

Enhancing EFL Teaching Skills: An Auto-Ethnographic Online Professional Development Journey

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ABSTRACT

Modern technology has altered English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, opening new options for creativity and greater learning. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) can update their knowledge of best teaching practices and adapt to new challenges in the field by taking advantage of open, online resources. This auto-ethnographic study serves as a thorough resource for EFL educators, illuminating the procedure of selecting suitable online platforms and learning methodologies to correspond with the needs of the digital age. This study utilizes auto-ethnographic methodologies to examine the cognitive shifts and adaptive strategies involved in integrating conventional teaching practices with cutting-edge technology. Educators of foreign languages interested in self-directed professional development can gain knowledge from this study. Educators are advised to actively participate in self-directed learning pursuits, leveraging an extensive array of online resources. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding auto-ethnography, online learning, and the pedagogy of teaching English as a foreign language by providing a first-person narrative that is grounded in theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, this highlights the transformative capacity of digital platforms in the context of EFL teaching, as it promotes continuous learning and adaptability among educators.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, countless new technologies and digital communication have considerably impacted the growth of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning (Hakim, 2021; Ritonga, 2020). When performing their jobs amid the quick development of technology and communication, EFL educators must continue to modify their pedagogical techniques to keep up with the most recent advancements and be able to create best practices in their sectors to assist students in learning (Drajati et al., 2018; Supriadi et al., 2020). Digital communication and technological advancements have had a substantial positive impact on education. For EFL educators, these developments have nonetheless presented new difficulties. The traditional classroom teaching methods must now be supplemented or replaced with cutting-edge

technologies and digital resources for EFL educators to succeed in today's educational environment (Khan et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018).

The effectiveness of differentiated teaching methods (Laari et al., 2021), strategies for student engagement (Pedler et al., 2020), and the role of culture awareness (Yurtsever & Özel, 2021) in assisting students in mastering the target language have all been the focus of extensive education research over the years. In addition to the existing studies on the subject, more must be learned about how teachers can most effectively use technological advancements to enhance their pedagogical practice (Adams et al., 2020) while still adhering to the fundamentals of successful EFL instruction. It is crucial to research how EFL professionals can make informed decisions when selecting the best platform and content to support student learning in their classrooms, given the rising popularity of online learning (Esnaashari et al., 2018) and the vast array of online resources available to teachers and students (Legamia & Akiate, 2020; Shatri et al., 2021).

The researcher regularly studies, assesses, and develops teaching techniques while working as an EFL instructor. An auto-ethnographic study approach can be used to follow the researcher's activities. This auto-ethnographic study aims to bridge the knowledge gap about EFL teachers' professional skill-development experiences, which can also help other instructors of EFL build effective teaching strategies. An in-depth examination of individual experiences as a language instructor actively participating in learning through free online courses is made possible by using this research approach. The researcher hopes to significantly contribute to developing pedagogical paradigms that support teaching EFL (Al-Wadi, 2020) by providing insight into cognitive shifts and adaptive strategies that emerge during the learning process.

The significance of this study lies in the information gained that may be used to raise standards in EFL education and in the introduction of new avenues for professional growth for EFL teachers (Jabłońska, 2022; Jiang, 2022). The study provides an in-depth look at the learning process and the researcher's experience as an EFL instructor utilizing online learning classes through the lens of auto-ethnographic research techniques. The results here will also have broad ramifications for other EFL teachers who wish to enhance their students' learning experiences while increasing their teaching practices by first undergoing independent professional training.

Other EFL educators may get inspiration and direction from this research to use successful self-development training methods. A more comprehensive understanding of how digital platforms can enhance EFL teaching and learning outcomes will result from an in-depth study using a specified approach. This study's findings can also guide instructors in modifying their approaches considering new developments and shifting student expectations. The study inspires other EFL professionals looking to experience similar growth and development by demonstrating how auto-ethnography may be a potent instrument to collect rich personal narratives that show transformative moments in teaching practice.

2. METHODS

Examining the impact of teaching English provided by the British Council's free e-learning programs for developing core competencies in EFL teaching is the main objective of this study. For the study to achieve this objective, an empirical method known as autoethnography was utilized, enabling an in-depth investigation of individual learning experiences within a wider cultural framework. The researcher, an in-service EFL teacher, was able to explore personal reflections and observations through autoethnography, which illuminated EFL teaching strategies and the possible influence of digital learning settings on autonomous professional development.

The focus of the study was primarily on the encounters and experiences of an EFL instructor, incorporating insights from both professional responsibilities and personal reflections. The researcher, who was actively involved in the look-in, examined three distinct training programs offered by the British Council. These programs were titled "Online Skills for Remote Teaching," "How to Teach Speaking," and "How to Teach Pronunciation." Moreover, the researcher's extensive history, which

encompasses previous teaching engagements in China and ongoing duties as a high school educator in Indonesia, contributed valuable extra data of considerable importance.

Carefully considered data was gathered using a range of instruments designed to record learning reflections, teaching strategies, and the incorporation of digital resources. Every aspect of the learning process, including enrollment in online courses, was carefully recorded. Simultaneously, portfolios were utilized as organized stores for documenting the knowledge acquired during the autoethnographic process.

Both descriptive and explanatory approaches, with a basis in socio-anthropological learning theory inside digital contexts, supported the ensuing data analysis. Utilizing his vast knowledge as a teacher educator, the researcher integrated pertinent theoretical frameworks like new media analysis and multimodal analysis into his work. The utilization of such a framework played a crucial role in providing a contextual framework and facilitating the interpretation of the data that was gathered, specifically within the dynamic environment of EFL instruction. This extensive research facilitated the exploration of cognitive changes and adaptive approaches that result from engaging in self-directed professional development opportunities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings section of this study covers two primary themes that arose during the analysis process, offering information about the complexities of the educator's worldview and the importance of continuous professional growth. By conducting a rigorous examination of the gathered data, the researcher was able to unveil the intricate facets of these themes, providing significant perspectives on the dynamic nature of EFL instruction and the pivotal role played by educators within this context.

The Educator Philosophy

The expeditious evolution of digital platforms has resulted in substantial changes in educational settings and pedagogical approaches (Alenezi, 2023). As an educator specializing in the domain of EFL, it is imperative for me to promptly acclimate to these emerging trends to impart language proficiency to my students. I actively incorporate new technology into my teaching methods to accommodate their demands. I am well-informed about these technologies' advantages and how they might improve the learning process before adopting them. Continuous learning is what I do to keep up with the latest changes in teaching technology. I look for information from reliable places, like educational blogs, and go to workshops by respected organizations like ASCD, National Geographic, the British Council, and universities in Indonesia. Because of technology, many of these training opportunities can be found online, and some are free (Rosé & Ferschke, 2016). This training opportunity makes it easy for me to learn new things and improve my skills without having to pay expensive special training fees.

Through active engagement in webinars and diligent consumption of educational blogs, I acquired valuable insights about nascent technology that can be effectively incorporated into my pedagogical approach (Ulmane-Ozolins et al., 2019). The advent of digital platforms has created novel opportunities for me to interact and collaborate (Anthony et al., 2021; Halik et al., 2022). I find great inspiration in engaging with educators who have effectively integrated technology into their instructional practices, as it motivates me to investigate novel methodologies for imparting language skills. Incorporating technology into my pedagogical approach amplifies student involvement and fosters the development of critical thinking abilities and digital literacy competencies (Marin & Steinert, 2022). By integrating multimedia resources, such as films, podcasts, and interactive simulations, into my instructional approach, I foster an engaging and adaptable learning milieu that accommodates diverse learning preferences and styles (Slamet et al., 2020; Yueh et al., 2012). In addition, these tools facilitate students' exposure to genuine language usage and cultural settings, promoting a more profound comprehension of the language being studied. In addition, technology facilitates the implementation of individualized education, allowing me to cater to my students' varying needs and capabilities effectively (Marin & Steinert, 2022).

By utilizing adaptive learning platforms and online evaluation tools, it becomes possible to customize training to cater to each student's unique needs (Merikko & Kivimäki, 2022). These technologies offer individualized learning pathways, adaptive feedback, and progress monitoring, enabling me to assess student performance and deliver focused assistance as needed (Moltudal et al., 2022). Implementing a personalized strategy guarantees that every student is provided with the essential assistance and resources required to succeed (Shemshack & Spector, 2020).

Furthermore, technology facilitates tailored learning and presents prospects for genuine language practice and cultural immersion (Jung, 2022; Rashid et al., 2018). By utilizing virtual reality experiences, online language exchanges, and digital resources, students can actively participate in authentic language usage and interact with native speakers of the target language residing in various regions across the globe (Baralt et al., 2022). The above exposure augments their linguistic proficiency and deepens their comprehension of diverse cultures, equipping them with the necessary skills to engage in global communication within an ever more interconnected global landscape.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that although technology has brought about a significant transformation in the field of education, it should not be regarded as a replacement for implementing efficient teaching methodologies (Mulyati, 2019). As an individual involved in the field of education, I acknowledge the significance of achieving a harmonious equilibrium between the incorporation of technology and the fundamental principles of pedagogy. The utilization of technology is a means to augment instructional methods and support the learning process rather than supplant the essential role educators play (Srivathsan, 2022).

The expeditious advancement of digital platforms has fundamentally revolutionized classrooms and instructional methodologies (H. Villarba et al., 2023). As an educator specializing in EFL, I understand the imperative nature of accommodating these emerging trends to teach language proficiency. I can acquire pertinent knowledge on developing technology by proactively engaging with educational blogs and webinars. This knowledge enables me to incorporate novel tools into my pedagogical approach effectively. The availability of online training possibilities enables me to consistently enhance my skill set without incurring significant financial burdens. By incorporating technology into my teaching practices, I can design captivating and interactive instructional materials that effectively address my students' varied requirements (Zhang et al., 2020). Using digital platforms, I aim to implement individualized instruction, facilitate authentic language practice, and foster cultural immersion to offer my students a dynamic learning experience that equips them with the necessary skills for achievement in an ever-evolving digital society.

Professional Development

The three courses that I completed from the British Council's Teaching English are presented here as key data for this auto-ethnographic study. The courses are How to Teach Speaking (HTS), How to Teach Pronunciation (HTP), and Online Skills for Remote Teaching (OSRT). Each course earned a 12-hour study credential. There are variations in start and end dates for each course due to the commitment of researchers to other tasks. HTS was registered on April 10, 2023, and completed on August 15, 2023. HTP was started on August 8 and finished on September 2, 2023. The OSRT was taken from July 4 to July 23, 2023. All three courses begin with an introductory part, which allows me to familiarize myself with the course structure and the online learning tools used. The introductory part covers a variety of units. At HTS, these units consist of navigating course locations, tips for successful learning, and enhancing learning through reflection. HTP and OSRT introduce online platforms, present an overview of program or unit modules, and offer guidance to expand learning.

Table 1. Learning Platform and Features

Course	HTS	HTP	OSRT
Duration	12 hours	12 hours	12 hours
Start and end dates	10 April 2023 - 15 August 2023	8 August 2023 - 2 September 2023	4 July 2023 - 23 July 2023
Introduction section	Navigating the course site, tips for studying successfully, and building learning through reflection	Introduction to the online platform, introduction the program/unit module, and tips for extending learning	Introduction to the online platform, introduction the program/unit module, and tips for extending learning
Modules	3 modules, each divided into 3 units with different titles	3 modules, each divided into 3 units with different titles	3 modules, each divided into 3 units with the same titles
Downloadable resources	Resources for Getting Started, Understanding Pronunciation, engaging with pronunciation of individual sounds, and engaging with pronunciation techniques and activities	Resources for Getting Started, Understanding Speaking: Maximizing Interaction, Understanding Speaking: Key terms & Issues, Understanding Language Practice Activities	Resources for Getting Started, Understanding Remote Teaching, Planning and Adapting Materials, Managing Remote Learning
Workbook	Yes - 19 Pages PDF	Yes - 19 Pages PDF	Yes - 19 Pages

In HTP and HTS, each of the three modules had three units with unique titles. In contrast, the modules of OSRT were categorized into three units, each of which exhibited comparable headings. The concluding segment of each course comprised downloadable materials designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge within the respective modules. Students were also given a workbook in which they could record their learning notes and reflections. Although the three courses had a similar emphasis on fundamental subjects pertaining to the instruction of the English language, they also showcased discernible distinctions. The focus of HTS was directed towards the cultivation of targeted skills and techniques necessary for the proficient instruction of oral communication. The HTP program placed its emphasis on the acquisition of targeted skills and methods essential for the facilitation of proficient pronunciation training. The educational material for OSRT was designed with a focus on the skills and practices that are particularly relevant to the field of online English teaching.

In HTP and HTS, each of the three sections was made up of three parts. When compared to the other two, HTS stood out as the most all-encompassing option, with its focus on both teaching and public speaking. It went into topics including fluency and accuracy evaluation, changing speaking activities, enhancing interaction, the pair and group work dynamics, incorporating language chunks in games, and encouraging communicative learning. In contrast, HTP employed a more focused methodology, specifically addressing the complexities of English phonetics and phonology. The curriculum covered various subjects, including the phonemic chart, sound production, intonation, and stress patterns. It also addressed connected speech, challenging phonetic sounds, strategies for avoiding incorrect pronunciation, methods for correcting mispronunciation, features of connected

speech and intonation, activities that incorporated connected speech and intonation, and the integration of connected speech into speaking exercises.

The most practically oriented course, OSRT, stood out as it addressed the difficulties and opportunities of teaching English online. Theorizing about remote teaching, designing, and customizing materials for online training, and successfully managing remote learning processes were all discussed. In contrast, the modules of OSRT were partitioned into three distinct units, each of which exhibited analogous headers.

The concluding segment of each course is comprised of downloadable resources designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge inside each module. A workbook was also made available so that students could document their thoughts and observations as they learned. Although the three courses had a similar emphasis on fundamental subjects pertaining to the instruction of the English language, they also displayed discernible distinctions. The focus of HTS was directed towards the cultivation of targeted skills and techniques necessary for the proficient instruction of oral communication. HTP concentrated on the precise techniques and methods required for efficient pronunciation instruction. The skills and techniques particularly useful for online English instruction were the focus of OSRT's curriculum.

I gained knowledge and skills that will help me improve my English teaching practice through these three courses, which gave me worthwhile learning opportunities. Therefore, I highly recommend these courses to fellow educators who are eager to enhance their pedagogical skills. By actively participating in these classes, I also acquired the theoretical groundwork, real-world knowledge, and pedagogical tools required to improve as an English teacher. This research therefore highlights the importance of such programs in fostering English language educators as professionals. The three courses all placed equal attention on crucial tactics and abilities for teaching English. Furthermore, they displayed discernible attributes.

HTS caters to educators who want to improve their skills in teaching spoken language. The comprehensive scope of its coverage spans a diverse array of subjects, offering pragmatic guidance on the successful implementation of instructional methodologies within educational settings. Fluency and accuracy evaluation, activity adjustment, optimal interaction tactics, pedagogical techniques for pair and group work, integration of language chunks in games, and the growth of communicative learning environments are among the topics covered. The HTP program is a highly helpful option for educators seeking to enhance their comprehension of English pronunciation. The phonetics and phonology of English pronunciation are thoroughly covered in this course. The curriculum encompasses several topics, such as the phonemic chart, strategies for producing sounds, intonation, and stress patterns, connected speech phenomena, challenging phonetic sounds, methods for mitigating incorrect pronunciation, approaches for rectifying faulty pronunciation, and speaking exercises that incorporate connected speech and intonation. The OSRT (Optimal Selection and Resource Trade-off) framework presents an optimal decision. This course offers useful assistance on lesson design, content modification, and the efficient administration of online learning procedures. Teacher engagement with OSRT helps them conceptualize and implement remote teaching methods to handle online learning issues and opportunities.

The determination of the most appropriate approach is ultimately contingent upon the unique requirements and preferences of everyone. When faced with uncertainty over the choice of a course, seeking guidance from teachers, educators, or experienced practitioners might be advantageous. Their knowledge can aid in identifying requirements and directing the decision-making process. These three

courses provide educators with a complete range of information and skills, encompassing several aspects of English language instruction, including speaking, pronunciation, and online teaching. Prospective educators can easily choose a course that fits with their professional goals and aspirations by carefully considering specific prerequisites. The HTS, HTP, and OSRT courses offer significant prospects for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators to actively participate in professional growth and enhance their pedagogical proficiency. These classes cover a wide range of topics related to teaching English, such as speaking, pronunciation, and learning online.

Table 2. Objective, Modules, and Topics Covered in the Trainings

Course	HTS	HTP	OSRT
Course objective	Develop your understanding of speaking skills and explore teaching techniques and activities which promote oral communication in the classroom for a range of ages and levels	Increase your understanding of phonology and your ability to support learners with effective pronunciation activities in the classroom	Develop the skills you need to make your learners successful in remote learning by reflecting on different approaches to planning activities, managing, and assessing remote learning and motivating remote learners
Modules	3 modules, each divided into 3 units	3 modules, each divided into 3 units	3 modules, each divided into 3 units
Topics covered	Fluency and accuracy, assessing activities and teacher talk, modifying speaking activities, maximizing interaction, pair and group work, language chunk in games, making learning communicative, which activity, flexible activity, activities and aims	The phonemic chart, sounds, intonation, and stress, connected speech, difficult sounds, techniques to prevent poor pronunciation, correcting mispronunciation, features of connected speech and intonation, activities with connected speech and intonation, integrating connected speech into speaking	Understanding remote teaching, planning, and adapting materials, managing remote learning

Along with the targeted competencies, completing the HTS, HTP, and OSRT courses all at once encourages the growth of an extensive professional knowledge base and skill set for EFL instructors. Through a comprehensive exploration of current scholarly literature on second language acquisition and pedagogy, educators enhance their efficacy within the educational setting. Moreover, by enhancing their comprehension of the varied cultures and learning modalities exhibited by their pupils, educators can effectively develop instructional strategies that are more aligned with individual requirements and cultural subtleties. These courses and theoretical frameworks help EFL instructors succeed and help students learn.

Discussion

My philosophy, as articulated in this work, acknowledges the rapid advancement of digital platforms and their profound impact on educational settings and pedagogical practices (Mercer & Mcdonagh, 2021; Uddin, 2019). The analysis of the findings should encompass a comprehensive examination of various learning theories, socio-anthropological perspectives on learning, and concepts related to new media learning. In this part, these theories are put together to analyze my teaching and learning philosophy.

Auto-Ethnographic Approach: My experience as an educator develops as a tightly entwined personal narrative with the theoretical foundations of this methodology. The study methodology of auto-ethnography is selected to reflect the integration of personal experience and theoretical comprehension (Delamont, 2007). This methodology involves my exploration of personal experiences, engaging in reflective analysis of my adaptation to the changing intersection of education and technology (Slade et al., 2020).

Socio-Anthropology Theory of Learning: The socio-anthropological theory of learning and my own professional development as a teacher are very similar. When I interact with students from different cultures in Indonesia, think back to my time as a language training assistant in the United States, and think about how I interacted with students when I taught in China, I am reminded of how important shared knowledge and cultural perspectives are to the learning process. These personal experiences show how learning is inherently social and cultural, which backs up the core ideas of the socio-anthropological theory of learning (Burkitt, 2021).

Learning Theories: I like different learning ideas because they help me keep trying to improve how I teach. Constructivism (Sayaf, 2023), for instance, illustrates how I have observed students actively constructing their knowledge through the experiences I design for them. The author's personal encounters with assimilating novel technologies and acquiring knowledge from peers align with the behaviorist concept of reinforcement via feedback (Leeder, 2022; Sulaswari et al., 2021). My experience as an educator also parallels connectivism (Alzain, 2019; Dziubaniuk et al., 2023) since I have come to realize how vital my network of peers and colleagues is as a source of information and inspiration.

New Media Learning: The integration of new media (Cover, 2004) into my pedagogical practice is very subjective. I have personally witnessed how multimedia materials, including movies and interactive simulations, enthrall and interest my students. These experiences align with my learning preferences, where I frequently turn to digital media for insight and inspiration.

Balanced Approach: Balance is a key component of my educational strategy (Goradia, 2018). Technology is a potent tool, but it must always be used in the service of sound pedagogical practices, as I have discovered. The achievement of equilibrium in my pedagogical approach, shaped by my successful educational encounters, is characterized by the integration of technology as a supplementary tool rather than a substitute for conventional instructional approaches (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Professional Development: The impetus for my dedication to ongoing professional development arises from my own encounters as a student. The effectiveness of learning is maximized when it is directly applicable to an individual's professional environment (Zhang et al., 2020). Engaging in educational programs, such as those provided by the British Council, has constituted a personal voyage of self-development that adheres to the tenets of adult learning theory. This experience has been personally witnessed and undergone as an enthusiastic and committed adult learner (Shemshack & Spector, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The research explores the professional skill development experiences of EFL instructors using an auto-ethnographic approach, providing insightful information that might help educators improve their teaching methods. It also emphasizes the crucial role those online platforms and choices of content play in assisting student learning, particularly in the era of expanding online education. The compatibility of the educator's perspective with numerous theoretical frameworks, including auto-ethnography, socio-anthropology, learning theories, new media learning, and a balanced approach, highlights the study's comprehensiveness. These ideas collectively underscore the importance of incorporating social, cultural, and technological components into the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The discussion also shows how the researcher's teaching philosophy fits with these theoretical frameworks. It stresses the importance of sociocultural and constructivist views, as well as the use of new media and a balanced approach. The researcher's dedication to ongoing professional development is evident from their participation in courses, which demonstrates their attention to adapting and developing teaching approaches.

This research makes a valuable contribution to the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction by providing valuable insights into the transformative capabilities of technology, the importance of cultural sensitivity, and the significance of continuous professional development for educators. This study intends to motivate and direct EFL practitioners in their quest for efficient and inclusive teaching techniques in the digital era by sharing personal experiences and relating them to academic frameworks.

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