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From Teaching English as a Second Language to Teaching English as a Foreign Language: An Autoethnographic Narrative

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Abstract
This auto-ethnographic study presents an account of the first author's journey as an English teacher that covers two phases from the first-person point of view. The journey began in Nigeria, where English is considered a second language, and later continued in Türkiye where it is learned as a foreign one. Using personal memories and documents such as certificates, letters, and reflective journaling, the author retraces key moments that influenced both his teaching journey and his personal development. This work does not seek to offer neat conclusions, but rather to pause, reflect, and pose a question: What becomes of a teacher's identity when he transitions between different cultural and linguistic landscapes? The researcher hopes to open a space for thinking about the ways our environments, students, and histories shape our professional identities and influence our practices. The study matters because it speaks to something many teachers experience but few name—the quiet transformations we undergo as we move across borders, literal and metaphorical. The findings reveal that transitioning from Nigerian English as a Second Language to Turkish English as Foreign Language contexts presents complex challenges, including conflicting language policies, (mis)use translation, excessive emphasis on exams, and limited target language use. Yet alongside the challenges came growth, renewal, and the deepening of a professional self. What emerges is a portrait of a teacher learning to listen more closely, not just to students, but to the silences within, where meaning often awaits.

Keywords: Autoethnography, cross-cultural experience, English language teaching, professional growth, teacher identity

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Introduction

Kachru's (1985) Three Circles of English is a theoretical framework that serves as a useful launchpad for any scholarly discussion of the status of English as a global language vis-à-vis other languages and cultures. According to this model, there are people, cultures, and countries, such as the US and UK, that regard English as their *mother* tongue. They appear to have no practical alternative to English, and for them, it holds the status of a first language (L1). In Kachru's model, this category belongs to the Inner Circle. Kachru (1985) argued that, being the source of the language, the Inner Circle served as the natural custodian of English. They are the law-givers, the norm-creators. On the other hand, there are societies upon which, due to historical circumstances, the English language was imposed and which subsequently adopted it as their second language (L2). Paradoxically, however, people in this category cannot do without English: it is a necessary educational, social, economic, cultural and political tool. Countries formerly colonized by the British Empire, such as India, Kenya and Nigeria fall under what Kachru (1985) calls as the Outer Circle.

In the English as a Second Language context (e.g., Nigeria, where the researcher was born and raised) English is historically woven into nearly every aspect of the people's lives, having been both adopted and adapted with a passion akin to religious sectarianism. English reached parts of what is now Nigeria as early as the sixteenth century, but it was colonial rule in the nineteenth century that cemented its status as the national language used in education, politics, and as a unifying medium in a richly multilingual nation (Danladi, 2013; Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Justina, 2012; Taiwo, 2009; Zabus, 2007). Some Nigerians have adopted English as a first language, often at the expense of their indigenous tongues, the researcher sees it as his second, a conscious act of loyalty to his heritage and to those who resisted conflating English with civilization Phillipson, 1992). You have a good number of eminent scholars and journalists who took it upon themselves to do everything doable to purify English from local adulteration of all forms and keep it as pristine as the falling snow; conversely, there are the progressive academics and other professionals that dedicated themselves to developing a local variety of Nigerian English. Despite the apparent disagreement between the two camps of the purists (the custodians of the RP or Standard British English) and the progressives, both have subscribed to the inevitability of using English. The more energy each camp exerted in trying to win the general public, the more their opponents felt obliged to debunk their theories and win the ideological battle. The result is that English flourishes either way. No one questions the necessity of using it in the first place. It is the official language, the language of education, the language of the law, the language of politics, and the language of national unity. Perhaps it is this socio-political relevance of the English language in the ESL context that led Kachru (1985) to describe the Outer Circle as the "norm-developers". A term that may refer both to the Outer Circle's ability to develop the language norms transferred from the Inner Circle, and to its potential to generate its own distinct usages, creatively shaping them and passing them on to the Expanding Circle.

In contrast to Nigeria, Türkiye is considered a "norm-dependent" country, given that English is neither its first nor second language. Türkiye falls in the Expanding Circle, which is the third group in Kachru's Three Concentric Circles model of World Englishes (Kachru, 1985). In Expanding Circle countries, English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL) and holds a secondary role. The English speakers in this circle rely on the Inner/Outer Circles for their norms. Like in the other countries in the Expanding Circle, Türkiye values English primarily as a form of global cultural capital rather than as a vital political instrument. Therefore, in Türkiye, the English

language does not enjoy official status and is learned mostly by the younger generations, businesspeople and professionals whose jobs or ambitions are, to varying degrees, global in nature. Thus, EFL practitioners and scholars have a somewhat utilitarian approach to the language: they neither felt the burden to keep it original as it was during the colonial era nor did they see any wisdom in refining it and adapting it to the Turkish setting. In other words, English users in Türkiye are not limited by the so-called Queen's English. Nor are they burdened by the arduous task of creating their unique version of the English language.

The author's journey as an English teacher started in 2009 after graduating from college, where he received a diploma in English Education. Two years later, the researcher enrolled at university to pursue his BA in English language and literature. He taught ESL for eleven years (2009-2020) at different levels of education in Nigeria before coming to the Republic of Türkiye, where he has been teaching EFL for 5 years (2020 to 2025). Fimbal Royal Schools was where the author's teaching career began in the 2009/2010 academic year. It is a group of private schools, nursery, primary, junior and senior secondary, in the metropolis of Kano State, Nigeria. The author started teaching in the junior secondary school (the terminology used there for middle school) and later got promoted to teach at the senior secondary school based on his performance and dedication. Türk Eğitim Derneği (TED) Elazığ Koleji was the first conventional school the author was employed as an EFL teacher in Türkiye in September 2020. This study provides a reflective account of the author's experiences in both countries, Nigeria and Türkiye, with a view to documenting and communicating them to both fellow ELT professionals/researchers and the broader, general audience.

By crafting this autoethnographic note, the author engaged in the act of critical reflection hoping that this research will offer him a rare opportunity to "recreate" his professional self or rather more accurately, participate actively in "creating" his *other* (i.e., professional) self (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992), or, even more importantly, the author partook "in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 43, as cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2021, p. 199). In other words, by writing this autoethnographic reflection, the author sought to break open the kernel of his personal identity, attempting to access that hidden part of his being that he had long taken for granted throughout his professional life. Wall (2006) captures this interesting fact of doing autoethnography when she aptly remarks that: "We cannot separate ourselves from what we do" (p. 156). It is important to note here that although numerous studies have examined both evident and subtle transformations in teachers' lives as they transition between the Inner, Outer or Expanding Circles, none has specifically addressed these dynamics within the distinct sociolinguistic and educational environments of Nigeria and Türkiye.

The aim of this study aligns with the overall purpose of writing autoethnography which is, as Méndez (2013) puts it, "to recreate the researcher's experience in a reflexive way" (p. 284). Its objective is to reflect on the author's professional journey as an English teacher, beginning in Nigeria's ESL context and continuing in Türkiye's EFL context. The research questions are as follows:

1. What challenges and opportunities arise when an English teacher transitions from an ESL to an EFL teaching context?
2. How does the use or avoidance of translation in English language classrooms affect students' ability to think in the target language and engage critically with texts?
3. How **does the overemphasis on grammar and exams in EFL contexts affect communicative competence and classroom practices?**

4. How can an EFL teacher's role as a cultural mediator influence students' views on language, culture, and identity while promoting critical thinking and reducing stereotypes?

Methodology

The current study is an example of *autoethnography:* a term derived from three Greek words, namely, *auto*, meaning *self*; *ethno*, meaning *people or culture*; and *graphy*, which means *writing*. Autoethnography "refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture" (Ellis, 2004, p. 36). A famous ethnographer, David Hayano was the first person who used it to describe studies in which anthropologists' study "their own" people (Ellis, 2004, p. 38). It is both a theoretical framework and a research methodology as it allows social scientists to explore "selves in relation with others" (Allen, 2017, p.73). As a "genre of academic writing, [autoethnography] draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues" (Poulos, 2021, p. 4). "As a toolbox within the qualitative research workshop" (Hayler, 2011, p. 19) autoethnography offers the researcher a rare opportunity to examine a particular aspect of their life critically from their perspectives to gain more insight into the how's and why's of a specific endeavour while at the same time making their private story a public "property." Thus, as Arikan (2015) puts it, "ethnographical research studies try to find answers to researchers' heart-felt questions" (p. 78). On the other hand, autoethnography stresses the need to view the political and sociocultural phenomena through the lens of an individual, through personal narratives and perspectives. "Autoethnography," writes Allen (2017), "recognizes an impossibility of escaping the language game in life and research" (p. 74). Autoethnographers engage in a reflective process in which they continuously assess and adjust their perspectives, personal experiences, and stories within the social and cultural frameworks because as Ellis and Flaherty (1992) rightly state, even "one's sense of self is conditioned by the peculiarities of time, place, and activity" (p. 10).

Data Collection

The data of autoethnography is derived mainly from the author's lived experiences, which as the primary source of autoethnographic data (Cooper & Lilyea, 2021). An autoethnographer can collect data from journal entries, self-reflective notes or from external sources such as governmental documents, certificates, emails, letters and photographs closely related to the experience under exploration. Personal memories, as well as "current observations," are also among the valuable sources from which autoethnographers commonly gather data (Choi, 2017). Sometimes researchers using the autoethnographic method combine their personally lived experiences and externally reported experiences and even scholarly literature related to the topic under investigation. Poulos's (2019) *Accidental Ethnography: An Inquiry Into Family Secrecy* in which the scholar studied "an important communication phenomenon," secrecy in the contemporary American society is a perfect example of this practice (Poulos, 2021, p. 7). In this study, the researcher used this mixed approach to source his data. The data were generated both internally from his memory, current observations, and personal reflection notes, and externally from several documents relevant to his academic and professional journey on his way to becoming an ESL/EFL teacher. In the latter category, the author also added insights drawn from

conversations with his colleagues past and present. This is an effective means of collecting autoethnographic data (Ghyasi, 2024; Perry, 2024).

Data analysis

An autoethnographer has many options when it comes to data analysis. Here are the four major ones, according to Cooper and Lilyea (2021): 1) *General Descriptive Qualitative Research;* 2) *Ethnographic Method;* 3) *Narrative Inquiry* and 4) *Arts-Based Qualitative Research* (p. 201). The researcher's choice in this study is General Descriptive Qualitative Research (GDQR) and it afforded him enough room for qualitative descriptions of his lived experience. Due to its flexibility, GDQR helped him identify and categorize patterns, themes, and provide a straightforward and accurate depiction of what occurred throughout his professional journey without necessarily resorting to intellectualization. However, this does not mean GDQR data analysis completely conceals any clues as to *why* the events in this autoethnography occurred or why the people reacted the way they did. There might be a lot of those clues, but being inclined to offer a descriptive summary of his experience, the author preferred to stay *on* their surface instead of digging deep into them. Providing a plain, comprehensive summary is a distinguishing feature of descriptive qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334).

The author employed data triangulation to enhance the credibility and depth of the study. The author used three primary data sources: personal memories supported by informal conversations with previous and current colleagues, official documents (such as certificates and employment letters) and researcher journaling. Personal memories provided the foundational narrative, while documents were analyzed to validate timelines, professional roles, and institutional affiliations. These documents were not inert as they clarified, confirmed, and could at times, challenge the author's narrative thread.

The process involved was as follows:

1. Narrative thematization: The author laid bare, sifted, and shaped his memories into thematic constellations, revealing moments of rupture, growth, adaptation, and resistance.
2. Documentary dialogue: For each key recollection, the author summoned relevant documents, not merely as proof, but as partners in meaning-making. A certificate, for instance, did not simply confirm a course; it shimmered with the unspoken labor he had endured to attain it.
3. Cross-textual weaving: The researcher placed memories and documents side by side. He noted alignments when they appeared, and when tensions surfaced, he embraced them as meaningful—perhaps exposing the space between what was lived and what was recorded.
4. Interpretive synthesis: Finally, the insights that emerged through this quiet convergence were not just analytical findings, but lived truths and personal history of a teacher's professional odyssey.

In this triangulated approach, no single strand held the whole truth. Instead, meaning emerged through the interplay, like sunlight refracted through three panes of glass, each bending it slightly, each essential to the color it cast. The researcher's overall aim in choosing triangulation was to enhance credibility and reduce the risk of bias inherent in relying on a single perspective.

Findings

Early Teaching Experiences in Nigeria

The researcher started his ESL teaching career in Kano State, Nigeria. As nature dictates it, the beginning of every worthy enterprise is tough. His was not an exception. The researcher's first two years were challenging: He was struggling with classroom management, time management and work stress. This period of the researcher's career was marked by its own uniqueness: dynamic eye-opening experiences and staggering indecision—whether to go on in the teaching profession and make it his career or abandon it for some more lucrative jobs as did some of his friends. However, just like in any other society, in Nigeria white-collar jobs were and still are hard to come by. Therefore, the researcher continued working as an English teacher. The author began his career in multi-ethnic Nigerian classrooms, where all the students shared one thing in common: English. The cultural and linguistic diversity of his students was intriguing. The student population at the schools diverse, reflecting Nigeria's rich cultural diversity. English served as the lingua franca which created a unified medium for instruction and communication. Moreover, most schools had a no-vernacular policy that outlawed speaking any other language apart from English. This policy prohibited the use of any local languages and promoted English immersion.

Against the backdrop of that policy, it was not surprising if *immersion* emerged as the author's preferred method. The immersion technique required students to be continuously surrounded by English in all their academic and social interactions within the school environment. This sustained exposure was intended to develop their linguistic competence in a natural and seamless manner. The immersion approach yielded notable improvements in the students' English proficiency. Moreover, the students developed greater confidence in using English across various contexts, from academic settings to everyday interactions.

Teaching in a linguistically diverse context–such as Nigeria, the researcher encountered several challenges. One significant challenge was addressing the varying degrees of English proficiency among the students. A notable demographic within his classrooms consisted of students who could be arguably be considered as L1 speakers. English functions as their first language (L1) due to their familial linguistic practices at home, where "elite" parents did not use their native languages to "help" their children acquire English from infancy and used it as their primary means of communication. Having been exposed to English from birth, students from homes where English was the sole language of interaction demonstrated native-like fluency. Conversely, there were other students from rural or disadvantaged social backgrounds, who had a minimal exposure to English outside the school premises. It was not uncommon to find students from these two parallel groups learning side by side under the same roof.

Transition Process

Two key motivations drove the researcher's transition from teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to English as a Foreign Language (EFL): his ambition to further his education and his lifelong passion for exploring different cultures.

Firstly, the aspiration to advance his academic qualifications played a significant role. After a rewarding tenure of teaching ESL in Nigeria, the author recognized the importance of continuous professional development and realized that his first degree (BA English) was not enough. Consequently, he sought to pursue a master's degree that would not only deepen his theoretical knowledge and practical skills but also position him more favorably for career advancement. This ambition led him to Türkiye, where he enrolled in a master's program designed to enhance his

expertise and professional competencies. The decision to undertake graduate studies was guided by two main objectives: to advance professionally as an educator equipped with modern methodologies, and to gain extensive knowledge of educational theories. However, as fate would have it, the author bagged his MA in English literature not ELT.

Secondly, the author's love and curiosity about other peoples' cultures, along with the idea of living abroad and engaging with a different culture was another motivation. Teaching EFL in Türkiye presented an unparalleled opportunity to engage with a different linguistic and cultural context. Furthermore, the author's cultural exploration was not merely a personal quest but also a professional endeavor to gain insights into diverse educational landscapes at the international level. Comprehending the cultural peculiarities of language learners in Türkiye facilitated a more effective adaptation of his teaching strategies and made him a better-prepared and more competent EFL teacher. The author had to own up that transitioning from teaching ESL in Nigeria to teaching EFL in Türkiye presented several challenges and necessitated significant adjustments. These challenges encompassed various pedagogical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions, each requiring thoughtful adaptation and resilience from the researcher's side as a teacher.

Challenges

(Mis)use of Translation

Sometimes, a bit of translation in a language classroom could aid learning by saving the teacher's priceless time and facilitating learners' understanding of the concept. But, as with everything, too much translation is bad. In the Nigerian ESL context, translation was minimal, as students used to communicate in English. It was not merely discouraged but explicitly prohibited by many school administrators and educators. Translation, or more broadly the use of any Nigerian local language by an English teacher within the school premises, was considered a taboo by some teachers, and a grave offense by others. However, if we give the matter a second thought, this overzealousness would be understandable if not justifiable. If all subjects are taught in English and social interactions are carried out using English as the medium, what excuse could an English teacher–who should act as a role model by all and sundry–have for using a "vernacular"? That was Nigeria.

On the contrary, in Türkiye, there is a heavy reliance on translation, however, the relevant curricula in effect in Türkiye are action-oriented in line with the tenets introduced by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Many English teachers primarily act as translators, focusing on direct word-for-word translation rather than promoting fluency and comprehension. This practice can hinder the development of natural language skills. For example, vocabulary lessons often involve translating lists of words rather than using them in context to enhance understanding. If it was a passage for reading comprehension, it would usually be translated into Turkish sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph during the reading activity. The author found this practice extremely challenging for two reasons. First, he did not possess sufficient mastery of the Turkish language and was therefore unable to translate even individual words, let alone entire paragraphs or passages. Second, the process was highly time-consuming. In addition, focusing on translation may reduce the emphasis on developing essential skills such as prediction, inference (understanding implicit meanings) and thinking directly in the target language. It can inhibit students from engaging critically with the text, as they may focus more on the mechanics of translation instead of the content and ideas. Thus, it can impede their ability to think critically about what they are reading.

Over-Emphasis on Grammar

In the Turkish EFL context, the instructional focus diverges sharply from the holistic language approach typical of the Nigerian ESL setting. Here in Türkiye, English grammar is often taught as a detached, self-sufficient linguistic phenomenon, isolated from the practical use of the language. Although the curriculum issued by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (2018) encourages English language teachers to introduce grammar inductively and in an integrated manner, there is a general tendency to prioritize the teaching of grammatical rules and structures—often at the expense of communicative competence. For an educator accustomed to the immersive, integrated language approach of ESL, this shift demanded a re-evaluation of one's professional outlook and teaching strategies. The author realized that he needed to develop techniques to bridge the gap between prescriptive grammar instruction and more dynamic, usage-based methods that promote real language "acquisition." The term *acquisition* appears in quotation marks to acknowledge the ongoing acquisition-versus-learning debate which lies beyond the scope of this study.

Excessive Focus on Exam

Another significant challenge was the pervasive, sometimes overwhelming, emphasis on exam-oriented teaching. The Turkish educational system places substantial weight on standardized testing, influencing classroom practices to become excessively test-centric while making learners and their teachers give little value to communication which is the goal of learning a language. In Nigeria, the author was used to teaching the content of the syllabus paying little attention to the exams except in the case of Senior Secondary Students in year three (SSSIII) who were preparing to take the Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (SSCE) and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The Nigerian ESL students were determined to learn (how to use) English in both their academic and social lives. In Turkiye, reverse is the case as most students believe they can do without English in their academic and social lives. In the early years of the author's career in Turkiye he use dto be baffled whenever students asked him to skip "irrelevant" topics and focus on the exam topics. However, that surprise has now disappeared after the author discovered the real status of the English language in the country.

Minimal Use of English

Whether in the classroom or outside the school, a student's success as a foreign language learner can be measured by their success or failure to communicate in the target language. The limited use of English both within and outside the school environment is discouraging. Unlike the ESL context in Nigeria, where English was a common communication medium, in Türkiye, English is rarely spoken, even within the four walls of the classroom. This scarcity of English usage hindered students' opportunities to practice and develop their language competencies. To counteract this, the researcher had to create a classroom environment that maximizes English exposure and motivates his students without contradicting the social realities of an EFL context. Some of the key strategies he has been deploying include using code-mixing and code-switching to accommodate the linguistic reality of bilingualism (as it is not practically easy to make English the exclusive means of instruction in the classrooms), incorporating more English in instructions; encouraging peer-to-peer English conversations, supplementing the syllabus by adding some activities (such as poetry recitation/presentation) and using multimedia resources to simulate an immersive language experience.

Rewards

Professional Growth

Being an L2 speaker of English who also teaches ESL and EFL, one *needs* (or is supposed) to be a melting pot of different cultures to "function" well as an international practitioner. In today's globalized world, intercultural competence is an invaluable professional skill for ESL and EFL teachers as it enables them to engage effectively in culturally diverse classrooms. The author's understanding of the Turkish culture and educational practices has gradually improved. Every day he gained more appreciation of the customs of his students and become a better practitioner. This professional development aided him in choosing the content of his lessons and the methods to be employed. It played a significant role in making him both dynamic and innovative in his day-to-day classroom activities, his relationship with his students and colleagues.

Another professional reward is getting "connected" internationally. Working as an EFL teacher in Türkiye helped the researcher to build a network of professional contacts from around the world. Collaborating with Turkish colleagues and other expatriate teachers afforded the author the opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices. The experience of teaching in an international context is a key indicator of a teacher's accomplishment and an added value on one's resumé. It signifies a dedication to continuous professional growth and a willingness to operate beyond one's comfort zone.

Personal Growth

Just as it helps teachers in their professional lives, cultural awareness and intercultural competence widen EFL practitioners' horizons. Immersing oneself in the Turkish culture, learning Turkish history and traditions, and witnessing an exhilarating lifestyle of one of the world's most magnificent ancient empires enriches the researcher's personal life; it broadens his worldview, too. Whenever the author personally reflects on how certain customs and traditions used to appear to him in his first year as an expatriate teacher in Türkiye and how he has not only become accustomed to them, but also been actively participating in and enjoying the same practices, he feels a great sense of personal accomplishment. Overcoming language barriers, cultural shocks, and misunderstandings rewarded him with a strong sense of independence, self-reliance, and resilience. The author's experiences as an EFL teacher in Türkiye have helped him cultivate an appreciation for multiculturalism; they helped him develop a facet of his personality responsible for artistic sensitivity—that part of one's personality that makes one feel at home with, and even enjoy, the cultural practices of another culture entirely different from one's own.

Role Modelling/Mentoring

It is one of the rarest pleasures of the teaching profession to wake up and find some youngsters trying to model their lives based on yours. The author argued that the actual pleasure comes from two things. The first is the feeling of self-accomplishment when others emulate you. The second is realizing you have, or are helping someone else find, their way in this maze we call life. Saying Türkiye is more developed than Nigeria is pointless; living a happy, meaningful life has little to do with a country's GDP. It is particularly true with the youths, who have very limited exposure in life and migrant teenage students, who are struggling to establish their identities. Sharing his personal stories of overcoming challenges and achieving success has given hope to many "hopeless" adolescent students, both among the Turkish and other nationalities like

Afghanis, Yemenis and Syrians. The author's success story inspired them, and many began actively involving him in their lives, considering him their role model.

Reducing Stereotypes and Prejudice

To some extent, all human beings are racist (Appiah & Gutmann, 1996). The real difference is the point where each one of us stands on the continuum of racism, from the mild or benign beginning to the malignant end. When we employ some concepts of racism to explain or describe people well without derogation, our intention–being harmless–justifies our action. We sound innocent. Discussing and debunking common stereotypes about Africa and Africans is one of the author's achievements. Through the analysis of diverse media representations of Africa, discussing the continent's rich history and achievements, and highlighting modern developments against the background of authentic historical documents, most of his students abandoned their previous stereotypical and prejudiced views of Africans. The teacher also encouraged the students to utilize the strategies of critical thinking to sift the chaff from the grain in this era of (mis)information flood.

Discussion

The author's early teaching experiences in Nigeria highlighted significant challenges related to classroom management, language policy, and socio-economic factors. These challenges are not peculiar to him as many newly-inducted teachers were found to experience disillusionment when they met the reality of teaching profession. Bano, Noreen, and Bashir (2019) found that many beginner-teachers were willing to leave the profession for better paying jobs due to dissatisfaction with the financial benefits. The social realities of limited white-collar job opportunities and the pressure to persist in teaching despite initial doubts highlighted the economic and cultural dimensions shaping teacher motivation and retention in the author's country of origin When the author started his teaching career in 2009, there was no official induction program for the newly inducted teachers in Nigeria (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria [TRCN], 2018). Some studies such as (Irshad, Ullah, & Shah, 2025) established a correlation between induction program for beginner-teachers and their ability to succeed in classroom management.

The strict no-vernacular policy, which enforced English-only use, reflects a widespread approach in many multilingual contexts. The aim is to maximize English immersion (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), but such English-only policies have been criticized for marginalizing students' native languages and cultural identities. They also have the potential of hindering meaningful learning and engagement (García & Wei, 2014; Cummins, 2000). The researcher's reliance on immersion techniques emerged as his only practical solution which aligns with the cconventional ELT practices in multi-cultural backgrounds (Ellis, 2015). The diverse proficiency levels of the student population challenged the author to come up with a pedagogical technique to handle the situation. As the author succeed in overcoming the challenge through the use of differentiated instruction, his adaptability increased. Teachers develop their personal identities by overcoming challenges they face in their classrooms (Toköz, 2023).

The researcher's transition from teaching ESL in Nigeria to EFL in Türkiye wasn't just a career move. It was a deep turning point in his professional life. Furthering his education was part of it, as many in this field know too well: if you don't keep learning, you're left behind. However, that wasn't the whole story. There was also something less visible, his lifelong urge to see how other people live, to learn what cannot be found in books, to stand on different soil and have a

first-hand experience of what it means to be an expatriate teacher of a foreign language. That's where things got complicated. The classroom changed. The students changed. And slowly, the teacher changed too. What had once been familiar (lesson planning, code-switching, even small jokes in class) had to be rethought, sometimes painfully. He wasn't just adding degrees or qualifications; he was slowly unlearning parts of himself to make room for new ones. So, this transition speaks not only to professional growth but to the way a teacher's identity bends, stretches, and sometimes breaks in new cultural spaces. It's not always neat. But it's real.

The author didn't set out to explore other cultures because someone told him to. It was something he had always been drawn to, even before he had the words for it. Later, he found out that what he was experiencing had already been written about. Researchers like Varghese et al. (2005) had shown how cross-cultural experiences shape teacher identity. But reading about it is one thing. Living it is something else. When he moved from Nigeria to Türkiye, many things he had taken for granted began to shift. His language, his teaching style, even his understanding of the classroom. He had to adjust, not just professionally but personally. There were mistakes. There was learning. And not all of it was easy. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) mention resilience. That word fits, but so do others: confusion, hesitation, small moments of doubt. Change didn't come all at once. It came slowly, in pieces, sometimes without him noticing. Johnson and Golombek (2002) describe international mobility as a kind of renewal. That may be true, but so is the struggle to find balance between two systems, two sets of expectations. Some days felt clear. Others didn't. But he kept going. He kept reflecting. He tried to make sense of it all, as Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) suggest teachers must do.

The (mis)use of translation has placed undue value on it within the Turkish EFL context. The researcher often remarked, half-jokingly, that to succeed as an English teacher in Türkiye, one needs Turkish more than English. This approach often leads to a superficial grasp of English. It limits students' ability to think and communicate directly in the target language. After a series of woeful attempts at making English an exclusive language of instruction in his classroom, the researcher realized that he was incapable of conquering a whole system. That was when he began to employ strategic code-mixing and code-switching as pedagogical tools. He started translating the essential English idioms to assist the students in grasping a unique feature of the language. Just as it is undeniably true that English is an idiomatic language, it has been shown that even at the university level, EFL students' poor communicative skills could be associated with their shallow knowledge of the idiomatic expressions that are abundant in the English language (Dokchandra & Boonnoon, 2023). Meanwhile, he continued to emphasize activities that promoted thinking in English by encouraging contextual understanding and paraphrasing techniques, such as immersive reading and writing tasks. In this way, the researcher succeeded in minimizing his students' over-reliance on translation.

As per the researcher, this approach stifles creativity and limits opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, communicative activities. To address this, the researcher adjusted accordingly. Teachers adapt their teaching philosophies based on students' language needs and sociocultural dynamics (Othman & Aljuhaish, 2021). He struggled to find a balance between preparing students for exams and incorporating engaging, communicative activities that fostered authentic language use, reflecting the natural, real-life value of English. The author began designing lessons that aligned with exam requirements while still promoting interactive and practical language skills. He also redesigned his test formats so that, in addition to grammar, lexis,

and structure, all four language skills–reading, writing, speaking, and listening–were incorporated. It has been an arduous, time-consuming task; however, it has proven to be highly rewarding.

When the researcher discovered the undue emphasis that Turkish EFL educators and students put on exams, he began to incorporate all the four language skills in his exams. That was in 2021in the second year of his EFL teaching career in Türkiye, and two years later at the beginning of the 2023/2024 academic year when the Turkish Ministry for National Education (2023) introduced a "new" format of compiling the English language examination in which all of the four skills–reading, writing, speaking and listening–must be tested. The author was thrilled for that was the format he had been using. On many occasions, people described his exam questions as bulky, over-ambitious or hard. Even though he didn't cave in, he had to admit that preparing exam questions that would take into account not only the four skills but also his students' abilities and the yearly scheme of work was not easy. Evaluating the essay sections of EFL high school students is even more challenging. Despite these challenges, the satisfaction of witnessing his students' academic growth outweighed all the stress he endured.

Mohammadi and Yousefi (2019) highlighted differing perceptions between teachers and learners regarding grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Arif et al. (2024) also demonstrated the crucial role of grammar instruction in supporting language acquisition and communicative competence.Their findings emphasized the value of explicit grammar teaching. In contrast, this study revealed that grammar often feels disconnected from real communication and is overly emphasized in the Turkish EFL classroom. This research is in line with Çiçek and Kayaoğlu (2024) who found that excessive focus on grammatical accuracy does not yield the most significant gains in overall proficiency. It, therefore, suggests a need to bridge the gap between form-focused instruction and meaningful language use.

In the beginning, it was hard for the author to increase the use of the target language (TL) in his classrooms, but after some time, he began to deploy a strategic use of code-switching. The researcher witnessed first-hand that total exclusion of L1 does not always support learning, particularly among EFL learners. This practice of pedagogic code-switching proved helpful as it eliminated students' speaking anxiety and introduced them to the reality of bi/multilingualism. Supporting this, Shahidan and Shahrom (2023) found that students often benefited from occasional code-switching, especially in clarifying instructions or complex grammar points.

This study's finding is that the author's exposure to Turkish culture and the unique professional practices in Türkiye's EFL context has facilitated his professional growth. Othman and Aljuhaish (2021) discovered that exposure to diverse cultural and linguistic settings helps teachers acquire a more inclusive professional identity (p. 525), and an EFL practitioner's ability to navigate the cultural milieu is a crucial aspect of their professional identity (Ghyasi, 2024). Teacher personality and identity are not static but evolve through interaction, reflection, and sociocultural experiences (Pishghadam, Golzar, & Miri, 2022). The author argued that this study, too, is an indicator of this professional development because, as Yazan (2019) observed, autoethnographic studies promote professional growth among ESL/EFL teachers. Fraser, Nejadgholi, and Kiritchenko (2021) employ a computational lens using the Stereotype Content Model to map how warmth and competence shape stereotypical beliefs. The scholars demonstrated that presenting anti-stereotype examples can effectively reduce biased perception and prejudices. This resonates with my classroom experience: by sharing my life stories as an international teacher and inviting my Turkish EFL students to open up about what they've heard or read about Africa and Africans, I was able to reduce stereotypes and increase their critical reasoning ability. It

worked like presenting anti-stereotype examples in action, shifting their views through lived, personal connection. Meanwhile, the observed shift toward mentoring and facilitation reflects a broader pedagogical and professional transformations in which EFL teachers embrace empathetic, learner-centered roles in response to changing educational systems. This result reflected Alosaimi's (2023) argument that teacher identity is not fixed but adaptively shaped by external challenges and evolving socio-educational demands. The researcher's role as a mentor to some of his students did not only help the students in question to navigate their lives but also acted a social means that assisted him to adapt to both social and professional realities of his new environment.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic reflection prompted a number of profound questions the researcher had previously been unwilling (or perhaps unprepared) to confront. Two of these questions deserve mention here: 1) Why is he not a native speaker of English? And 2) As a second-language speaker of English who earns a living by teaching the language, what, precisely, is the nature of his professional role? In this sense, the study functioned as a form of personal archaeology, an excavation of the self.

By revealing some aspects of the author's unconscious, it succeeded in doing what a dream does, according to Sigmund Freud (for Freud, the dream is the royal road to the Unconscious, and it is deep inside the Unconscious that humans' wildest desires and fears reside). This study unearthed some of the author's ingrained fears; it revealed the appalling insecurities buried deep in a hidden corner of his psychic cellar and forced him to come face to face with aspects of his cultural Oedipus complex.

As an African, the author knows it as a fact that he was/is–will never be–English, even though he was made "British." This is not because the researcher has dark skin or an L1 other than English. Even those Nigerians who abandoned their ancestral languages and adopted English as their L1 were never—and will never be—English. At its best, their benefit is an exchange in which they gave one and received two halves; at worst, they were duped because they gave charcoal in exchange for snow. The exchange partner departs, and the snow melts. Every single English word they utter betrays the secret they have spent their entire life trying to hide: the fact that they are not English. So, it has nothing to do with the author having an L1, but everything to do with the fact that, for the researcher to be human, he did not have to be English. Being a native speaker of English has been invariably associated with professional complacency (Perry, 2024). For the second question, what this study did, after bringing up the question: *What does a formerly colonized person do when he roams the globe teaching the language of the colonizer?* was more of complicating the issue than proposing any solution to it. This question compelled the researcher to pose more critical yet pertinent inquiries, such as: What are the language ideologies that shape the researcher and his "personhood"? (For the first time in his life, the researcher sought to uncover the covert assumptions that shaped a crucial aspect of his professional identity). Although these ideologies are powerful and prevalent in our "everyday language use," most individuals remain unaware of the language ideologies that influence their personal identities (Yazan, 2019, p. 39). Did the British colonists assist the author when they taught him to speak their tongue? Or did he, in turn, facilitate the growth of their language and culture? The supremacy of the English language is intrinsically linked to the dominance of English culture (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999). Is the author being instrumentalized by powerful cultural forces as an ambassador for an imperialist agenda? He proclaims that he is helping his students become global citizens. But is he?

Or is he merely echoing the so-called civilizing mission claimed by British colonialists? In the introduction to this study, the author expressed pride in being a user and speaker of his mother tongue, unwilling to forsake his ancestors by abandoning their language. However, as the study progressed, his initial confidence completely dissipated. If he could traverse the globe to teach peoples a language and culture different from his own, where did he derive such enormous confidence to assert that he had not forsaken his ancestors? Thus, as the author reflected on his sociocultural background and his personal and professional identities through this autoethnography, he realized that he should not have made such a sweeping claim. Now, he is uncertain whether he remains loyal to his ancestors simply by using the language they once spoke or whether he is merely demonstrating obstinate conservatism, unable to appreciate that language is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The researcher confidently attests that writing autoethnography compels one to engage in a sense-making process (Adams & Ellis, 2022).

The question–who helped whom–continues to weigh on the researcher's psyche, as it applies not only to the colonized–colonizer relationship. The researcher used to believe that by teaching his EFL students the English language, he was helping them participate more fully in worldwide communication because English has become a global lingua franca. Granted, it is. The problem wasn't solved, however: who helps whom? Isn't the researcher perpetuating the imperialist ideology he claims to abhor? To illustrate this point further, consider an Indian EFL teacher and her Saudi students. She teaches them English language skills, which both the students and their parents believe will be useful for academic, professional, and personal growth in the future, as we live in an increasingly worldwide society. She is helping them engage in the broader world. Simultaneously, the students provide her with employment opportunities, often in a more conducive environment than she may find in her home country. Does this example illustrate a typical symbiotic relationship, where two parties (neither of whom is a native speaker of English) gain significant advantages due to the rise of the English language to the status of the world's lingua franca? The same situation applies to the researcher, and this is a disturbing feature of autoethnography. Because writing an "authentic" autoethnography involves exposing one's vulnerable self (Ellis, 2004), it may force one to admit or articulate some bitter truths about oneself, one's identity, or even one's existence. The researcher believes that is precisely what this study has done to him.

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