, emotions, and actions and connects them with relationships, communities, and cultures (Adams et al., 2015; Anderson, 2006; Butz & Besio, 2009). Adams et al. (2015) outlined some of the core principles of doing an autoethnography as: (1) recognising the limits of knowledge regarding identities, experience, and relationships; (2) connecting personal experience, insights and acquired knowledge to the larger conversations about the topic; (3) though narrative in nature, equal importance is placed on intellectual knowledge; and (4) addressing the

ethical implications of the research. This research considered these principles in its design. The ethical issues and limits were addressed in sections 3.2 and 6.0, respectively. Principles three and four guided the discussion section (5.0). It is my intention that this research will contribute to the wider discussion that though Computer Science majors – through a discipline-based approach – are learning what is necessary to function in the industry, it certainly does not mean that the humanities are devoid of merit for these students.

3.2 Validity and ethical concerns

One issue that will need to be taken into consideration while undertaking this research is the question of validity. Validity refers to the representation of the data as believable and true (Ellis et al., 2011). Two major threats to validity of this research are overemphasis on the narration rather than its analysis and a negligence of adherence to ethical standards. As part of the doctoral programme, validity was ensured through member checking by two peers. Two colleagues assessed the research project and provided feedback to correct any factual errors (Chang, 2008). Both colleagues are within the same doctoral cohort with Lancaster University and shared similar experiences as me. That is, they are both educators in their respective fields and more importantly their research is also focused on learning experiences. As it relates to ethical standards, although the research is largely based on self-narratives, these narratives will recall institutions and people, which make them an ethical concern. To ensure ethical standards are adhered to, the names of institutions and student names remained confidential and was not revealed in the writing nor its analysis. Additionally, ethical approval was sought through Lancaster University for this research.

3.3 Data collection

The research will place my experience at its centre, making it a self-focused study (Cohen et al., 2018). The data was collected as a narrative and reflective piece by making my personal experiences and emotions the primary object of study and analysis (Butz & Besio, 2009). Using the Microsoft Word dictate feature, 117 pages of narratives about my experience as a Humanities and Computer Science student. The narratives also included my reflections on how I believed my humanities background impacted my educational experience in Computer Science. Approximately 52,534 words were recorded. To support my memory of the narratives, three additional sources of data were used (Table 1).

Table 1. Additional sources of data used in the study

Data source	Humanities (History Undergraduate)		Computer Science (Undergraduate)	
	Description	#	Description	#
Assessment feedback forms	Tutor feedback from final exams – Essay type final exams	14	Tutor feedback from final exams – Written final exams	26
Assignments	Essay assignments and tutorial presentations (these presentations were on a particular topic and presented to students in class)	10	Assignments included essays on emerging technologies, programming assignments, and accompanying documentation.	10
Excavation Log	Archaeology courses required an excavation log/diary for field work.	1	Not applicable	

3.4 Data analysis

In answering the research questions the data was coded and sorted to determine topic commonality and categories for which further discussion can be derived (Chang, 2008). The narratives, assignments, assessment feedback, and excavation logs were read, analysed, and codes were identified based on repeating words. A total of 137 codes were identified after this process. It included and ranged from academic skills such as coding, debugging, writing, analysing, and reading to various forms of engagement that included such themes as confidence, effort, uncertainty, and persistence. Of the 137 codes, 77 were not relevant to the aim of this research. The remaining 60 were grouped by commonality and categorised, where 10 categories were identified. These included critical thinking, attention to detail, communication, motivation, interest, scepticism, adaptability, self-learning, historiography, and inapplicable. These 10 categories were further analysed and, of these, 5 were the most pertinent to answering the research questions. Inapplicable was relevant to Research Question 1, while attention to details, communication, adaptability, and persistence were applicable to Research Question 2.

3.5 Theoretical framework

The data was further analysed, and the discussion section was organised by Shen et al. (2014) three step process of interdisciplinary knowledge integration theory. This theory was used to determine whether Humanities can have an impact in the field of Computer Science, specifically at a higher education level. Moreover, the theoretical framework allowed for explaining and articulating this issue by connecting the research to the existing literature and knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018). The theory was developed specifically

for science students and describes the ability to accomplish knowledge integration across disciplinary boundaries. The knowledge integration stresses not only a simple additive of this knowledge but also the ability to integrate ideas from distinctive sources to form explanations and solutions (Shen et al., 2014). The theory is based on three processes: translation, transfer and transform.

1. Translation - the specialised terminologies and jargon developed within each discipline.
2. Transfer - the application of models, concepts, and principles from one discipline to another to make connections or interpret scenarios.
3. Transform - using the application of models, concepts, and principles to completely transform the knowledge of the discipline.

4. Findings

This section reports the findings of the autoethnographic study. The results are structured by the research questions outlined in the research methodology section. Each research question is sub-divided into the emergent themes identified from the coding process of the narratives.

4.1 RQ1 - What specific methodology or perspectives from Humanities was I able to use in my Computer Science studies?

One theme emerged in answering this research question: Inapplicable. This theme stemmed from the recurring view that humanities methodology and/or perspectives were not applicable or could not have been used in learning computer science.

4.1.1 Inapplicable

“History...all people seem to think of the discipline is that it is a study of the past, but it was much more than that.”

My narratives showed that friends likened my pursuit of a history degree in this light, reading about the past and nothing more. But doing history was more than that and it required more than that. My assessment feedback showed that every presentation I prepared, every paper I wrote and every examination I studied for went and had to go much further than just the mere presentation of “facts”. I had to start with evidence and sources but more than this, I also had to look for causes and effects and use these to explain how and why particular events unfolded the way they did. Both my narratives and assessment feedback showed that my process had to be one of understanding and carefully considering the social, cultural, religious, political, and economic environment in which the sources were written, the intent of the source and the intended audience and biases of the writers.

“...This bias also did not exclude my own biases...” My narratives and assessment feedback showed that while using these sources, as an aspiring Historian, I had to recognise my own limitations and biases when evaluating the sources. Since the assignments were subjective, recognising your own biases and those of the writers was important to ensure that the assignments were not analysed from my perspective or the perspective of the authors of the source material. As a result, I had to ensure this in all presentations, assignments, and examinations. *“I could not get caught in analysing historical events from the mindset of present-day view, my own values, beliefs and attitudes but instead I had to be aware that this analysis must be in the context or era in which they occurred.”* This was relevant not only to written sources but also to material sources as well. In March 2007, as part of my Archaeology practical, our class was required to assist in archaeological excavations at Marianne Estate in Blanchisseuse, Trinidad, for which we had to keep a daily excavation log. The log showed that for every artefact found, I had to catalogue and, based on my knowledge of the inhabitants within the time (as known through carbon dating), I had to theorize on the purpose of the various artefacts found.

All of these showed a pattern of presenting sources, analysing these sources to make conclusions, but more importantly these conclusions were subjective not objective as is the case with computer science. My narratives were clear that unlike computer science which required an objective approach, for History I had to adopt an interpretative approach to my presentations, assignments, and examinations. *“...getting into computer science meant re-wiring my brain from*

making subjective assessments and conclusions to an objective statement of probabilistic induction.” My computer science assignments now showed a change in pattern to a definition of a problem, experimental analysis, and modelling, and finally developing a simulation of the proposed solution. This problem-solving approach required of me precision and reasoning: a far cry from what was required of me when I did History. For me, History focused on people, events, and movements, while computer science focused on technology and innovation. This polarised approach gave me the view that there was no relevance to connection of the two disciplines. *“...Now that I am doing computer science, my history background is irrelevant and offers nothing to my new path”.*

To the question of what methodology or perspectives from humanities was I able to use in my computer science studies; the answer is none. The perspectives and methodology of Computer Science and Humanities are quite different and certainly not related. Computer science required a more problem-solving and objective approach, while humanities a more analytical (cause and effect...etc.) and subjective approach.

4.2 RQ2 – What are the specific competencies did I acquire in my Humanities studies that made my learning experience different from Computer Science students?

From the data, four specific competencies emerged that was acquired from my humanities studies that made my learning experience different from my peers in computer science. These were: attention to detail, communication, adaptability, persistence.

4.2.1 Attention to detail

My assignments in Computer Science often consisted of case studies that presented a problem that had to be solved by developing a software and very often these case studies were pages long. It was easy to fall into the trap of *“...analysis paralysis...”*, where the problem is over examined to the point of inability to effectively define solutions. However, what I did find myself unconsciously doing was *“...breaking down the problem into smaller parts, examining each part and the factors that affected them and only then would I outline a solution...and at times approached the solution from a different angle.”* As budding developers, solutions were developed by focusing on the problems that need to be solved, however, having a humanities background, I often thought of the consequences of solving the problem a particular way.

From my documentation for coded assignments, I tried to consider social and ethical issues in handling data, even though it was an assignment. Issues such as downloading communications on forums, developing algorithms that make recommendations based on gender, and collecting profiles of users. These common issues can be easily overlooked, as developers are more concerned about building software and algorithms, rather than the implications of their code: *“...we should not allow ourselves to reach the point where we end up coding our humanity away.”* I attributed my consideration of these issues to my background in Humanities, because in doing history *“...I spent a lot of my classes and exams making connections between theories and identifying cause and effect...It was essential for writing any essay or presenting any topic...”*.

4.2.2 Communication

Going into Computer Science, especially programming, the first thought is that there is no need for reading, comprehension, and writing: *“...very often you think of someone sitting behind a computer all day writing code...that’s it... nothing else necessary, nothing more required...”*

But this ideology was quickly dashed during my studies. Development (programming) relied heavily on a lot of research and documentation that required effectively communicating your solutions via diagrams and explanations. Despite this being a part of Computer Science, there is a running commentary about *“...programmers lack the ability to communicate ideas effectively and simply, especially when it relates to creating documentation of their software solution...”*. Contrary to this ideology, I did find it easy to create documentation and communicate my ideas effectively via the diagrams and most importantly explanations of my solutions. *“...much of my assignments (in History), especially those of my tutorial classes were all based on reading, comprehending, and communicating ideas and arguments...”*.

To ensure an excellent grade in my assignments, I had to demonstrate my ability to widely read on the topic given, present my arguments logically and to effectively communicate these arguments to my lecturer. I greatly attribute this as being the experience that provided me with the skillset required to write documentation that communicates clear and precise explanations, ideas, and solutions in computer science.

4.2.3 Adaptability

All these, stated above, provided me with the ability to be adaptable. Adaptability in the sense that it allowed

me to adjust to new approaches, new people, and new expectations from the varying tutorials. *“...with our tutorials we were never in the same group and therefore we were obligated to work with different people both within and outside of our own disciplines. People who were not our friends. This ensured that we were forced to resolve any conflicts with each other (if any occurred) as well as build professional relationships, all the while working, studying, and learning with and from each other...”* This technique made it easier to adapt to when I transitioned into Computer Science. My narrative reads, *“...it was much easier adjusting to a new environment, new people, new expectations and a new situation and understanding that if things do not go according to plan, I had the ability to adapt if things didn’t go well...I did it before; I can certainly do it again...”*.

4.2.4 Persistence

“...read for your degree...” that was the idea that was drilled into our minds from the beginning of our courses and that is exactly what I had to do for the next three years of my history studies. Most of the times we would go into a lecture hall, listen to the lecturer who would only introduce the topic but go no further. The onus was on us as students to familiarize ourselves with all the concepts and theories related to the topic and be ready for tutorials and exams: *“...a self-teaching method as I like to call it...”*. This persistence was a tremendous asset when doing computer science, especially in programming. Programming has a notorious reputation for being difficult to learn and having a high dropout rate. This dropout rate was seen in my Computer Science schooling years; each year classes would dwindle considerably. For instance, I began my Computer Science degree with approximately 80 students, by the second year the class dwindled to around half of the original enrolment, and by the final year there were only about 20 students left, with 3 of these students being students from a previous year.

Programming cannot be fully taught in the confines of a classroom, *“...the lecturer can only teach the fundamentals of programming and nothing more; it was up to us to go home and learn all we could whether it was online or through the recommended textbooks...”*. Therefore, it requires the persistence to be in a constant state of research for understanding the syntax and use of it in developing solutions, but more importantly it requires the ability to brave the frustrations of dealing with coding bugs and faulty logic. This persistence I was already familiar with from my time in Humanities. For me *“...it felt quite natural to sit with my computer and textbooks and learn all I could by myself...struggling through any topic that was challenging...and motivating myself to push through...”*.

5. Discussion

This section seeks to interpret and explain the significance and importance of the findings through the lens of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education and organised by Shen, Lui and Sung's (2014) theory of interdisciplinary knowledge integration.

5.1 Translation

Benson (1982) argues that interdisciplinary studies are nothing more than a borrowing of insights or methods from one discipline by another. As he stated, "*the physicist is lost without mathematics; the political scientist borrows insight from sociology, history and economics; the literary studies scholar makes use of the methods of linguistics and analytic philosophy.*" This borrowing of insight where there is a logical integration of disciplines has already been highlighted in current literature. For instance, Klaassen's (2018) a case study of interdisciplinary educational Bachelor programme on Clinical Technology and MIT's undergraduate in Biological Engineering that integrates the knowledge of Biology and Computer Science (Tadmor & Tidor, 2005).

However, Benson (1982) further claims that interdisciplinary studies rest on serious conceptual confusion, that is, students often lack a clear and coherent sense of purpose. My reflections show that the ease of translation of knowledge between the disciplines within these established studies is not necessarily applicable between Humanities and Computer Science. In the case of Humanities, "the focus is on contextualisation; to perceive other perspectives in depth, to practice critical analysis and interpretation of historical documents in order to form a picture of past events" (Repko et al., 2017). Computer Science, on the other hand, encompasses practical techniques of developing computer software and hardware, as well as expressing instructions necessary to perform useful computation (What is Computer Science?, n.d.).

This stark difference between these two disciplines is clearly seen by the different approaches to assignments, where in the case of History the assignments were more subjective in its approach as compared to a more objective approach with Computer Science assignments. This subjectivity is what many trained in the sciences find alien and have led to the rejection of history as insubstantial; and this thinking is what accounts for the reason why STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines is often studied in silos and not in tandem (Skorton, 2018). While it is arguably undeniable from my narratives that

there is no clear sense of purpose for integrating Humanities and Computer Science, the rest of my narratives have led me to disagree with Benson claims. Such a connectedness of integrative disciplines does not negate the deeper insights that can be gleaned from integrating 'not-connected' disciplines such as Humanities and Computer Science. Each discipline has its own views, very often conflicting. However, it is these conflicting views that provide the skills that may not be available to someone of any one discipline (Miller, 1982).

5.2 Transfer and transform

It has already been uncovered that Humanities and Computer Science is not conceptually alike and does not provide any means of translating methodologies or perspectives. Therefore, it can be argued that interdisciplinary education may in fact impede a student's ability to develop essential competencies of their own disciplines (Benson, 1982). For instance, the most frequently cited skills necessary for Computer Science students are their ability to solve problems, and mathematical ability (Medeiros et al., 2019). Developing abilities and skills such as these, no doubt cannot be gained from Humanities. However, my narratives show that Humanities can offer several competencies that can transfer and transform the learning experience of Computer Science students. These findings have led me to disagree with Benson's assessment. The narratives highlight two competencies that were transferable between Humanities and Computer Science:

1. Attention to detail, which was the ability to analyse and use creativity to develop solutions. That is the ability to think critically.
2. Communication, which is the ability to read, comprehend and effectively communicate ideas.

These uncovered points have supported the arguments of the current literature as it relates to other disciplines within an integrated approach. For instance, Bear & Skorton (2019) argued that interdisciplinary education allows for improved written and oral communication skills, critical thinking, and ability to apply knowledge in a real-world setting. It is also supported by the results of Kali & Kidron (2015) in which students noted critical thinking and writing skills mostly developed when undertaking a course using an interdisciplinary approach. This is further supported by You (2017) who argued that interdisciplinary learning helps students tap into cognitive processes that creates links between disciplines.

While most points uncovered in the findings support the arguments of current literature as it relates to interdisciplinary higher education, however, these viewpoints (in current

literature) were formulated from a general view or studies that do not directly deal with Humanities and Computer Science. Therefore, it is worth noting the difference an interdisciplinary approach to Humanities and Computer Science can provide that has not already been realised from other related or integrated disciplines. In this regard, Khalid et al. (2013) argues that despite engineers having good critical thinking skills they often lack interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate effectively. In other words, humanities can strengthen the ability of engineers to communicate both written and orally and it enhances their ability to develop creative ideas and solution outside their field of study (Khalid, et al., 2013). Skorton (2018) added to this by claiming that integrating Humanities and STEM disciplines provides the outcomes of higher order thinking, creative problem-solving and enhanced communication. Bear & Skorton (2019) when examining the results of the trend in higher education in the context of a National Academic Consensus report noted that students with an interdisciplinary background in the Humanities and STEM had a greater student motivation and engagement during their studies, as well as an increase in communication and teamwork skill (Bear & Skorton, 2019).

Added to this unique value, the findings also uncovered two additional values not observed in current literature: adaptability and self-teaching:

1. Adaptability, which allowed for an ease of adjustment to new approaches, new people, and new expectations. This was particularly valuable in a changing environment as Computer Science.
2. Self-Learning, which ensured that there was not a reliance on classroom lectures to learn the fundamental concepts and theories related to a topic. This is particularly beneficial in the study of Computer Programming where continuous practice outside the classroom is necessary.

Therefore, it is evident that the Humanities and Computer Science are fundamentally connected more than they are mutually reinforcing (Skorton, 2018). It is these competencies and its impact rather than the conceptual integration that provides value to an interdisciplinary approach to higher education between the disciplines of Humanities and Computer Science. Steve Jobs, when introducing the iPad2 in March of 2011, made the statement “...*technology alone is not enough – it is technology married with liberal arts, married with humanities that yields us (Apple) the results that make our heart sing.*”

6. Limitations

The research uncovered various competencies gained while studying Humanities that changed and enhanced the learning experience of Computer Science. However, whether these competencies were a direct result of a previous study in Humanities or because of other factors were not explored in this study.

7. Conclusion

Much of the research that concentrates on an interdisciplinary approach to higher education often focuses on disciplines that have a symbiotic relationship where methodologies and principles are easily transferable between disciplines. However, an analysis of the current research has uncovered two specific gaps. Firstly, not much of the literature has dealt specifically with Computer Science; and secondly, none that I have found dealt specifically with an interdisciplinary approach to Humanities and Computer Science. Using my unique background and experiences as a student of both History and Computer Science, this research intended to contribute to this gap in literature.

This research has shown that although the approach to education between History and Computer Science differs significantly and the actual methodology or perspective are not transferable, it still offers valuable competencies that greatly improves the learning experience of students. These include enhanced communication skills, enhanced critical thinking skills and the ability to be adaptable and self-teaching. For this reason, it is important for higher education institutions to recognise these benefits and move to introduce an interdisciplinary approach to Computer Science. However, this is easier said than done. Introducing such an approach provides new challenges for institutions that requires the introduction of new teaching and learning approach and assessment methods that caters for disciplines that are pedagogically polarised, such as Computer Science and Humanities.

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A collective reflection on doing an autoethnography in online doctoral education

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1. Introduction¹

This last article in this special issue, entitled *Autoethnography in online doctoral education*, concludes with a collective reflection on doing an autoethnography on the online PhD programme in *e-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning* at Lancaster University. On this programme, we, the tutor and students interact and learn together at a distance—rather “physical” than psychological in our experience. The Editor of this special issue, Kyungmee Lee, is Senior Lecturer and Lead Tutor of the first module of the programme where all of these autoethnographies were learned and written, and Kyungmee is the only person (among eight of us) whose life is physically bounded around Lancaster and Lancaster University in the UK. The rest of us are geographically and internationally spread. Karen is from Colombia, Konstantinos from Greece, Mary from the USA, Regina from Austria, Salwa from Oman, Sophia based in the UK (Leicester, 150 miles away from Lancaster), and Thomas based in the UAE. Most of us have never been to Lancaster (some not even to the UK).

Despite the physical distance and the total absence of face-to-face interactions, we have gone through this first part of the PhD journey together and subsequently produced this beautiful and indeed special issue. We are both privileged to have this exciting but challenging opportunity and proud to make the most of it. While we certainly want to celebrate the production of this shiny new issue as an editor and authors, most importantly, we would like to celebrate the success of our collective (and ongoing) effort, as a tutor and students, to create a sense of “us”, a sense of belonging, through learning, doing and writing autoethnographies. No matter how far we live from the University, we still feel we belong, and *when it comes to our research, we know we belong*.

Before closing the special issue and moving on to the next chapter of our academic journey, we want to offer some behind-the-curtain (or behind-the-screen in the digital era) narratives, reflecting on our lived experiences of learning and doing an autoethnography during and after the module. We are not interested in delivering propaganda in aid of autoethnography, uncritically or even naïvely packaged with all our positive comments, to our already problematic research field, exhausted by endless hype of new technology and blind faith in self-directed learning (or a long list of similar pedagogical ideas). In fact, we want to do the opposite. We want to shed light on some of *the intellectual, emotional, and ethical challenges associated with an autoethnographic endeavour*, reflecting on how we have experienced and addressed them despite the incomplete and immature nature of our solutions.

We also want to make a more profound sense of *our learning and researching (and researched) experiences and their impact on our continuous becoming* (as a PhD student, researcher, educator, and ultimately as a person). While we believe and hope that reading through our reflective narratives can still be of interest and use to readers of the special issue, each of us has humbly made a *small number of practical recommendations* (based on our intense but limited first encounters with autoethnography) for readers who are planning to learn and do autoethnography in the near future.

Below, readers can first find a reflective narrative of the tutor introduces the collective reflection and concludes the special issue as a whole. It is followed by seven reflective narratives by seven student autoethnographers, presented in the alphabetical order of their first names. We strongly recommend that readers first read **the editorial, Introducing 16**

doctoral autoethnographers in an online PhD programme (Lee, 2022a), which offers a useful overview of the pedagogical and institutional conditions of our experiences, to fully understand and appreciate our concluding thoughts here.

2. Tutor's closing remark: A danger of representation in autoethnography — Kyungmee Lee

Kyungmee Lee is Senior Lecturer in Technology Enhanced Learning in the UK and the Editor of this special issue.

The initial call for papers was sent out to about 100 doctoral students who had completed my module between 2018 and 2021. At the point of circulating the call a year ago, I was just vaguely thinking that it would be beneficial to include a separate article that provides some sort of meta-narratives about doing an autoethnography. The only thing I definitely knew was that I needed input from my students who have actually done (not supervised) an autoethnography. I needed to collect their stories. In the call, therefore, I asked the potential authors to submit a reflection on doing an autoethnography alongside their autoethnography.

From 2018 when I first introduced autoethnography in my module (see **the editorial of this issue**, Lee, 2022a), until the time of writing this article in June 2022, I have done four iterations of the module and supervised about 125 autoethnographic projects—roughly 25 projects for each iteration. I have observed that many students made their doctoral studies more authentic and transformative by engaging with autoethnography as a module assignment, and the outcomes of that engagement were genuinely meaningful and fruitful. Nevertheless, such a learning process is demanding and challenging, and students often struggle not only due to the unfamiliar and unconventional characteristics of autoethnography as a learning subject but due to the personal and professional circumstances of online PhD students outside the programme. Subsequently, *students' emotional and intellectual experiences with autoethnography are as diverse* as their emotions and inner thoughts presented in their autoethnographies. Many have shared what they enjoyed and gained through the experiences (despite their initial doubts and uncertainties), but some have indicated a lasting sense of uneasiness, discomfort, and dissatisfaction with their learning outcomes.

While I have written about my teaching experiences—often as autoethnography (see Lee, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022b), my students are the primary subjects of my teaching

1 The leading and corresponding author Lee is named first, and all other contributing authors are listed in alphabetical order of their surnames.

and their learning experiences are always a central part of my narrative. Thus, *there is always a danger: I may fail to capture the diversity and complexity of each student's encounter and engagement with autoethnography*; I may include some students' voices and exclude others' (mostly unintentionally, but sometimes intentionally to present coherent narratives); and I may mistakenly draw biased and self-serving conclusions from my observations (instinctively or unconsciously, as I often desperately seek approval of my pedagogy). At least, I am aware of such dangers, and as I ask my student autoethnographers to do so, I put my best effort into validating my arguments and conclusions by comparing and contrasting them with/against others' in literature and different datasets. I also performed a member-checking process where I invited a small number of students to read my draft autoethnography to gather their thoughts and comments. Of course, at this point, someone would question *the biased selection of the small number of students* and the existing power relationship between myself as a supervisor and them as supervisees—would my supervisees dare to disagree with my analysis? There is no safe way out.

In the hope of resolving those ethical dilemmas, therefore, I have collected the authors' reflections on doing an autoethnography. Among 16 authors who contributed to this issue, 14 submitted their reflections; but it was clear that seven had put more significant effort into their writings than others. They wrote distinguishably more genuine and unique narratives, adding nuanced discussions on both the benefits and challenges of doing autoethnography in the context of their own online doctoral studies. Initially, I had thought I would somehow analyse and develop shared themes across those reflections, and use different parts of those reflections in my article as some sort of excerpts. When I read through the submitted reflections (particularly the selected seven in this article), I quickly realised that it would be *unethical to treat these living narratives simply like text data* and my line-by-line analysis and partial representation of them would not do justice to those authors. Most importantly, I felt each of these reflections deserved an independent space in this issue and needed to be read as a whole (not as arbitrarily disaggregated and loosely knitted parts)—there is no way for me to put these elegantly and engagingly written narratives in any better form than they are.

To create the most impact on potential readers of the article within the space constraint, I have selected and invited these seven authors to co-write this collective reflection with me. As I am determined not to promote our story as a definite and straightforward success story about a particular teaching and research methodology, I have asked them to re-visit and ensure that their reflections include realistic

(not idealistic) descriptions of doing autoethnography as new PhD students online. I have also provided comments to support each author in increasing the level of criticality in their sense-making outcomes. Each author has also added a couple of practical recommendations for readers (or other PhD students) who want to try out autoethnography at some point in their academic journey. I hope the present article, an outcome of our collective reflection, presents a balanced perspective on our experiences engaging with autoethnography—*making readers feel better informed but still motivated and hopeful*.

Having said that, I want to close my part of writing by offering a couple of brief suggestions for other tutors who want to employ autoethnography as a pedagogical tool as I have been. Firstly, as evident in the articles included in the present issue, students choose to investigate a range of different personal and professional topics in their autoethnographic projects and some delve into deeply sensitive and political areas. Thus, it is imperative to create a safe and supportive learning space that enables students to face, reveal and share their vulnerability with others in the module. *The backbone of such a space is a tutor's presence*—I have noticed that individual students need to feel connected to (cared for by) their tutor, and only then do students seem to move forward to developing their own community. I have also found it difficult to effectively and ethically guide students' autoethnographic journeys without first creating mutually respectful and trusting relationships with individual students. For that purpose, fairly early in the module, *I first open up myself and my own vulnerability to the cohort* (details can be found in Lee, 2021), which is followed by a series of one-on-one conversations (and small-group interactions).

On the other side of the coin, however, I face a real issue: *the increased teaching load*. Despite the self-evident legitimacy of performing such a care-oriented pedagogy, it is demanding and time-consuming. No tutors in the current higher education context have enough time. To worsen this, I have found it awfully easy (or even natural) to invest too much in students' autoethnographic journeys, not only intellectually but emotionally. It is not rare for me to drop tears on students' writings and curse some random strangers in those writings. To keep the balance between being an approachable tutor and managing the dreadful workload (so I can have some time to edit a special issue like this), I have carefully designed and structured all of my interactions with students (including 1:1, small group, large group, and cohort group) throughout the module period. *Almost no single interaction I would do aimlessly*—all my interactions clearly focus on supporting student projects; one interaction

systematically feeds into the next; all fit logically into a big picture of learning and doing an autoethnography. The finishing stroke is to *explicitly communicate the design (the purpose of the design) to students*. I continuously and repeatedly explain, both in written form (on Moodle site) and oral form (during Zoom sessions), what I do, how I do it, and why I do it (what they do, how they do it, and why they do it)... there is nothing good about being mysterious in teaching, I believe.

3. Look deep within yourself — Karen Villalba

*Karen Villalba is English Lecturer in Colombia and the author of **Learning to “see” again: Overcoming challenges while teaching English to visually-impaired students** in this special issue.*

The first year of PhD studies represents a high level of anxiety and stress since you enter the process of adaptation and do not know what new experiences you will encounter. Doing an autoethnography as the first task for this year was meaningful not only as a student but also as a person. It was facing an opportunity to look inside myself and reflect on my own actions as a teacher and as a human being to *first see and admit what you are not*. An autoethnography entails going inside yourself to assess your strengths and weaknesses, so you can accurately determine a path that might lead you to improve yourself, and *embrace both negative and positive things around you* as the supplies to become more aware of reality.

As an adult with multiple obligations in my personal and professional life who is now doing doctoral studies at a distance, the experience of doing autoethnography taught me to have a broader view of what qualitative research means under the interpretivist paradigm. Since it was an authentic task that included me as the main character of the research, I could separate the positivist perspective from the interpretivist one at a practical level by following the principles of evocative autoethnography from which I had the opportunity to express feelings that I could not have done before. My memories and previous experiences as a teacher are now able to serve as a voice for those who are living the same circumstances without living behind solid inquiry processes and research instruments.

In the field of technology enhanced learning, quantitative (or more recently, mixed-methods) research methodologies have long been the dominant ones and recognising other forms of research may be, to some, like losing power or authority. Even for qualitative researchers, it is often consid-

ered self-indulgent and therefore not a legitimate form of qualitative inquiry. I do not blame them.

However, upon the completion of my first autoethnographic project, I almost found it hilarious that other researchers consider autoethnography less accurate than other research methodologies or, even worse, that they see it as an unimportant way to do research. Doing an autoethnography (doing it well) is a demanding task, I would argue, more than conducting other forms of research. What represented a real concern to me was the implications of ethics regarding the amount of personal information revealed and retelling the voices of others. Consequently, *more ethical parameters involving humans* had to be carefully set before writing my autoethnography, which made it a more rigorous and reflective research process than others.

Another factor that may affect the perception of other researchers toward autoethnography is that it is like meditation. It is not easy to focus on yourself since *you have to face what you really are*: your mistakes, emotions, disabilities, limitations, and a long list of variables that show you are not in control. Some people might feel more vulnerable if they look deep into themselves and they prefer to study outside factors and keep their inner selves hidden. So, anyone who wants to try this methodology needs to be aware that it is normal to face dilemmas, multiple dilemmas.

A final reflection I want to expose is that autoethnography is connected to the study of multicultural forms and the field of anthropology. For my Latin-American context, this methodology provides a framework to critically reflect on complex social processes left after colonisation and analyse the implications of living in the Global South, as well as the influence of the Global North in our lives. It is an opportunity to look to a self (or some aspect of one's life) lived in a cultural context that is not free from others' control and domination. In such a complex society, it is also worth reading about how others feel about the same world we share and learning from the epiphanies or reminiscences evoked under crucial circumstances of our shared but differently experienced society. Autoethnographies are an opportunity to systematically expose and explore the subjective truth about yourself and your power within a culture. It demonstrates that *individual identities and perceptions are sufficiently worthy of being shown*.

4. Reflections of a self-obsessed c**k — Konstantinos Petsiotis

Konstantinos Petsiotis, *English Teacher in Greece and the author of **Thirty-one and counting in the shadow: A teacher's autoethnography** in this special issue.*

Illness and death of a partner, blogging in Cancerland, death (by suicide? out of shame?) of same-sex ex-partner, same-sex attraction and coming out, LGBTQ identities, abortion and transnational adoption, stroke-stricken fathers and queer daughters, depression, collaborative witnessing with a Holocaust survivor, racism, power and privilegism, bulimia and anorexia, dysfunctional parent-son/daughter relationships ...

All of this was in the very first chapters of Adams et al.'s (2015) *Autoethnography*. I instantly knew back in January 2021 that autoethnography—whatever that was—was going to be interesting. It was, indeed, and I realised the meaning of Bochner's (rhetorical?) question: "Do you want 5 or 5,000 people to read your work?" (cited in Adams et al., 2015, p. 41). Art Bochner was referring to "traditional, esoteric academic articles from journals that often sit on people's shelves or are skimmed quickly online" as opposed to writing with the "potential to create change in people's lives".

Autoethnographies "begin with events that turn *us*—our thinking, feelings, sense of self and the world—and *others*—our friends and families, members of our social, political, and cultural communities, and others who are different from *us*—inside-out" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 47). When I first came across this citation, it read more like a warning than guidance on doing autoethnography.

This turning of the selves and others inside-out sounded like exciting introspective soul searching and extrospective observation—but *what happens in the absence of events?* or the inability on my part to sense, detect, identify any such events that would trigger this transformation of self and perception of others? Did I have my share of epiphanies? And who cares? What if I was "not interesting enough to write about" (Delamont, 2007, p. 3)?

Autoethnographers embrace vulnerability and *do it with a purpose*: to ask and answer questions about experiences and the emotions they generate (Adams et al., 2015, p. 39). But how much to expose and how much to hide? How vulnerable can I get?

And anything goes? Behar (1996) points out that:

vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self, who is also a spectator, has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake. (p. 14)

How much can you disclose and "care for the self" at the same time? What if "the need to share our stories does *not* outweigh our responsibilities to care for ourselves" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 62)? Punning on the title of Campbell's article (2017), *Apparently being a self-obsessed C**t is now academically lauded*, I mused that apparently, being white, able-bodied, straight, male, and middle-class did not seem to qualify me to do an autoethnography?

Over the months following this first encounter with autoethnography, I came to grips with it, and, ultimately, writing about myself, my professional life, and my life in general, came so naturally and easily for me; and even though I probably did not to "improve the lives of others" through autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015, p. 39), I certainly benefitted from what Cote (2017) described as *The healing power of storytelling*.

From a research standpoint, an important change – or rather, realisation occurred to me: doing autoethnography on, seemingly unqualified (not interesting enough), me was an eye-opener in that it made me realise that I want to do qualitative research from now on. June 2021, and six months into the PhD programme, on completion of my autoethnographic project and receiving a distinction for it, I realised that yes, being a self-obsessed c**k does get academically lauded.

On a final note, I do not really feel entitled to give advice to aspiring autoethnographers; instead, I would refer them to a short paper by Ellis et al. (2010), who explain what doing and writing autoethnography is.

5. Autoethnography: A self-guided road trip, destination ... you — Mary L McDowell Lefaiver

Mary L McDowell Lefaiver is a Learning and Development Senior Manager in the US and the author of **An invisible fork in the road: The autoethnography of a female social scientist** in this special issue.

My fellow social scientists, in the spirit of telling “the truth of the human experience vis-à-vis knowledge construction of the feminist project,” as indicated in my autoethnography, I will not lie to you.

From a strictly personal perspective, taking on this research was the most challenging piece of work I have ever undertaken. My first attempt at this piece was over three years ago as a novice PhD student learning the intricacies and nuances of empirical research. I thought it a brilliant entrée into doctoral research and was glad not to seek out dozens or hundreds of research participants to practise my fledgling skills; I would only need to interview my parents and reflect on myself. That was naïve. Although self-focused, *autoethnography is not immune to relational ethics; you represent yourself as well as others*, and how they are positioned in the research must be considered with care. Fast-forward to this research, and while I am still uncomfortable, I have augmented discomfort with knowledge. I have been able to find a resolution to a question that has plagued me for decades. Closure is important.

From a research perspective, although my topic is not in direct alignment with this journal’s focus on Technology Enhanced Learning, I hope you will find it a helpful exemplar, not only of autoethnographic methodology, but also a presentation of epistemology – how we situate ourselves between truth and our beliefs in the quest for knowledge construction. I have also used this opportunity to delve more deeply into feminist theories and inquiry, pillars of my thesis research, and as a way to polish my critical and analytic writing. I encourage other students to *identify frameworks that resonate with you*; engage with the concepts and frameworks across research ventures; peel back the layers to origins and evolution; seek out different perspectives, critiques and rebuttals. Having undertaken these activities with autoethnography, I find that they have allowed me to bridge the gap between theory and practice. My work as a learning practitioner has become more inclusive of individual voice and I have developed more agency in advocating for others. I believe that this deep engagement with theory has made me a better leader of people and teams in my workplace.

From a practical perspective, my advice may seem flippant, but again, I will not lie to you. I will strip away the abstractions of academic writing and offer several points of practical advice. First, prepare mentally and emotionally. Laying bare your soul through this method will take you across a spectrum of emotions you may or may not enjoy. Talk about your exploration with others, of course, being mindful of any ethical matters. If necessary, take a break to allow your mind, body, and spirit to refresh. Remember,

you cannot pour from an empty cup. Secondly, acknowledge that the vulnerability you demonstrate is the nature of this methodology; it is not meant to be comfortable, sterilised, or undertaken in a vacuum. Despite the many lows I experienced through my reckonings, I was buoyed knowing that I was working “to bolster the dominion of the feminist method” and contributing to the greater body of knowledge on this vital subject. *Find purpose that is meaningful to you in your work.*

Thirdly, show gratitude for your participants. Gratitude is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It will give back to you manifold in ways that may be invisible or intangible yet will make the journey worth the expense. As you will find in my account, I moved from “sadness and questioning to pride and gratitude”. Despite the discomfort, I am grateful for this opportunity that brought me a new, more profound gratitude and appreciation of my parents. Thank your participants, because in the very least and in my estimation, it is bad form as a researcher to “take the data and run”.

Finally, I would be remiss as a practising feminist if I did not advise you to *be true to your voice*. I convey this in all the meanings that constitute voice, which I think are best summarised by:

The concept of voice spans literal, metaphorical, and political terrains: In its literal sense, voice represents the speech and perspectives of the speaker; metaphorically, voice spans inflection, tone, accent, style, and the qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker’s words; and politically, a commitment to voice attests to the right of speaking and being represented. (p. 146)

As I learned so acutely by exploring why “girls don’t do math” and “girls don’t do science,” if you are not speaking and acting on your behalf, what outlandish refrains and hyperbolic tropes are misrepresenting you?

6. Lost and found: Transforming identity through autoethnography — Regina Obexer

*Regina Obexer is a Senior Lecturer in Austria and the author of **Lost in third space: Identity work of a higher education “blended professional”** in this special issue.*

“Autoethnography – what on earth is that?” was my first thought when I read the introduction to the first module in my new PhD programme. I knew what ethnography was, but I was not sure how there could be much value in navel-gazing obsessively about one’s own issues in front

of a potentially global audience. Nine months and three iterations of my autoethnography later, I can now say that engaging in the autoethnographic research project as the first task in the PhD programme has been *transformative* for me in several ways.

I chose a topic in my professional context that had been nagging me for a while: my multiple responsibilities at work and the conflicts these competing demands were causing. I traced my feelings about this back to a critical incident that significantly changed how I conceived of my professional identity, and started investigating what the literature had to say about people in similar situations. Having a theoretical framework as a basis for self-observation made me realise that a lot of what I was experiencing was quite typical of professionals in my situation. I also became more analytical of my own actions and behaviours, and learned to better use constructive dialogue to broaden my perspective.

Writing this autoethnography has made me appreciate the value of critical self-reflection, has enabled me to reframe my view of my roles in my workplace, and has helped me make a decision about the future direction I will take professionally. This shift can be traced using the phases of transformative learning theory as defined by Mezirow (2000) and explicitly mentioned by Lee (2020) in the context of autoethnography research in early doctoral education.

I chose a critical incident at work, a *disorienting dilemma*, as my starting point for analysis: a comment from my manager which made me question my professional identity, my place in the team, and my future career trajectory. I engaged in *critical self-reflection*, striving to understand this experience and the issues it has surfaced. This prompted me to develop a habit of reflective writing about significant experiences at work, which resulted in 20 short narratives. I also reflected on the different aspects of my role using visual tools to illustrate them. At the same time, I carried out research and analysis of the literature about the professional group I identify with and the struggles this group is confronted with when determining their role and place in their institutions. Engaging with the literature was hugely beneficial to help me analyse my own muddled feelings of being without direction, having competing priorities, and not living up to the expectations of my colleagues and myself. The process of writing the narrative parts and then using the theoretical framework to analyse them has helped me both recognise and articulate some of the identity issues I was facing by reflecting on my past and my current experiences. By defining these more precisely through writing, I was able

to identify and construct different facets of identity related to these roles.

In parallel, I started engaging in a more focused *constructive dialogue* with trusted work colleagues and friends, and I also bounced ideas off my peers in the PhD cohort. In the end, this process led me to *take action* in that I approached management with a proposal to change my work portfolio and focus on responsible management education, giving up some other responsibilities. As a result, I am now in a different team, focusing on work that I am passionate about, and with a workload that is much more manageable. Despite initial reservations about the method, my autobiographical project has resulted in a significant change in my career development. I am not sure this would have happened without engaging in the reflective and communicative process I went through in the course of this work.

As for practical recommendations for other novices doing autoethnography, I would stress the need to *thoroughly consider ethical implications*. When preparing my paper for publication, I was worried about exposing players in my drama without their explicit consent. I changed some passages to make them less confrontational, and I also changed some pronouns to disguise identities. Sometimes you may need to find a compromise between authenticity and protecting your participants, but don't forget that this is your story.

Finally, my main recommendation is to embrace autoethnography as a *real opportunity to engage with an issue in your life* that deserves attention, and to trust yourself that what you produce will be of value – not only to yourself, but also to others.

7. Be comfortable being uncomfortable! – Salwa Al Sulaimi

Salwa Al Sulaimi is English Lecturer in Oman and the author of **Teacher-student rapport in emergency remote teaching: Autoethnography** in this special issue.

During the first week of Module 1, *Research Methods in Education and Social Science Settings: Philosophy, methodology, techniques and tools* (part of a Ph.D. programme on *e-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning*), we read Chapter 1 of *Research Methods in Education* (Cohen et al., 2018). Although I found the text challenging as a novice researcher, I was exposed to new terms, including paradigm, epistemology, ontology, methodology, and qualitative and quantitative research. It took time and careful consideration to respond to the tutor's question regarding whether I consider myself

a positivist or a subjectivist. Although I inherently favour objectivity, I realised that I am a subjectivist researcher, a likely result of my educational background in social sciences and work as an educator.

During the third week, our group of 30 students from various educational and cultural backgrounds was introduced to autoethnography, the methodology we would be using for our first research paper. At this time, I shared a post that I titled, “I feel uncomfortable”. The post was a detailed account of my insecurities, writing about my vulnerabilities and writing a story in my second language. Plus, I am the worst storyteller I know! Although I did not expect this additional challenge, it was not entirely dreadful. It was reassuring to read Lee’s 2020 article, “Autoethnography as an authentic learning activity in online doctoral education: An integrated approach to authentic learning”. The article features positive student feedback regarding autoethnography and argues that “it would not be possible to expect online doctoral students to engage in a meaningful learning process, simply by providing new knowledge and skills, which are disconnected from their real-life situations” (Lee, 2020, p. 570). The article helped me recognise that *doctoral students learn best through the authenticity of autoethnography*.

We spent three months reading material on autoethnography, reviewing autoethnographic papers, discussing and brainstorming ideas for our proposed projects, and writing. At the end of this educationally rich process, I realised that it had been an illuminating and transformative experience for me. Custer (2014) notes that autoethnography “honours subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits” (p. 1). For instance, teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic was frustrating. However, the act of writing and reflecting on it, exchanging stories with colleagues, and academically analysing the topic revealed an alternative perspective—subjectivity—that enabled me to process these struggles and discover solutions. Unlike most research methodologies, *autoethnography celebrates and values the researcher as an insider and, most importantly, includes the researcher’s personal experience*. Reflecting on my experience, I wrote the following in my module reflection post: “The autoethnography paper was both challenging and fun. As a novice researcher, I find the methodology compelling because I am now more open to various ideas and viewpoints. I perceive research differently now, increasing my appreciation for social science research.”

In addition to these personal benefits, I hope my paper contributes to the academic literature on teacher–student rapport building. My autoethnographic work argues that classroom rapport building is as essential in online

classrooms as it is in physical classes. In the absence of face-to-face communication, teachers must adopt alternative strategies to build interpersonal relationships with students and highlight the challenges and struggles they face while trying to accomplish this goal. Therefore, if you are writing autoethnography, it might be one of *the rare authentic situations where you should be comfortable being uncomfortable!*

8. Autoethnography and me: Juggling my researcher self and my participant self — Sophia Mavridi

*Sophia Mavridi is Digital Learning Specialist and English Lecturer in the UK and the author of **Emergency remote teaching and me: An autoethnography by a digital learning specialist during Covid-19** in this special issue.*

Autoethnography is a research method I had never used or read about before. While going through this experience was not easy, it was empowering and liberating in a way that helped me grow as a researcher. And despite my initial scepticism, I got to appreciate it as a reliable and compelling research method, too. I’ve been encouraged to distance my own ‘self’ from my writing in the name of objectivity and reliability. A less personal tone raises trustworthiness, while a more personal one raises eyebrows. Hence, I embarked on this journey with reservations. How can a personal story be called research? Why would people be interested to read my story? *I learned that autoethnography is not just writing your own life story*; it is using your story to understand a social phenomenon you are part of. It is conducting a scientific study and giving outsiders a glimpse into your culture as an insider.

As an autoethnographer, I had to constantly balance and switch back and forth between two roles; my researcher self and my participant self. Anderson (2006) argues that this dual role (of being a member of the social world under study and a researcher of that world) requires increased self-reflexivity, a process which autoethnography enabled me to engage in more deeply. I got to realise that there are so many embedded assumptions in the way I think; identifying them in a rational manner is not an easy task for an insider. For more than two decades, I have worked in language education as a primary and secondary school teacher, university lecturer, examiner, trainer, and researcher. It is a world I am tightly embedded in as an insider, and this comes with deeply rooted beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions. I found that *immersing myself in autoethnography facilitated deeper engagement in reflexivity*, something that is particularly

important to researchers who are insiders in their research context.

It also made me more attuned and empathetic to my participant self. The process of autoethnography sometimes reveals hard truths that might be uncomfortable to process and reflect on. During the process of doing my autoethnography, I felt vulnerable as I realised my flaws, weaknesses, and fears, and this led me on a back-and-forth journey between epiphanies and tensions. There were many things I didn't want to expose in my research. *Experiencing this vulnerability made me think about how research participants might feel when asked to share their own stories and perceptions.* This insight matters because, as a qualitative researcher, I need to understand how my participants may feel and the deliberate or unconscious choices they may make about what information to share with me. I think walking in their shoes gave me a sense of empathy which may prove useful when conducting qualitative research in the future.

From the above, it should be clear that future autoethnographers should not enter the field naively believing that autoethnographic writing is a neat, linear, and coherent process. Having written an autobiography, I have learned that individual experiences and the complex emotions they generate can be messy, disjointed, ugly, and confusingly hidden. There was also a persistent sense of anxiety about juggling my researcher self and my participant self, and striking a balance between the two. I finally realised that, as a researcher, I was never fully able to distance myself emotionally from my participant self; however, *using a strong theoretical framework and a robust methodology to collect and analyse my data* enabled me to assure myself (and the potential readers) that my autoethnography is of good epistemological value. Anderson (2006) eloquently describes this as remaining “committed to an analytic research agenda” (p. 375) aimed at better understanding not only the self but (primarily) social phenomena as well.

9. An Unexpected Journey — Thomas Leach

*Thomas Leach is an Education Editor in the UAE and the author of **The hammer and the scalpel: A teacher's experience of workplace bullying** in this special issue.*

I must confess that when I was first given the task of writing an autoethnography, I hadn't even heard of the style and my first encounter, a paper called *Apparently being a self-obsessed C**t is now academically lauded* (Campbell, 2017) made me wonder if autoethnography was even a valid academic style, if it received so much sneering and criticism

from purist academics who consider their way, the only way.

However, I read more autoethnographies as well as papers about writing autoethnographies and something about its purpose resonated with me. I've never been a positivist, I don't believe in universal truth, my whole adult life, I've lived in cultures other than the one I was born in, which has led me to believe that people and their environments are too complex and diverse for a one size fits all answer. However, the kind of shared experience that comes from autoethnography has a different kind of truth, *the sharing of personal truth, which in turn offers its own value.* Even though the outcomes of a paper may not relate to us in every way, they can help us think in a new way or understand an event that is outside of our personal experience.

More importantly, I feel like now more than ever, we live in a society where we are supposed to understand each other's situations, without actually being allowed to ask about them. There are things I don't understand about being non-white, sexualities other than my own, or being the victim of sexual abuse for example, but autoethnography is a way of coming to understand those aspects of human nature and horrible situations.

Often with academic papers, we read facts and statistics, often boiling down large amounts of information into rudimentary numbers, losing the essence of the people those numbers came from. The positivist argument for a universal truth as fact only to be overwritten the following week by the next universal truth to come into vogue is a far cry from the purpose of an autoethnography, which is to share an experience for what it is. In this respect, it can be quite therapeutic to write sometimes as well.

Autoethnography is not an easy academic approach either. As the researched, a lot of the knowledge might come from me, but that doesn't make the work any less rigorously researched or mean that other sources aren't included. When writing about my own experience of working in toxic workplaces, I still researched papers on workplace bullying and situated my experiences in a way which corroborated the known literature. It can be quite harrowing as well to delve back into parts of our lives we would rather leave forgotten. Because of this, an evocative autoethnography *balances on a fine line between academic and creative writing*, and it takes skill to find that balance.

For me, autoethnography ended with some personal growth, by writing about a piece of my past I'd previously

considered an unpleasant waste of time, I learned that my experience had actually helped me grow as a person, that *the struggle was important and became part of the tapestry of who I am*.

For those looking to write an autoethnography, my recommendation is always that to be a good writer you need to read. Find some autoethnographies on subjects that interest you and start from there. Even if it doesn't become your primary style of academic writing, it's still worth trying at least once to understand that just because it's different from the mainstream, doesn't mean it doesn't offer value to the scholarly body of knowledge.

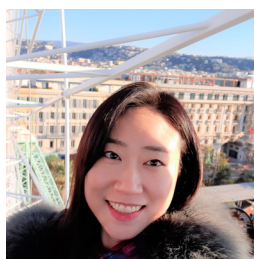
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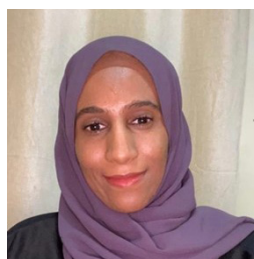
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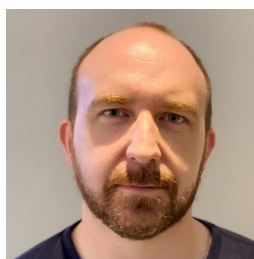


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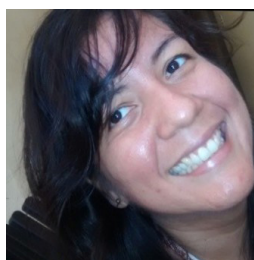
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autoethnography in online doctoral education

This special issue consists of 16 autoethnographies and a collective reflection written by doctoral students on an online PhD programme in TEL.

Autoethnography in this online doctoral programme is a deliberate attempt to move ourselves from marginal positions to central positions in our TEL research, creating more critical and ethical discourses and practices.

By investigating their own experiences of social injustice and associated struggles, online doctoral students learn how to critically engage with dominant TEL discourses that often dismiss the unjust social conditions in which a particular technology is developed and used.

This special issue is intended to show other TEL researchers what it looks like for us to connect our personal struggles and academic engagement, reflecting on more ethical TEL research methods and practices.

A collection of online doctoral students' authentic voices can be a unique add-on to the previous literature on doctoral education, helping readers to genuinely appreciate the great diversity of the group. Each autoethnography with a distinctive topic can also attract different groups of audiences.

