

# *Autoethnography in TESOL Teacher Education: A Methodological Synthesis*

**HESSAMEDDIN GHANBAR** 

*Department of Applied Linguistics, Fer.C., Islamic Azad University  
Tehran, Iran*

**JABER KAMALI** 

*School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University  
Istanbul, Turkey*

## **Abstract**

In recent years, autoethnography has gained prominence as a research methodology in TESOL teacher education (TTE). Despite its growing popularity, no comprehensive methodological synthesis has been conducted to examine how this qualitative approach has been utilized in the field. Addressing this gap, we performed a systematic database search, identifying 145 studies that employed autoethnography in TTE. These studies were analyzed across a diverse range of dimensions, including inter alia, research foci, methodological designs, and other pertinent aspects. Our findings revealed that the majority of autoethnographies focused on teacher identity and agency, with critical and social justice theories serving as the predominant theoretical frameworks. Additionally, a typical autoethnography in this context was characterized by its longitudinal and collaborative nature, conducted in the United States within university settings, primarily involving in-service teachers and utilizing multiple data sources. Based on these findings, we provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the methodological rigor of future TESOL autoethnography.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, autoethnography has emerged as a valuable research methodology within TESOL teacher education (TTE) (Canagarah, 2012; Kennedy & De Costa, 2023; Mirhosseini, 2018; Yazan, 2019),

offering a means for educators to explore their personal narratives in relation to broader sociocultural and pedagogical contexts. By blending personal experience with critical analysis, autoethnography allows TESOL educators to reflect on their teaching identities, practices, and development (Yazan, 2024). It can also empower educators by giving them a platform to voice their own stories, challenges, and successes, ensuring they speak for themselves rather than being represented by others (Canagarajah, 2012). This can be particularly important for marginalized or underrepresented teachers, allowing their unique perspectives to inform the broader field (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015).

Given the growing body of autoethnographic work in TESOL, a methodological synthesis of this methodology in teacher education is warranted to provide a clear picture of characteristics, affordances, and limitations for the researchers who would like to employ this methodology in their future work. In recent years, scholars have conducted methodological syntheses of qualitative research across multiple perspectives, including technology-mediated TBLT (Chong & Plonsky, 2023), learner engagement with written corrective feedback (Shen & Chong, 2023), and qualitative coding and analysis (Riazi, Ghanbar, & Rezvani, 2023). However, there is a lack of methodological synthesis in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL focusing on specific methodology (see Ghanbar, Cinaglia, Randez, & De Costa, 2024). One of the recent papers using methodological synthesis on a qualitative approach is Ghanbar et al. (2024), which reviewed articles that employed narrative inquiry as a method, showing the importance of these types of studies.

Therefore, while some efforts have been made to synthesize autoethnographic research in AL, significant gaps remain, which we aim to address. First, they have adopted a broad focus, for instance, mainstream teacher education (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015), which we distinguish from TTE. Mainstream teacher education refers to general, cross-subject preparation without an explicit focus on English language teaching, while TTE refers to programs and contexts explicitly preparing English language teachers. Second, the scope of data in some cases has been relatively limited, as seen in Keleş (2022), who reviewed a constrained sample of 40 studies up to 2022 (this is one of the first worthy attempts). Therefore, despite its growing use, the application of autoethnography in TTE has yet to be systematically synthesized, leading to a gap in understanding its overall contribution to the field. Against this background and considering that we also have some personal incentives to do this study, the rationale for this study is threefold.

First, this study originates from the researchers' deep personal engagement with autoethnography (see Kamali, 2023, 2024) and research synthesis (see Ghanbar et al., 2024). This combination of interests enables a thorough, methodologically rigorous analysis of how autoethnography has been applied in TTE. Second, autoethnography involves the researcher as a central figure in the narrative, blending personal experience with academic inquiry. This intimate involvement has often been met with skepticism by reviewers who question the objectivity and rigor of such studies (Yazan, 2024). Accordingly, we explicitly examine how published TTE autoethnographies evidence methodological validity and trustworthiness and address these critiques. Third, this study addresses the ambiguity surrounding the stages of conducting autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015) and is an attempt to analyze the stages and other considerations that enhance the method's trustworthiness and transparency. Through this methodological synthesis, the study aims to establish a more rigorous and accepted framework for autoethnographic research in TTE, proving its relevance and importance in the field.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers attribute the origins of autoethnography to the 1960s (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012) and note its growing recognition and acceptance during the early 1970s. This emergence coincided with broader shifts in qualitative inquiry, namely greater reflexivity, attention to voice and positionality, and the "crisis of representation", which opened scholarly space for first-person, culturally situated accounts (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Richardson, 2000). Subsequent programmatic writings consolidated autoethnography as a methodology that links lived experience to cultural analysis and treats researcher subjectivity as a legitimate site of knowledge production (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography rests on interpretivist/constructivist, often critical/decolonial, assumptions that treat knowledge as situated, relational, and reflexively co-constructed. Lived experience is a primary site of data generation and theorizing, making the self-in-culture the unit of analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gannon, 2006). Meaning emerges through iterative reflexivity and by linking personal narrative to cultural and institutional formations (Adams et al., 2015; Richardson, 2000). Quality is assessed via trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, attained through transparency, thick description, and auditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Rather than value-free objectivity,

autoethnography seeks persuasive, attuned accounts with theoretical or social significance (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnography encompasses various definitions, making it challenging to establish a precise and universally accepted description (see Keleş, 2022). Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739), in an attempt to offer one such definition, describe it as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that reveals multiple layers of awareness, linking the personal with the cultural.” They presented autoethnography as a form of writing and research rooted in personal experience, which is intertwined with broader cultural contexts. By layering personal experiences with cultural analysis, autoethnography creates a bridge between individual identity and the larger social, historical, or cultural environment, offering insights into how the two influence each other (Adams et al., 2015). Chang’s (2008) concept of “triadic balance” among the elements of “auto,” “ethno,” and “graphy” emphasizes that autoethnography should maintain an ethnographic focus in its methodology, a cultural lens in its interpretation, and an autobiographical nature in its content. Gannon (2006) positioned autoethnography within decolonization/decolonial research paradigms, emphasizing its role in challenging traditional ethnographic practices that silenced researcher subjectivity while granting them full authority over representing others. In autoethnography, the researcher becomes both “the subject and object of research ... located in his or her particular space and time” (p. 475).

Autoethnography is often discussed alongside a family of adjacent labels, including, but not limited to, autobiographical ethnography, auto-observation, autopathography, critical autobiography, emotionalism narratives of the self, ethnobiography, ethnographic autobiography, ethnographic memoir, ethnographic poetics (for a complete list, see Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 739–740) but these terms are not interchangeable (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2022; Poulos, 2021). For instance, Earl and Usher (2016) highlight that autoethnography differs from other forms of self-study research primarily in its emphasis on engaging with larger social, cultural, and political issues through a personal lens, stating that “in autoethnography there is greater emphasis on the public/private nexus than in a self-study” (p. 49). Or Aronson (2000) distinguishes autopathography (first-person “patients’ tales,” also called “medical confessionals”) from the autoethnographic method, underscoring that the former label refers to illness-narrative genres written to help others achieve catharsis, educate/criticize carers, or even earn money, whereas autoethnography is a method-driven inquiry. Following Ellis and Bochner’s typology and subsequent reviews (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008), we treat autoethnography as a distinct qualitative methodology that explicitly couples

self-as-insider positioning with systematic, theory-linked cultural analysis and a reflexive method. However, this distinct qualitative methodology comes in different types, such as analytic (Anderson, 2006), critical (Yazan, 2019), evocative (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), narrative (Berger, 2001), poetic (Yang, 2024), performative (Sughrua, 2020), and reflexive (Grant, 2020), among several others (see Table 1 for the full list).

Even though the use of autoethnography has gained traction in language education (Yazan, 2024), it has faced criticism from both ethnographers and autobiographers, with each group finding fault from its own perspective (Ellis et al., 2011). Ethnographers critique autoethnographies for being too aesthetic and lacking rigor, theory, and analysis, while autobiographers argue they lack sufficient literary qualities (Ellis et al., 2011). To address and resolve these challenges, Chang (2008) identifies five key pitfalls that autoethnographers should guard against:

- (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.”

(Chang, 2008, p. 54)

Chang’s (2008) cautions can directly address these critiques by strengthening analytic rigor, enhancing cultural interpretation, and sharpening narrative craft. Kamali (2025b) also provides some strategies to overcome threats to trustworthiness in autoethnographic studies in applied linguistics (which can be extended to all fields) by classifying them in four categories, namely invisible data, over-subjectivity, otherness, and navel-gazing. The strategies he proposed are as follows: (i) triangulation, audit trails, and analytic memos; (ii) reflexive self-questioning and dialogic validation; (iii) negotiated, ethical representation; and (iv) methodological transparency aligned with qualitative evaluation criteria.

Thus, notwithstanding these critiques, attending to Chang’s (2008) cautions and adopting Kamali’s (2025b) trustworthiness strategies—among others—can help autoethnographers view their approach as an appropriate alternative to traditional research, which meets standards of both rigor and literary excellence.

Autoethnography in TESOL has been described as “case studies that follow the tradition of ethnographic research that are being acculturated into a postmodern academic world” (Duncan, 2004, p. 3). Although since the early 2000s, language education research has

**TABLE 1**  
**Types of autoethnography**

Type	Definition	Sources
Narrative	Centers lived experience as a story (scene, dialogue, plot) to link the personal and the cultural	Bochner and Ellis (2016)
Reflective	Uses systematic self-reflection on one's practice/experience to generate cultural insight	Chang (2008)
Evocative	Crafts emotionally compelling, literary narratives to invite identification and dialogue	Bochner and Ellis (2016)
Poetic	Uses poetry as inquiry and representation to analyze and present lived experience	Prendergast (2009)
Visual (video/photo)	Mobilizes still/moving images alongside reflexive writing to connect self to sociocultural contexts	Pink (2013)
Self (Solo)	A single researcher analyzes their own experience as cultural data	Adams et al. (2015)
Duo (joint)	Two researchers juxtapose dialogic life histories to co-construct meaning	Norris, Sawyer, and Lund (2012)
Tri	A three-voice, dialogic variant of collaborative autoethnography that builds shared analysis	Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2013)
Participatory	Invites participants as co-inquirers/co-authors to democratize knowledge production	Boylorn and Orbe (2020)
Collective	A group generates, analyzes, and interprets autobiographical materials together	Chang et al. (2013)
Co-constructed	Knowledge emerges through dialogic, relational storytelling and negotiated texts	Ellis et al. (2011)
Performative	Treats performance/embodied writing as both method and representation	Spry (2001)
Interpretive	Positions autoethnography within interpretive inquiry to produce thick, meaning-centered readings	Denzin (2014)
Community	Writes from/with a community, foregrounding positionality, relationships, and politics	Toyosaki, Penseau-Conway, Wendt, and Leathers (2009)
Multi-sited	Extends self-cultural inquiry across multiple places/contexts, adapting multi-sited logics	Marcus (1995); see also Chang (2008)
Critical	Situates lived experience within systems of power with an explicit social-justice intent	Boylorn and Orbe (2020)
Partial (layered account)	Presents experience as necessarily partial via layered voices/vignettes and reflexivity	Rambo Ronai (1995)
Indigenous	Grounds autoethnographic knowing in Indigenous epistemologies and storytelling	Kovach (2009); Smith (2012)
Psychoanalytic	Interprets autobiographical material through psychoanalytic theory to analyze desire, identity, and affect	Britzman (1998)
Collaborative	Two or more researchers jointly collect, analyze, and interpret autobiographical data	Chang et al. (2013)
Reflexive	Systematically interrogates the researcher's positioning, relationships, and power throughout the analysis	Finlay (2002)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Type	Definition	Sources
Betweener	Writes from “in-between” identities/locations to interrogate marginality and belonging	Diversi and Moreira (2017)
Analytic	Combines complete-member research, analytic reflexivity, and theoretical contribution beyond the self	Anderson (2006)

begun to embrace and acknowledge autoethnography, there are only a limited number of publications appearing in top-tier journals (Starfield, 2019). Recently, there has been a growing body of work that encourages scholars, teachers, and teacher educators in the field of TESOL to walk into this “less-treaded path” (Mirhosseini, 2018, p. 76) as a way to connect personal narratives with broader educational and cultural issues, thereby enriching the field’s understanding of language teaching and learning from diverse perspectives (De Costa, Gajasinghe, Ojha, & Rabie-Ahmed, 2022; Kamali, 2024; Yazan, 2023, 2024). TTE in particular stands out as one of the subfields within TESOL and AL where autoethnography is gaining increasing acceptance.

## Autoethnography in TESOL Teacher Education

Autoethnography, as a method of inquiry in TTE, gained momentum in almost the last decade. One of the first attempts to use autoethnography in teacher research was made by Canagarajah (2012) in a study where he employed autoethnography to show “the ways in which he negotiated the differing teaching practices and professional cultures of the periphery and the center in an effort to develop a strategic professional identity” (p. 258). Since then, autoethnography has been used in TTE to examine constructs from an emic view (insider meanings and perspectives) as contrasted with an etic stance that applies external, researcher-defined categories (Harris, 1976), including identity (Yazan, Pentón Herrera, & Rashed, 2023), agency (Zhu, Kim, & Weng, 2024), criticality (Kamali, 2023), and ideology (Fallas-Escobar, 2023), to name a few. Autoethnography, grounded in narrative-based language teacher education (Barkhuizen, 2011; Johnson & Golombek, 2002), has been further developed as a form of teacher research by Yazan (2019, 2023, 2024).

Critiques of autoethnography in TTE (e.g., alleged lack of rigor or system, over-reliance on the personal, and susceptibility to bias) echo

long-standing debates in qualitative inquiry (Ellis et al., 2011). Addressing these critiques requires situating autoethnography within the paradigmatic shifts that have reconfigured what counts as knowledge and who counts as a knower in education research. Under positivist and post-positivist assumptions, objectivity, generalizability, and researcher detachment are privileged; from this vantage point, first-person narratives can appear methodologically suspect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interpretivist/constructivist perspectives, by contrast, foreground meaning-making in context, researcher positionality, and the co-constructed nature of data. Within this frame, autoethnography's reflexive stance and thick description are not threats to validity but core strategies for producing situated, credible knowledge (Ellis et al., 2011).

Critical and poststructuralist lenses further extend these assumptions by examining power/knowledge, discourse, and identity as performed and relational. Autoethnography resonates here by making visible how teachers or teacher educators are produced through, and resist within, institutional and ideological formations (Kamali, 2025a; Yazan, 2019, 2023). Posthumanist and postqualitative orientations push further, decentering the autonomous subject and attending to affective, material, and more-than-human entanglements in teaching-learning ecologies (Pierre, 2014). Read across these paradigms, autoethnography is not a pure "personal blog" (Yazan, 2024, p. 20) but a family of approaches for theorizing experience as culturally, discursively, and materially constituted.

Methodologically, autoethnography differentiates itself from other qualitative approaches through distinctive commitments: (a) researcher-as-instrument and explicit reflexivity; (b) the analytic-evocative spectrum of writing aimed at both theorization and resonance; (c) ethical self-exposure and relational accountability; and (d) evaluative criteria attuned to substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact (Adams et al., 2022; Ellis et al., 2011). "Analytic autoethnography" emphasizes theoretical articulation and transparency in data handling (Anderson, 2006), while "evocative autoethnography" foregrounds storied, affect-laden representation (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Both strands can meet rigorous standards when procedures are explicit (data generation/archiving, coding/annotation of field texts, tracing of interpretive moves), claims are warranted, and ethical considerations are addressed (Adams et al., 2022).

Within TTE, these commitments justify the method's relevance. Autoethnography enables access to "backstage" dimensions of practice, including "hidden feelings, forgotten motivations, and suppressed emotions" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 261) that shape teacher learning yet rarely surface in conventional datasets. It supports teacher candidates'

systematic reflection on how beliefs, histories, and contexts inform emotion, identity, and agency within and beyond communities of practice (Yazan, 2019), aligning with contemporary accounts of the teacher as a situated, reflective, and value-laden professional (Korthagen, 2017). In parallel with the rise of action research, teacher research, and self-study in TTE (Peercy & Sharkey, 2020), autoethnography contributes a rigorous, reflexive, and theoretically grounded pathway for knowledge-building about teacher education.

## Research Synthesis on Autoethnography in TESOL (Teacher Education)

Autoethnography in TESOL sits within the broader narrative turn in applied linguistics that legitimized first-person, culturally situated accounts, such as diaries, linguistic biographies, autobiographies, and life-history interviews, as sources of knowledge about language learning, teaching, and identity (Barkhuizen, 2013; Pavlenko, 2003; Riessman, 2008). Early autobiographic narrative work in SLA and sociolinguistics demonstrated how learner journals and diaries trace affect, strategy use, agency, and shifting investments over time (Bailey, 1990; Benson & Nunan, 2005), while linguistic biographies and life-history interviews illuminated trajectories of multilingualism and social positioning that cannot be accessed through decontextualized measures (Norton, 2013). These traditions provide intellectual and methodological scaffolding for autoethnography by foregrounding voice, context, and representation.

Building on this foundation, autoethnography is understood as a qualitative methodology that systematically links lived experience to cultural analysis through reflexive, evocative, and analytically grounded storytelling (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2005). Within TTE, this approach offers a means to interrogate teacher identity, authority, and agency, particularly for novice and transnational teachers, by situating personal narratives within institutional, ideological, and historical ecologies (Kamali, 2025a; Norton, 2013; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Properly executed autoethnography in TTE thus demands clarity about epistemological stance, researcher positionality, relational ethics, and the representational choices that mediate between “experience” and “culture” (Ellis et al., 2011).

Despite increasing uptake, the field still lacks a comprehensive methodological synthesis focused specifically on autoethnography in TTE that details search strategies, inclusion/exclusion criteria, coding

schemes, and analytic procedures. Existing map-making efforts point to both promise and problems. Keleş (2022) synthesized autoethnographic work in applied linguistics (2010–2020) and found a predominance of memory-based personal narratives centered on language learning/teaching, frequent ambiguity around what counts as “autoethnography,” and limited methodological explication; the review called for stronger justification of methodological choices, deeper engagement with epistemology, and craft-conscious use of literary forms to render emotion and marginalization. This, however, was limited to only two databases—Google Scholar and EBSCO—which, while useful, lack the rigor and comprehensiveness of platforms like Scopus or Web of Science. Adamson and Muller’s (2024) focused look at collaborative autoethnography in applied linguistics further underscores processual, transformative aims, for example, flexible participation and growth-oriented reflexivity, yet its narrow scope leaves open broader questions of definitional boundaries, analytic rigor, and reporting standards across TTE.

To date, these appear to be the only research syntheses conducted in the field, and several factors may account for this gap. First, autoethnography remains relatively new to AL and TTE, having only gained traction over the past decade. Second, the continued preference for positivist research among gatekeepers, such as editors and reviewers, discourages researchers from dedicating time to autoethnographic studies, which are often met with rejection (Yazan, 2024). Third, conducting a synthesis of autoethnography is inherently challenging, given its diverse forms and the absence of a standardized definition within the field (Keleş, 2022). These factors collectively contribute to the scarcity of autoethnographic research in TTE, which leads to the lack of methodological synthesis on the subject.

Our aim in this study was to provide empirically grounded insights that will assist researchers, teachers, and teacher educators in understanding how autoethnography has been applied in the field and in adopting rigorous methodological practices. Specifically, this review seeks to identify the main research foci and theoretical frameworks, examine the contexts and participants, analyze methodological designs and technical features, and describe reporting practices in TTE autoethnographic studies.

In line with this purpose, the methodological synthesis (see Chong & Plonsky, 2023) was guided by the following overarching research questions:

RQ1. What are the main research foci and theoretical frameworks reported in TTE autoethnographic studies?

RQ2. In which contexts and with which participants have TTE autoethnographic studies been conducted?

RQ3. What methodological designs and technical features characterize TTE autoethnographic studies, including study type, temporal structure, data collection modalities, data sources, and analytic techniques?

RQ4. How do TTE autoethnographic studies report miscellaneous methodological aspects, including ethics, funding, researcher positionality, limitations, and research implications?

## METHOD

We adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and incorporated the recommendations outlined by Pigott and Polanin (2020), given that they provide a scientific and structured framework appropriate for conducting this methodological synthesis. Based on Chong and Plonsky (2023) and as delineated by Ghanbar, Dehghan-Chaleshtori, and Farsani (2025), a methodological synthesis, which has gained traction in the field, is a systematic review that critically examines and evaluates the research methods, designs, and analytical tools used within a specific domain or technique. It aims to identify trends, assess methodological rigor, and offer empirically grounded recommendations for improving future research practices; hence, this provides a foundation for shedding light on the autoethnography research in TTE and for answering the four aforementioned research questions.

To consider the element of systematicity in a methodological synthesis (Chong & Plonsky, 2023), the review process in this study, outlined in Figure 1, comprised four essential phases: (1) identification, (2) screening, (3) evaluation of eligibility, and (4) inclusion. It should be noted that providing transparent and comprehensive documentation of the review process enhances the research's quality and credibility, enabling readers to evaluate its methodology and facilitating the replication of the study.

### Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

This methodological synthesis was informed by the frameworks of prior systematic reviews in the field (e.g., Ghanbar et al., 2024) and aligned with Plonsky's (2014) guidelines for delineating a study's scope in terms of temporal, geographical, and substantive dimensions.

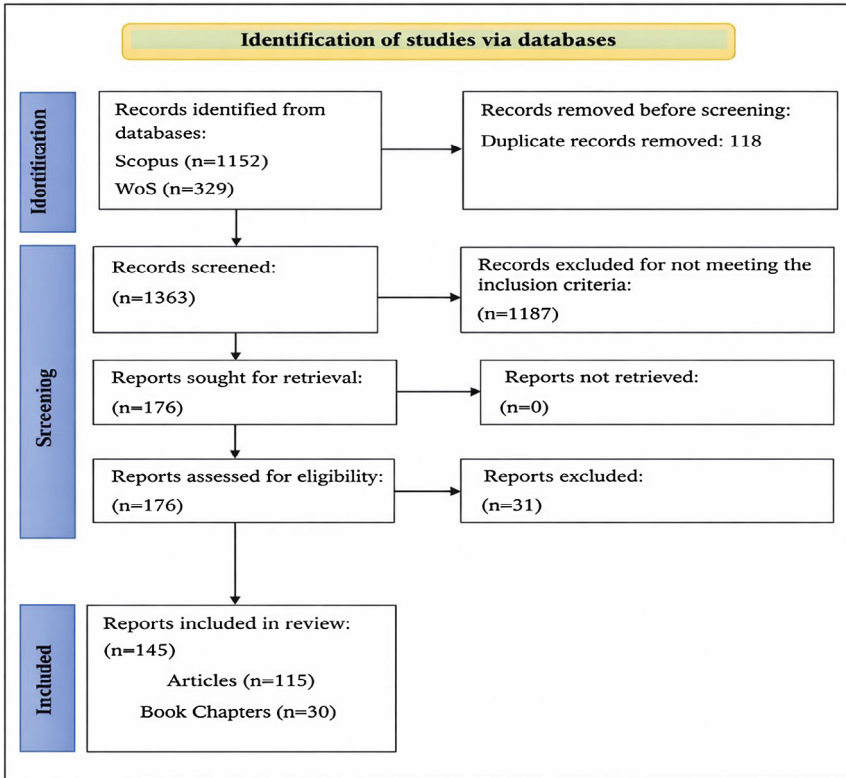


FIGURE 1. PRISMA flowchart of the methodological synthesis.

Accordingly, the inclusion criteria were systematically established as an initial step.

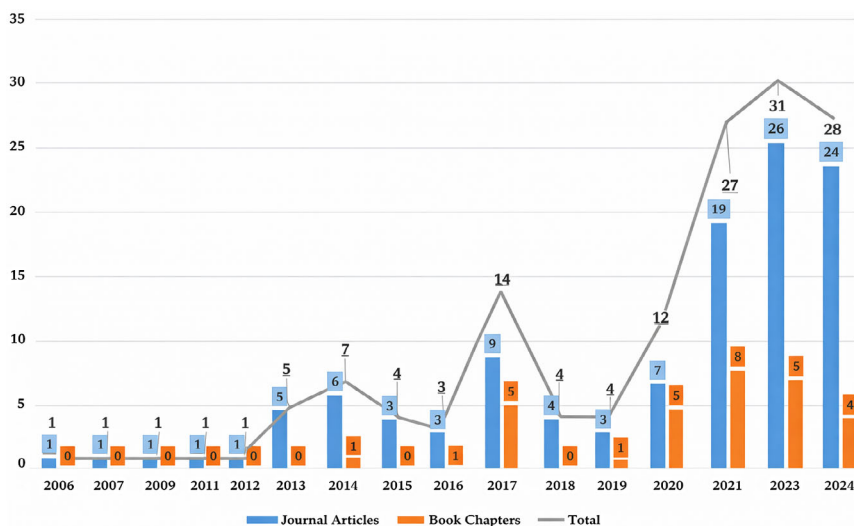
As for the substantive domain of this methodological synthesis, we meticulously followed the following inclusion criteria. So, included studies followed the below criteria:

- were empirical (i.e., encompassing first-hand data; see Riazi et al., 2023) (e.g., Mirhosseini, 2018 was excluded in this regard);
- was written in English;
- involved TESOL teachers (preservice or in-service), TESOL teacher educators (including teacher trainers, supervisors, or university faculty involved in teacher preparation), or TESOL teacher/researchers. Studies targeting teacher/researcher or teacher educator/researcher roles in TESOL contexts were also eligible (e.g., Cong-Lem, Truong, Zhu, & Long, 2024 was excluded in this regard);

- addressed topics relevant to TTE, such as pedagogy, critical pedagogy and empowerment, identity (e.g., teacher, intercultural, or professional identity), agency, emotion (e.g., emotional labor), well-being, intercultural competence, reflective practices, teacher education programs, or professional development.
- had to explicitly use the term “autoethnography” to describe its methodology (appearing in the title, abstract, or methods); otherwise, it is excluded (e.g., pieces labeled “narrative inquiry,” “reflective autobiography,” or “self-study” are out). Without this constraint, any self-reflective account could be swept in, diluting construct validity and blurring epistemological/methodological boundaries; requiring the explicit label preserves definitional clarity and makes screening replicable for other reviewers. Although earlier or related approaches such as “autobiographical narratives,” “auto-observations,” and “reflective self-studies” share family resemblances with autoethnography, they diverge in theoretical grounding and methodological procedures (Adams et al., 2022; Ellis et al., 2011; Poulos, 2021) (e.g., Pavlenko, 2007 was excluded in this regard);
- used one of the autoethnographic methods (e.g., collaborative, critical, narrative). Mixed-methods studies would be included if autoethnography was a primary component.

It should be noted that a typical study should have all the aforementioned features to be involved in this review. By applying these criteria, the substantive dimension of our methodological synthesis is clearly delineated, specifying the topics, participants, and methodological focus that define the scope of our methodological synthesis in TTE. In the most recent methodological synthesis of narrative inquiry, Ghanbar et al. (2024) considered several relevant variables for analysis, including research foci, theoretical frameworks, national and educational contexts, and a wide range of methodological issues. Their work informed the development of our coding scheme and the substantive domain of our study, which serves as a similar methodological synthesis on a related qualitative methodology, namely autoethnography (see the “Coding” section).

The temporal scope of this study encompassed scholarly works published between 1994 and August 2024. We deliberately focused on the past three decades (much wider than that of Keleş, 2022) to capture the contemporary development, methodological evolution, and emerging trends of autoethnography in TTE. Moreover, the 1990s were the decade when “autoethnography” became a method of choice for using personal experience and reflexivity to examine cultural experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Consequently, our study aimed to provide a



**FIGURE 2.** Temporal distribution of TTE autoethnographies (2006–2024) and publication types. Data for 2024 reflect publications up to August 27, 2024.

comprehensive synthesis of the field over this 30-year period. As can be seen in Figure 2, the first autoethnographic research found in the area of TTE was in 2006. Until 2013, autoethnography had a linear trend. Since 2013, the application of autoethnography in the field has demonstrated a generally upward trajectory, albeit with periodic fluctuations. Notably, its usage surged significantly in 2020 and continued to grow steadily, reaching its peak in 2023. As illustrated by the trendline in Figure 2, autoethnographic research in the field has exhibited an overall increasing trend across the examined period, spanning from 2004 to 2024.

Regarding the locational dimension, we targeted two prestigious databases: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. We selected Scopus as one of our primary databases due to its significant advantages over other available repositories. Scopus is recognized as “the largest curated abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed research literature” (Schotten, Aisati, Meester, Steinginga, & Ross, 2018, p. 32), offering extensive interdisciplinary coverage and facilitating replicable search processes. Similarly, WoS was included as a complementary primary database, reflecting its longstanding role in indexing high-impact journals in language education and applied linguistics. This decision is consistent with recent methodological syntheses (e.g., Ghanbar & Riaz, 2024; Hiver et al., 2024; Nicklin & Plonsky, 2020; Vitta et al., 2022), which have demonstrated the value of these two databases in identifying influential publications.

We acknowledge that additional databases such as ERIC, LLBA, Google Scholar, or researchers' websites might further expand the search coverage. Nonetheless, our search strategy prioritized both methodological rigor and the scholarly credibility of sources. Despite the fact that ERIC and LLBA are systematically curated, ERIC in particular indexes a broad range of academic works, including reports, dissertations, and journals without impact factors, which can introduce variability in quality and peer-review rigor. Additionally, preliminary cross-checks showed substantial overlap between the records indexed in LLBA and ERIC and those retrieved from the databases we used, confirming that expanding the search to these sources would likely have added redundancy rather than new eligible studies. Conversely, repositories such as Google Scholar and researchers' personal websites lack systematic curation and replicable indexing practices (see Cooper, 2016; see also Ghanbar & Riazi, 2024, for a related discussion on Google Scholar), which can compromise transparency and reproducibility. Consequently, our selections of databases balanced comprehensiveness with academic credibility, consistency, and methodological transparency. Of note, to reduce the risk of omitting relevant autoethnographic works, we also complemented our database searches with backward reference checking of the previous review of autoethnographic works in the field (Keleş, 2022), thereby extending coverage beyond our targeted two primary databases. We believe this combination ensured both methodological rigor and transparency, as well as comprehensiveness in garnering the corpus of autoethnographic works in TTE.

To retrieve autoethnographic studies relevant to TTE, a comprehensive search strategy was designed based on previous methodological syntheses. Variations of the term *autoethnography* (e.g., “autoethnography,” “auto ethnography,” “auto/ethnography,” “autoethnographic,” “auto ethnographic,” and “auto/ethnographic”) were combined with a wide range of TESOL- and language-related keywords (e.g., “language teaching,” “language learning,” “teacher education,” and “applied linguistics”) using Boolean operators (see [Supporting Information: Appendix E](#) for the search string used and other search specifications for each database). We applied equivalent database-specific syntax across Scopus and WoS in order to ensure comparability, using TITLE-ABS-KEY in Scopus and the corresponding TS = (Topic Search) field in WoS, which searches titles, abstracts, and author keywords. We constrained our net to studies written in English to ensure accessibility and consistency in screening, coding, and analysis, apart from the fact that English is the dominant language of publication in TESOL research. We reckoned that including non-English studies would have required additional translation resources and may

have introduced inconsistencies in interpreting methodological details, potentially affecting coding reliability. The complete Boolean search strings for both databases are provided in [Supporting Information: Appendix A](#), and the final search was completed on *August 27, 2024*, ensuring that the corpus reflects the most current research available.

The initial search yielded 1481 articles and book chapters – 1152 from Scopus and 329 from WoS – which were imported into Rayyan, a web-based tool for systematic reviews or methodological synthesis (Ouzzani, Hammady, Fedorowicz, & Elmagarmid, 2016). Rayyan supported the review process by facilitating blind screening of titles and abstracts, tagging inclusion and exclusion decisions, and flagging conflicts for resolution across reviewers. While Rayyan itself does not conduct methodological synthesis, its affordances in organizing references and documenting screening decisions enhanced the transparency, rigor, and replicability of our review. Rayyan was employed solely in our study during the screening phase to manage records, remove duplicates, and facilitate blind inclusion/exclusion decisions between reviewers. Of note, Rayyan's tagging, conflict-flagging, and audit trail functions streamlined our collaboration and enhanced the transparency and replicability of the screening process.

After identifying and removing 118 duplicates, 1363 items remained. Screening was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, we held four online meetings to discuss, refine, and calibrate the inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring shared understanding and consistency. We then divided the records and independently screened titles and abstracts against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as abstracts generally contained sufficient methodological and substantive information to determine eligibility at this stage. In the second stage, the full texts of studies that survived the abstract screening were retrieved and carefully reviewed to ensure they met our inclusion criteria.

It should be noted that to further ensure consistency, 20% of the records ( $n = 273$ ) were double-screened. This process yielded a raw agreement of 95.12%. Following Norouzian's (2021) recommendations, we complemented this with Cohen's  $\kappa$  and the Brennan–Prediger  $S$  index. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was calculated at 0.89, indicating almost perfect agreement, while the  $S$  index was 0.90, likewise showing a decent reliability index. Minor disagreements were resolved by consensus in two additional online meetings. This process resulted in 176 items for full-text screening (the second stage). Following a closer review, 31 records were excluded (e.g., Harumi, 2023; Pennington, 2024, which pertain to Japanese language education and to professional development in reading rather than TESOL), leaving 145 records: 29 book chapters and 116 journal articles (see [Supporting Information: Appendix A](#)).

## Coding

To address our research questions, we developed a coding scheme to extract relevant data for our methodological synthesis. This coding scheme was developed through an iterative and collaborative process of reading and discussing: (a) recommendations by prominent autoethnographic researchers in the field (Yazan, 2024); (b) prior reviews on autoethnography and other related methodological syntheses in the field (Adamson & Muller, 2024; Ghanbar et al., 2024; Keleş, 2022); and (c) technical literature on framing methodological synthesis in the field (Chong & Plonsky, 2023; Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018; Plonsky & Oswald, 2015). This coding scheme aimed to capture information on a wide range of variables in autoethnographies, and to do so, it was made up of five sections. The first section consisted of variables related to the research foci, research questions, and theoretical frameworks of autoethnographies. The second section focused on variables related to context and participants, including, inter alia, geographical location, and educational setting. The third section encompassed variables pertaining to methodological design technicalities in autoethnographies, such as the type of autoethnography as well as data coding and analysis. For example, we examined qualitative data analytic techniques as explicitly reported in each study and classified them according to established methodological traditions in the technical literature. To ensure consistency in coding, we adopted concise operational definitions from the technical literature. *Thematic analysis* was defined and considered by us as a flexible yet systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning (i.e., themes) across qualitative data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riazi et al., 2023). We also conceptualized *Qualitative Content analysis* as an analytic technique that goes beyond simple word counting by engaging in an in-depth examination of language to categorize extensive textual data into a manageable set of groups that convey comparable meanings (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Riazi et al., 2023 for an extended discussion and classifications of this technique). We also considered *Grounded Theory* as a systematic and iterative qualitative data analytic technique that aimed at generating theory inductively from empirical data rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. It involves a continuous interplay between data collection and analysis through coding, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling, allowing concepts and categories to *emerge* from the data and be progressively refined into a coherent theoretical explanation of a phenomenon (Glaser, 2011; see also Riazi et al., 2023 for an elaborate discussion on different types of grounded theory). These definitional boundaries, we

believe, guided the coding process and ensured analytic rigor and comparability across studies.

The final section of our coding instrument addressed additional reporting practices, including ethical safeguards (e.g., concealing participant identities using pseudonyms), as well as the reporting of research implications and limitations, an element newly introduced in this methodological synthesis and not considered in previous methodological syntheses (e.g., Ghanbar et al., 2024) (see **Supporting Information: Appendix B** for the complete list of variables targeted and **Appendix F** for the code book and the nature of variables). For all the variables in the coding scheme, we used different coding categories to code them, yet for two specific parts of the coding scheme, that is, research foci and theoretical framework, the related textual excerpts from each study were copied verbatim into the coding scheme.

Following Plonsky and Oswald's (2015) guidelines, we pilot-tested the initial coding instrument on a subset of 10 included studies. This stage revealed several ambiguities and redundancies, which we addressed through two rounds of revision informed by conceptual clarity and our feedback. During several online meetings and communications via email, we refined operational definitions, consolidated overlapping categories, and added missing variables to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant features in autoethnographic studies. We concurrently coded individual studies and checked them one by one and discussed inconsistencies. After 1 month of developing, discussing, and revising the coding scheme, we finally came up with the final version of the instrument. At this stage, to establish intercoder reliability and solidify the coding scheme, we two independently analyzed 20 randomly selected studies. The overall percent agreement for categorical variables (e.g., participants, geographical context, educational settings) was 99%. To complement this raw measure, we calculated Cohen's  $\kappa$  and  $S$  index for each section of the coding scheme (see Norouzian, 2021). The results demonstrated strong to almost perfect reliability across all sections: *context and participants* (99.3%,  $\kappa = 0.91$ ,  $S = 0.93$ ), *design features* (98.8%,  $\kappa = 0.87$ ,  $S = 0.89$ ), *methodological design features* (99.0%,  $\kappa = 0.88$ ,  $S = 0.90$ ), and *miscellaneous methodological aspects* (98.7%,  $\kappa = 0.85$ ,  $S = 0.88$ ). Averaged across all categories, our intercoder reliability remained almost robust (99% agreement,  $\kappa = 0.88$ ,  $S = 0.90$ ), signposting the consistency and replicability of the coding process. The final coding scheme includes 26 variables, and all codings and other related analyses are shared in **Supporting Information: Appendix B** (see also **Appendix F** for the code book and all decision rules).

## Data Analysis

To address the first research question, a frequency analysis was conducted to trace the trajectory of autoethnographic publications over the specified time period. We also employed descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to address the second research question, which aimed to shed light on various aspects of reporting practices in autoethnographic studies. Of note is the fact that this approach aligns with the methodological conventions of research syntheses in the field, where frequencies and percentages are commonly used to systematically evaluate methodological trends (Chong & Plonsky, 2023) (all calculations were implemented in Microsoft Excel). For the only continuously measured variable (i.e., the duration of the study) and in line with the aforementioned principle, we reported the mean, standard deviation, and median. For the analysis of two variables, namely theoretical frameworks and research foci, we employed bottom-up thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on the relevant textual excerpts from each study, which were copied verbatim into the coding scheme. The process began with a thorough reading of the selected studies to familiarize ourselves with the topic and content of articles, followed by initial coding of relevant sections of the texts. These codes were subsequently organized into potential sub-themes, which were further consolidated into emerging themes (see Ghanbar et al., 2024; Morea & Ghanbar, 2024, for a similar approach). The emerging themes for both theoretical frameworks and research foci were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data, maintaining consistency with the underlying patterns and concepts identified throughout the analysis. Of note, because this stage involved interpretive meaning-making rather than categorical coding, quantitative indices of interrater reliability were not applicable (i.e., for bottom-up thematic analysis, Cohen's kappa and percent agreement are not methodologically appropriate because the coding units are not predetermined categories, but emergent themes developed through interpretation). Instead, to ensure analytic rigor and trustworthiness, we engaged in peer debriefing and researcher triangulation (Creswell, 2003; Riazi et al., 2023), holding multiple online meetings to refine, compare, and reach consensus on the emerging themes.

## RESULTS

This section presents the results of the synthesis on various facets of TTE autoethnographic studies, covering research foci, theoretical

orientations, design and methodological features, ethical safeguards, grants, limitations, as well as research implications.

## RQ1. What Are the Main Research Foci and Theoretical Frameworks Reported in TTE Autoethnographic Studies?

Relating to the research foci of reviewed autoethnographic studies in TTE, thematic analysis of excerpts from articles yielded seven main themes, as represented in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, teacher identity and agency are the most recurrent themes ( $n = 33$ , 22.80%), followed by emotional labor and experiences ( $n = 17$ , 11.70%). Nonetheless, topics like the impact of cultural and sociopolitical contexts as well as teacher education and training have been less focused on in the studies ( $n = 19$ , 13.10% and  $n = 12$ , 8.30%, respectively). Relating to the research questions of autoethnographies, we observed that the majority of articles did not have any research question ( $n = 103$ , 72%), as opposed to merely 42 studies with research questions (see [Supporting Information: Appendix C](#) for all research questions of the reviewed studies). Pertaining to the theoretical frameworks, the majority of studies did not

**TABLE 2**  
**Themes and sub-themes of research foci of TTE autoethnographies**

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher identity and agency	Teacher identity development, agency, transnational identity, identity tensions, performativity	33	22.80
Emotional labor and experiences	Emotional labor, teacher emotions, emotional experiences in online teaching, empathy, critical literacy	17	11.70
Decolonial and critical perspectives	Decolonization, challenging native speakerism, raciolinguistic awareness, critical language studies	18	12.40
Pedagogical approaches and methods	Bilingual education, digital/multimodal methods, EIL/EMI/CLIL practices, collaborative methodologies	25	17.20
Professional development	Teacher professional growth, mentoring, self-directed PD, communities of practice	21	14.50
Cultural and sociopolitical contexts' impacts	Impact of neoliberal policies, coloniality, sociocultural influences, situated learning	19	13.10
Teacher education and training	Curriculum design, assessment practices, teacher candidate training, intercultural competence	12	8.30
		145	100

**TABLE 3**  
**Themes and sub-themes for theoretical orientations of TTE autoethnographies**

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Critical and social justice theories	Critical pedagogy, social justice and multiculturalism, critical literacy	7	16.28
Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT)	Activity Theory, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)	6	13.95
Sociocultural theory	Sociocultural theory, sociocultural learning theory	5	11.63
Identity and reflexivity	Identity theory, feminist standpoint, bi/multilingual identity	5	11.63
Postcolonial, decolonial, and transnational theories	Postcolonial and decolonial theories, transnational and intercultural competence	4	9.30
Multilingualism and language ideologies	Translanguaging theory, theories of linguistic imperialism and world englishes, dynamic model of multilingualism	4	9.30
Educational frameworks	Teaching for equity framework, adult education theory	4	9.30
Emotion and motivation	Emotional Appraisal Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	3	6.98
Social construction and dialogism	Social constructionism, dialogic theory	2	4.65
		43	100

explicitly mention their theoretical frameworks ( $n = 102$ , 70%). The thematic analysis of theoretical frameworks in those remaining 43 studies yielded the following 10 themes and sub-themes as presented in Table 3.

As illustrated, critical and social justice theories constitute the most frequently employed theoretical frameworks ( $n = 7$ , 16.28%) (e.g., Egitim & Watson, 2024; Mora, Cañas, Rodríguez, & Salazar, 2020), followed by activity theory and cultural-historical activity theory ( $n = 6$ , 13.95%) (e.g., Sánchez-Martín, 2020; Truong & Nguyen, 2024). Sociocultural theory ranks as the third most common framework ( $n = 5$ , 11.63%) (e.g., Bowen, Insuwan, Satienchayakorn, & Teedaaksornsakul, 2023; Saiphet, 2024), with a frequency comparable to that of identity and reflexivity frameworks (e.g., Herrando-Rodrigo, 2022). These are followed by postcolonial, decolonial, and transnational theories ( $n = 4$ , 9.30%) (e.g., Bowen et al., 2023; Saiphet, 2024), multilingualism and language ideology frameworks ( $n = 4$ , 9.30%) (e.g., Solano-Campos, 2014), and educational frameworks ( $n = 4$ , 9.30%) (e.g., Gagné, 2021). Emotion and motivation theories also appear with moderate frequency ( $n = 3$ , 6.98%) (e.g., McAlinden & Dobinson, 2022). Notably, certain frameworks, such as social constructivism and

dialogism (e.g., Ariza-Quiñones, Hernández-Polo, Lesmes-Lesmes, & Molina-Ramírez, 2022), have been only rarely adopted across the reviewed studies.

## RQ2. In Which Contexts and With Which Participants Have TTE Autoethnographic Studies Been Conducted?

Firstly, regarding the geographical contexts of autoethnographic studies, as can be seen in Figure 3, we noticed that most studies were conducted in the United States ( $n = 38$ , 26.21%), followed by Japan ( $n = 14$ , 9.66%) and China ( $n = 10$ , 6.90%).

Some studies were conducted across multiple countries, such as New Zealand and Switzerland, the USA and Brazil, Japan and Thailand, as well as the United States, Japan, Switzerland, and Indonesia, making up 7.59% of the TTE autoethnographies. Notably, our sample includes studies from a wide range of geographical contexts, with countries such as Korea, Mexico, Italy, Qatar, Norway, Egypt, Spain, Macau, Singapore, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the UAE each contributing a single study. These studies have been aggregated and categorized under “Other” for this analysis ( $n = 14$ , 9.66%).

As with educational contexts, as we represented in Figure 4, the majority of studies were conducted at a university ( $n = 94$ , 65%),

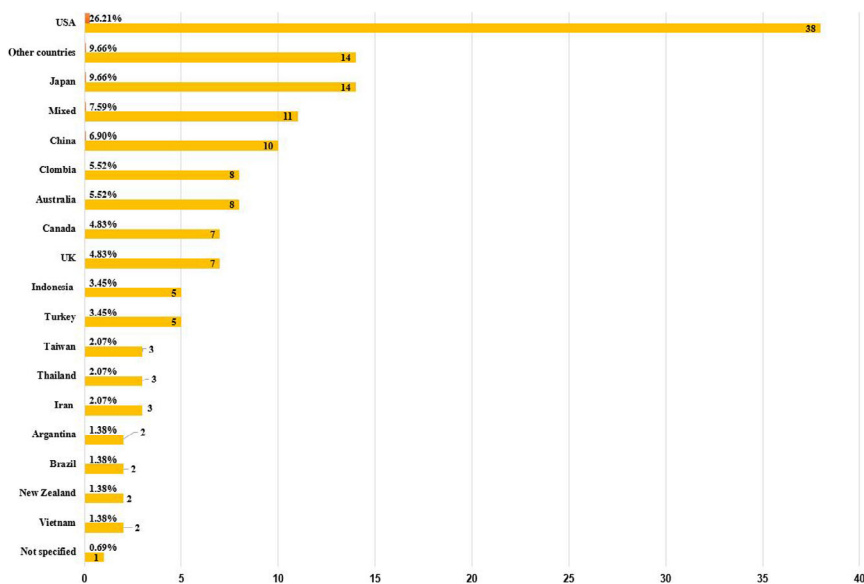


FIGURE 3. Geographical contexts of TTE autoethnographies.

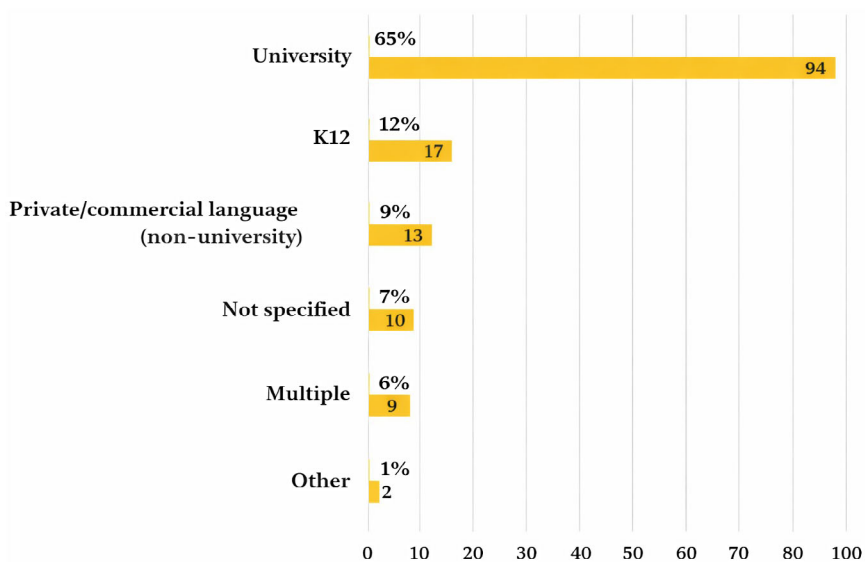


FIGURE 4. Educational contexts of TTE autoethnographies.

followed by K12 ( $n = 17$ , 12%). Of note, nine studies (6%) were implemented in two or more educational contexts, like university and K12, university and K12, and private institutions. We also observed that two autoethnographies were conducted in other educational milieus, like teacher associations or kindergartens (1%).

As can be seen in Figure 5, autoethnographies were conducted on a wide range of participants. Among different types of participants, in-service teachers were the most recruited ones (36%). Of note, most studies used more than one type of participant (e.g., learners, teachers, and researchers, or teachers and teacher candidates, or teachers and language learners), as we witnessed that the category of multiple was the second most frequent one (10%). In three studies, we also noticed other participants, such as international teaching assistants and K12 students. Of note, one study did not specify its participant type.

### RQ3. What Methodological Designs and Technical Features Characterize TTE Autoethnographic Studies, Including Study Type, Temporal Structure, Data Collection Modalities, Data Sources, and Analytic Techniques?

As it was depicted in Figure 6, a significant portion of autoethnographic studies (38.62%) did not explicitly mention their design type,

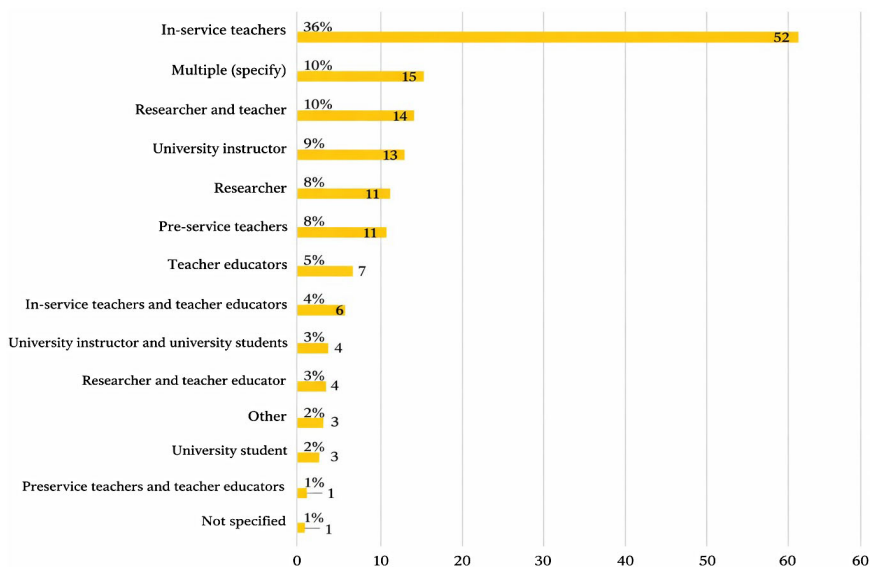


FIGURE 5. Recruited participants in TTE autoethnographies.

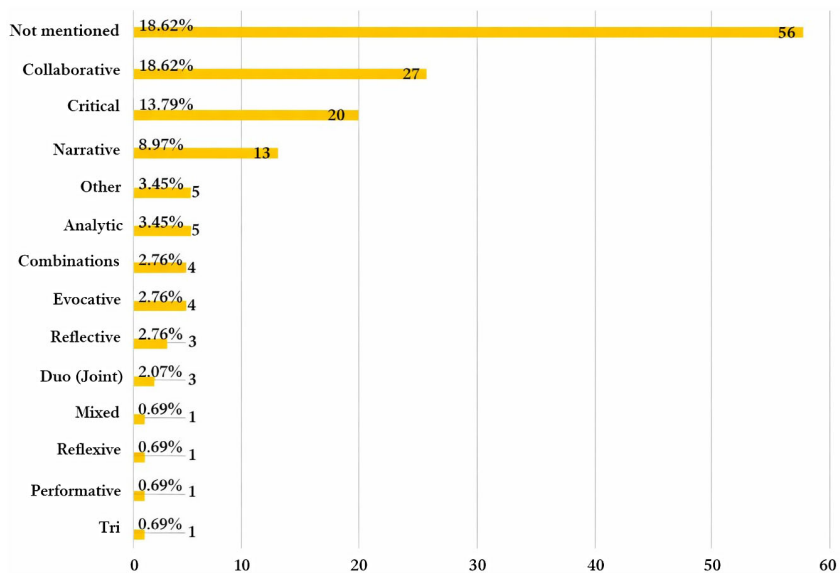


FIGURE 6. Design types of TTE autoethnographies.

highlighting a potential gap in their methodological transparency. Among the specified autoethnographic studies, *collaborative* (18.62%) and *critical* (13.79%) were most frequently used, signifying a strong preference for frameworks that emphasize collective perspectives and critical social analysis. *Narrative* autoethnography was also relatively common, appearing in 8.9% of studies, suggesting an inclination toward storytelling as a method for conveying insights in TTE. Other kinds of autoethnographies, encompassing *combinations of methods*, *analytic*, *reflective*, and *evocative*, were present but less frequent, each making up 4.14% to 2.76% of the sampled studies. Less commonly used methods, such as *duo* (joint) (2.07%) and individual cases of *tri*, *performative*, *reflexive* (0.7% each), demonstrate a more limited application in TTE autoethnographic research. Of note, there are other types of autoethnographies like critical emancipatory, critical community, and digital that comprised 2.76% of the reviewed studies. Overall, this distribution highlights the popularity of collaborative and critical frameworks in autoethnography, while underscoring the prevalence of studies lacking methodological transparency (see Figure 6 for more information on different types of autoethnographies and see also Table 1 for precise definitions of each type of autoethnography).

We also shed light on the temporal aspects of autoethnographic study design, categorizing them into longitudinal and cross-sectional studies. As can be seen in Figure 7, 47% of studies ( $n = 68$ ) were

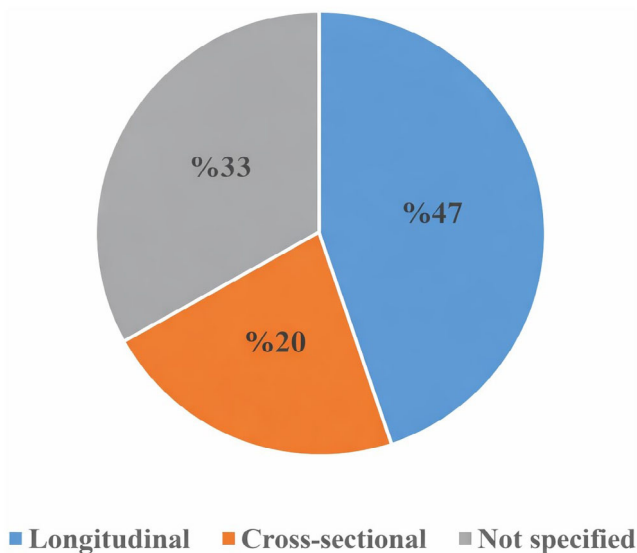


FIGURE 7. Temporal designs of TTE autoethnographies.

longitudinal and 20% ( $n = 29$ ) were cross-sectional. Nonetheless, in line with what we observed in the previous part, 33% of the studies reviewed ( $n = 48$ ) did not include sufficient detail to allow for classification within these categories, indicating a persistent lack of methodological transparency. Additionally, we reviewed the studies' timelines regarding their duration. We observed that 80 studies (55.17%) did not disclose information about their duration, while 65 studies (44.83%) specified the exact length. Additionally, we standardized all duration estimates to months, finding that the mean length of autoethnographic studies in TTE was 47.78 months ( $SD = 88.16$ ), with its median being 12 months (the distribution of lengths was not normal, with the skewness value of 2.53); study lengths ranged from a minimum of 1 month to a maximum of 360 months (30 years).

We also analyzed the data collection modalities used across the studies (see Figure 8), finding that most employed multimodal methods ( $n = 69$ ) or written data ( $n = 67$ ). Remarkably, only a small number of autoethnographic studies relied solely on spoken data ( $n = 9$ ).

As depicted in Figure 9, the combination of data sources was the most adopted option by autoethnographers in TTE ( $n = 87$ , 60%),

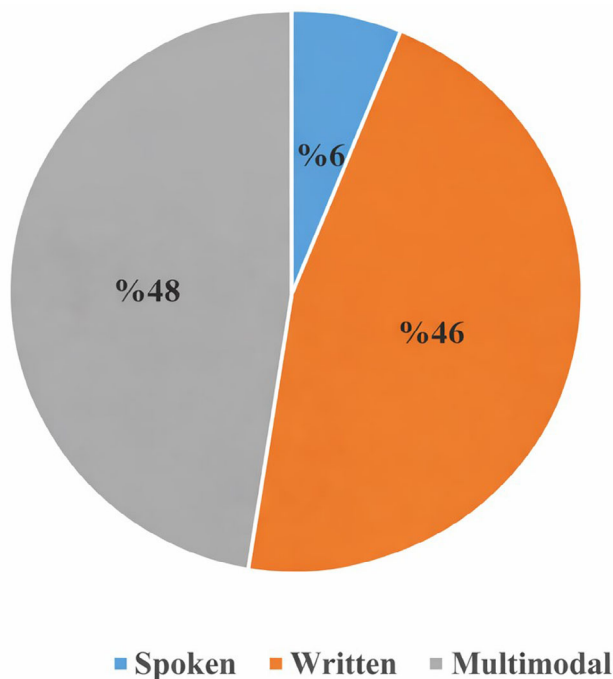


FIGURE 8. Data collection modality of TTE autoethnographies.

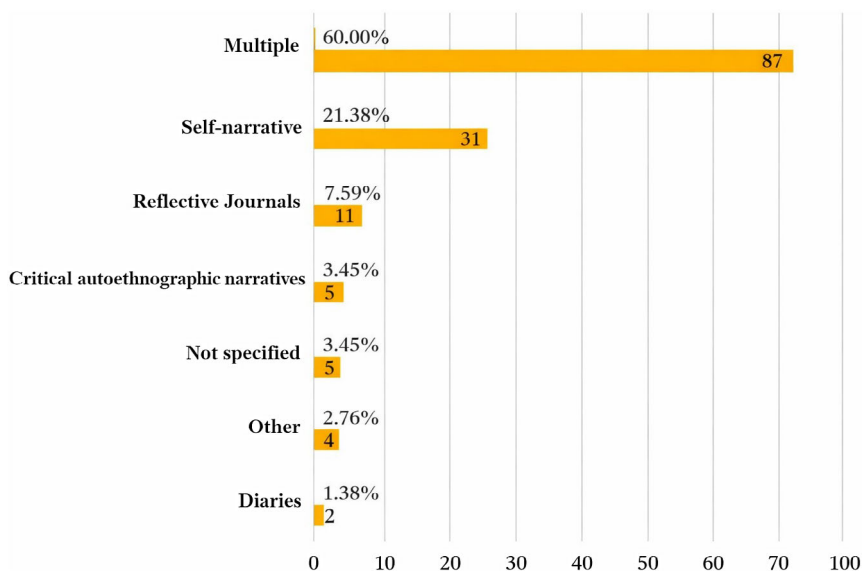


FIGURE 9. Data sources in TTE autoethnographies.

followed by self-narratives ( $n = 31$ , 21.38%) and reflective journals ( $n = 11$ , 7.59%). In some studies ( $n = 5$ , 3.45%), researchers adopted critical autoethnographic narratives. We also observed that some studies utilized some other less common data sources like discussion on social platforms, field notes, and poetry ( $n = 4$ , 2.76%). Regarding the mixed category, the most frequent one, we detailed these combinations in [Supporting Information: Appendix D](#) to show the wide array of data sources currently used in TTE autoethnographic research in TTE.

In the last part of this section, we delved into the data analysis of TTE autoethnographies and their methodological transparency. The first observation was that out of the total of 145 autoethnographies, 128 studies (88.28%) did not contain any information about the coding of the qualitative data, as opposed to merely 17 studies (11.72%), which elucidated the coding procedure. Pertaining to the coding techniques, we also shed light on the data analytic techniques that were exploited in TTE autoethnographies. As can be seen in [Figure 10](#), thematic analysis was the most frequently utilized technique in works ( $n = 36$ , 24.83%), followed by content analysis ( $n = 3$ , 2.07%), and grounded theory ( $n = 2$ , 1.38%). Additionally, a small subset of studies ( $n = 9$ , 6.21%) employed less commonly used methods, such as multimodal analysis, critical discourse analysis, and paradigmatic analysis. Notably, more than two-thirds of the studies ( $n = 93$ , 64.14%) failed to

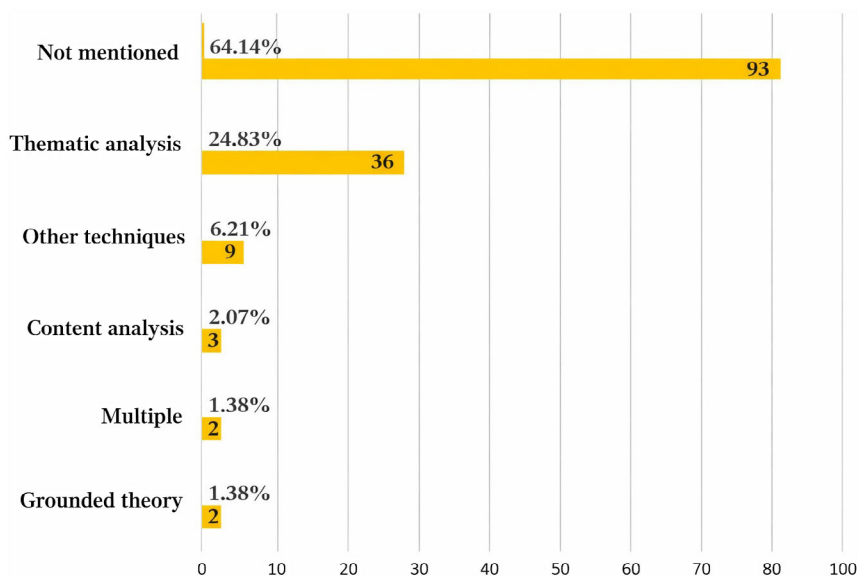


FIGURE 10. Data analytic techniques in TTE autoethnographies.

provide any information regarding their qualitative data analytic techniques.

#### RQ4. How Do TTE Autoethnographic Studies Report Miscellaneous Methodological Aspects, Including Ethics, Funding, Researcher Positionality, Limitations, and Research Implications?

Regarding ethical safeguards, the majority of studies ( $n = 122$ , 84.14%) did not address ethical considerations, in contrast to only 23 studies (15.86%) that did (the majority used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities). A similar trend was observed for grant reporting, with the vast majority ( $n = 141$ , 97.24%) not revealing any funding support. In terms of researcher positionality, we found that a significant proportion of studies ( $n = 102$ , 70.34%) lacked statements about the researcher's positionality. Yet, some studies presented an elaborate discussion on the author's positionality. For example, in his reflective narrative, Hauber-Özer (2019) explicitly situates himself within the research context by acknowledging his dual role as both an outsider, separated from Syrian participants by language and nationality, and a partial insider who shares the broader challenges of

migration. He further reflects on how his own experiences of immigration have shaped his understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Regarding the limitations of autoethnographic studies, 108 studies (74.48%) did not report any, whereas only a small proportion ( $n = 37$ , 25.52%) acknowledged limitations. For instance, Norley (2017) assigned a separate section to discuss the limitations of the research, recognizing critiques of autoethnography related to subjectivity and reflexivity. The author further acknowledged potential bias and issues of researcher integrity arising from their insider position and reliance on personal experience. Relating to research implications, 84 studies presented research implications (57.93%), apart from 61 studies (42.07%) that did not offer any implications. In a good exemplary study, Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018) articulated multiple implications, recommending longitudinal and triangulated approaches to explore hybrid EMI practices in Japan. They also emphasized the importance of examining student attitudes toward translanguaging and highlighted the methodological benefits of collaborative autoethnography in fostering reflexive dialogue among researchers. When it came to assigning a separate section for research implications, we found that only 14 autoethnographies (22.95%) included a dedicated section for this aspect of the research (see, e.g., Cinaglia, Montgomery, & Coss, 2024; Zhang, 2024). The implication sections varied in length across the studies, with 31 studies (51%) featuring more extended segments (more than 125 words) (see, e.g., Lu, 2024; Yuzlu, 2022), while 30 studies (49%) provided shorter sections (less than 125 words) (see, e.g., Jee, 2016; Nganga & Kambutu, 2024).

## DISCUSSION

This section examines the findings from the review of 145 studies in TTE that employed autoethnography as a research method. The discussion is framed within the broader context of existing literature on autoethnography and its application in TTE, offering insights into the intersection of these fields.

### Research Focus and Design

This methodological synthesis identifies seven main research foci within TTE autoethnographic studies, with teacher identity and agency being the most prevalent. These themes reflect the dominant trend in autoethnography as a narrative methodology that supports teachers'

identity negotiation and professional growth (Yazan, 2019). Although this aligns with much of the literature (Kamali, 2023, 2024), it challenges Zhu et al.'s (2024) claim that teacher agency has been underexplored through autoethnography. Additionally, 24% of studies centered on themes of criticality, decolonialism, and emotional experiences such as vulnerability and labor, suggesting an increased interest in power dynamics and the affective dimensions of teaching. Interestingly, many studies did not clearly articulate a theoretical framework, consistent with the methodological nature of autoethnography that prioritizes personal narratives over structured theory (Yazan, Canagarajah, & Jain, 2020). Yet around 30% employed critical or social justice frameworks, indicating that autoethnography in TTE is increasingly used to address systemic inequalities and promote inclusivity in TESOL (Canagarajah, 2012). While the lack of explicit theoretical grounding can hinder credibility, it also reflects the unique methodological stance of autoethnography. Yazan (2024) argues that applying theoretical frameworks can strengthen autoethnographers' positioning within scholarly communities.

A significant gap noted in this synthesis is the methodological opacity in many studies. Over one-third failed to specify their methodological design, and nearly two-thirds lacked clear data analysis strategies, partially validating critiques of autoethnography as insufficiently rigorous. However, collaborative approaches like duoethnography offer a solution, blending reflexivity with multiple perspectives to increase both credibility and interpretive richness (Chang et al., 2013). Although only 47% of studies labeled themselves as longitudinal, most inherently are. Autoethnographic narratives often rely on reflective memory, spanning extended periods of teachers' lives (Kamali, 2023). These retrospective accounts allow researchers to explore identity formation over time, even without formal longitudinal frameworks.

Finally, the synthesis foregrounds the creative, multimodal character of data in autoethnography, using multimodal in its broad sense: the coordinated use of textual (fieldnotes, reflective journals, CANs; e.g., Zhu et al., 2024), visual (photographs, screenshots, maps, artifacts, collage; e.g., Yu, 2022), auditory (audio diaries, voice notes; e.g., Pérez et al., 2023), video/performative (classroom recordings, staged re-enactments; e.g., Thao & Thuy, 2024), embodied (gesture/posture cueing; e.g., Chen & Lin, 2024), and platform-mediated traces (social media, messaging apps; e.g., Graham, Pan, & Eslami, 2021). Rather than merely adding formats, these modes provide distinct epistemic affordances; for example, images and maps capture emplacement and materiality, and audio/video preserve temporality, affect, and interactional grain; platform traces document public/private audienceing and visibility work, thereby enabling cross-modal triangulation and

memory work that deepens analysis. In TTE specifically, such multi-modality surfaces the backstage of teacher learning (emotion, identity, micro-decision-making) that single-mode textual accounts can miss, strengthening both credibility and pedagogical utility of findings.

## Demographic Peculiarities

This methodological synthesis reveals several significant trends and gaps. Of note, 26% of the studies were conducted in the United States, underscoring the country's dominant influence in shaping autoethnographic scholarship. This aligns with broader critiques of U.S. hegemony in academic research and raises concerns about the under-representation of diverse voices, particularly from less frequently represented regions. While Japan and China together account for nearly 24% of the studies, greater geographical diversity is needed to challenge the intellectual and cultural dominance currently present in the field.

Most of the reviewed studies were situated in higher education contexts (e.g., Bowen et al., 2023; McAllum, 2016; Ng, 2018) and often conducted by senior scholars (e.g., Canagarajah, 2012; De Costa et al., 2022; Yazan, 2023). This clustering may indicate limited inclusivity in authorship within autoethnographic publishing. The proportion focusing on in-service teachers (36%) appears consistent with a premium placed on seniority and experience.

Nonetheless, some studies have disrupted this norm. Scholars such as Yazan (2019) and Kamali (2023) have employed autoethnography to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers and mentors, illustrating the method's potential to capture a broader spectrum of perspectives. These exceptions demonstrate autoethnography's versatility and underscore the need for more inclusive approaches that extend beyond higher education and established voices, ultimately contributing to a more equitable understanding of teacher development in TESOL.

## Ethics, Limitations, and Implications

Our methodological synthesis uncovered notable gaps in ethical and methodological transparency across autoethnographic studies in teacher education. Most strikingly, nearly 85% of the studies did not include explicit ethical considerations. This absence may be due to the assumption that autoethnography, with its deeply reflective and self-critical nature, inherently addresses ethical issues. Because an

autoethnographer is both the subject and the researcher, the conventional separation between observer and observed dissolves, aligning with Gannon's (2006) view of autoethnography as a "corrective movement" against traditional research paradigms. The researcher's embodied experience becomes the central data source, blurring lines between subjectivity and inquiry. While this approach challenges dominant notions of objectivity and representation, it can also lead to the mistaken belief that formal ethical protocols are unnecessary.

Another key finding is that nearly two-thirds of the studies lacked a section discussing their limitations. This omission may stem from the personal and subjective foundations of autoethnographic work, which make it difficult to frame limitations through traditional concepts like generalizability or objectivity. Authors may prioritize narrative depth over methodological critique, potentially overlooking the importance of reflecting on the scope and constraints of their research. However, explicitly acknowledging limitations can enhance transparency and help readers better understand the influence of context-specific factors on the findings.

Finally, more than half of the studies did not articulate broader implications. This is unsurprising given the context-bound nature of autoethnography, which draws heavily from the researcher's specific cultural and social environment. While this specificity allows for richly detailed insights, it also limits the ability to generalize findings or connect them to broader theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, making space for discussions of implications, even within localized contexts, could improve the impact and relevance of autoethnographic contributions in teacher education research.

## FUTURE TRAJECTORIES

As autoethnography is gaining momentum in TTE, we will explore the considerations for future trajectories of this methodology in the field, informed by our methodological synthesis. While momentum is evident, a forward-looking agenda also requires grappling with concerns about analytic warrant, reporting standards, and inequities in who gets to publish autoethnography in TTE.

### Continuing to be Innovative

Our results support Chang's (2008) assertion that autoethnography inherently involves innovative data collection techniques that are rarely encountered in other research methodologies. The studies we

reviewed employed various creative and unconventional methods, highlighting the versatility and richness of autoethnographic inquiry. Examples include photographs (Yu, 2022), drawings (Collins, 2020), maps and photos (Yu, 2022), social networking platform messaging (Bowen et al., 2023), and even literary forms such as poems and proverbs (Fall, 2019). These diverse approaches demonstrate the expansive potential of autoethnographic data collection to capture nuanced, deeply personal, and contextually rich insights. At the same time, researchers are advised to pair creativity with explicit reporting of analytic moves, reflexive practices, and ethical boundaries (e.g., positionality, data-sharing limits) so that innovation is legible and reviewable rather than merely performative (Adams et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

We, alongside others (e.g., Mirhosseini, 2018; Yazan, 2024), strongly recommend that researchers continue to embrace and extend this trend of methodological innovation. Concretely, future work should (a) align with field-wide reporting guidance for qualitative research (O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014; Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007); (b) make reflexivity practices auditable (e.g., reflexive journals, decision trails; Braun & Clarke, 2022); and (c) describe analysis in sufficient detail to allow evaluators to trace claims from narrative episodes to cultural/institutional arguments (Tracy, 2010). In TESOL specifically, newer genres such as poetic and collaborative autoethnography illustrate how aesthetic experimentation can still meet criteria for quality when procedures and warrants are made explicit (Yang, 2025).

## Practicing What We Preach

Autoethnography emerged as a transformative methodology aimed at dismantling traditional power structures within the social sciences, offering a platform to amplify diverse voices and foster autonomy for all participants (Rose, 2019). It challenges the dominance of authoritative, detached research by placing lived experiences and personal narratives at the center of inquiry (Adams et al., 2015). However, the studies in our corpus reveal a dissonance between this emancipatory vision and current practice. Most of the research was authored by established scholars within the field rather than by a broader range of voices, including those at the margins who are most in need of representation. Because our corpus comprises only accepted, published articles, we are unable to conclude rejected manuscripts or the grounds for their rejection, including potential quality considerations. Consequently, all inferences should be interpreted as contingent upon

acceptance status, describing published work rather than the entire set of submissions, some of which may have been declined for sound quality-related reasons.

This imbalance highlights the need for gatekeepers, including editors, reviewers, and academic institutions, to address the underrepresentation of diverse voices in the field. We propose several actions to move closer to autoethnography's promise of democratizing knowledge production (Allen-Collinson, 2013). First, gatekeepers should actively encourage contributions from novice researchers, practitioners, and individuals outside the traditional academic arena, perhaps through mentoring or collaboration opportunities. Journals should also reduce bias and raise rigor by intentionally broadening reviewer pools (tracking methodological expertise, sector, geography, and career stage), using a short method-specific checklist (reflexivity; relational ethics/consent and anonymization; evidentiary warrants that link personal narrative to cultural/institutional analysis; analytic transparency; contribution beyond "story value"), offering brief calibration modules with exemplars for editors and reviewers, requiring structured author disclosures (positionality and data boundaries), providing revise-and-mentor pathways for promising early-career submissions, and including practitioner-scholars and qualitative experts on editorial boards. Interested academic institutions where qualitative methods are taught should also take some actions: elective mini-modules on autoethnography for teacher-researchers; explicit rubrics that operationalize analytic rigor; micro-grants and mentoring for practitioner projects; and curated repositories of annotated exemplars from language teacher education to help novices connect lived experience to institutional dynamics in principled, analytically grounded ways. Finally, the field must reconsider the criteria for expertise in autoethnography, emphasizing lived experience and the authenticity of personal narratives alongside scholarly rigor. By making these changes, we can create a more inclusive and transformative research environment that truly reflects the diverse voices autoethnography aims to amplify.

## Building Trustworthiness

While it may be challenging – and arguably unnecessary – for certain variations of autoethnography, such as evocative autoethnography, to provide detailed accounts of methodological features like theoretical frameworks (Yazan, 2024), our synthesis highlights a recurring issue: the difficulty of establishing trustworthiness as defined in qualitative research. Trustworthiness, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), serves as a

cornerstone for evaluating the quality and reliability of qualitative inquiries. In line with Keleş (2022), our analysis revealed that some autoethnographic studies fall short of these standards, particularly in terms of methodological rigor. Many studies lacked clearly articulated research designs and data analytic techniques, consistent application of methods, or explicit justifications for their choices, which made assessing their validity and contribution to the field challenging. For example, as Riazi et al. (2023) and Tracy (2010) asserted, the credibility of qualitative studies largely depends on how well the researchers explicate data coding and analysis (Ghanbar & Rezvani 2024a, 2024b). This is especially significant for autoethnography, a methodology already under scrutiny for its subjective and narrative-driven nature (Chang, 2008). Without stronger methodological foundations, there is a risk of undermining the field's credibility and its potential for impactful scholarly contributions. Recent reviews broaden this beyond the classic trustworthiness quartet, emphasizing “big-tent” criteria (e.g., sincerity, resonance, meaningful coherence) and urging explicit reflexive labor as evidence of analytic rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Tracy, 2010). Practically, this means documenting how narratives were generated and curated, how alternative readings were considered, and how personal episodes were linked to sociocultural claims (O'Brien et al., 2014).

To address these gaps, we advocate for a balanced approach that respects the creative and introspective essence of autoethnography while incorporating clearer methodological practices. This could include providing a rationale for the chosen approach, outlining data collection and analysis procedures more explicitly, and connecting personal narratives to broader theoretical or social frameworks (e.g., Kamali, 2024; Qin, Zhu, Cheng, Shen, & Zhang, 2023). We further recommend using values-informed reporting checklists as scaffolds (adapted thoughtfully for autoethnography; Braun & Clarke, 2025), maintaining reflexive decision trails (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and leveraging collaborative autoethnography to render analysis intersubjectively checkable (Chang et al., 2013), where appropriate. Recent discussions of qualitative rigor in education (Kamali, 2025b) underscore that such transparency is compatible with interpretivist and aesthetic commitments (Tracy, 2010).

## Developing Implications

For any research in AL, as an Epistemological Backbone of TTE (like any other discipline) to meaningfully contribute to its field, it must establish clear and actionable implications that extend beyond

the immediate scope of the study. This is particularly critical for autoethnographic research, which inherently centers on the personal experiences and narratives of the autoethnographer (Adams et al., 2015). While the intimate and reflective nature of autoethnography offers unique insights, its impact risks being diminished if it fails to connect individual stories to broader academic, professional, or societal contexts (Yazan, 2024). Autoethnography holds the potential to bridge the personal and the universal, translating deeply personal experiences into knowledge that resonates with diverse audiences (Berger, 2015). However, our synthesis suggests that many autoethnographic studies do not fully capitalize on this potential. Some focus solely on recounting personal journeys, which may be true based on some autoethnographers (see Yazan, 2024), without drawing explicit connections to larger theoretical frameworks, pressing social issues, or the shared challenges of others in similar contexts. This lack of discussion of implications limits the relevance of such studies and hinders their ability to advance the field of inquiry.

To create meaningful implications, autoethnographic researchers must strive to situate their personal narratives within a broader framework (Mitra, 2010). This can be achieved by identifying and articulating the study's implications for theory, practice, or policy. For instance, how does a teacher's reflective journey inform pedagogical strategies in diverse classrooms? Or how can an individual's struggles with identity formation shed light on systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities? We therefore recommend closing the analytic arc of each study with (a) a brief warrant chain from episode to concept to implication; (b) an explicit statement of scope/transferability; and (c) a note on actionable next steps for practitioners, programs, or policy (Tracy, 2010). Ultimately, the true strength of autoethnography lies in its ability to create a dialogue between the self and the world (Klevan & Grant, 2022). Such moves are increasingly visible in contemporary TTE autoethnography and can serve as templates for future studies aiming for both resonance and practical uptake (Yang, 2025).

## CONCLUSIONS

This methodological synthesis of 145 autoethnographic studies in TESOL teacher education sheds light on the richness of reflective inquiry into teacher identity, agency, and emotional experience. At the same time, it brings into focus persistent gaps in theoretical grounding, methodological transparency, and ethical reflection. As the first focused methodological synthesis of autoethnography in TTE (to our knowledge), this synthesis aims to contribute on two fronts: for

research, it offers a replicable and accessible coding scheme and explicit quality benchmarks that future studies can adopt to enhance rigor and comparability; for practice, it distills actionable suggestions that teachers and teacher educators can use to scaffold and assess autoethnographic tasks if they decide to integrate them.

One methodological limitation of our work concerns the definitional boundary applied in our synthesis. To maintain conceptual precision and replicability, only studies explicitly identifying as *autoethnographic* were included. While this decision ensured our analytical coherence and consistency, it may have excluded earlier or conceptually adjacent works (e.g., reflective autobiographies or self-narratives) that share overlapping features with autoethnography. Future systematic research syntheses could adopt a broader comparative lens to trace continuities among these traditions while preserving methodological clarity. Additionally, the temporal scope of this study was 1994–August 2024, encompassing the period when autoethnography became a formally recognized methodology in TESOL research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). While this ensures historical coherence, it may have excluded earlier reflective or autobiographical accounts that predate formal autoethnography. Finally, although the present synthesis provides timely insights into trends in TESOL teacher education, its focus on this specific disciplinary domain and its temporal coverage up to August 2024 inevitably delimit its scope. Future syntheses might extend this line of inquiry across disciplines, contexts, and languages, maintaining a critical lens on how autoethnography can continue to evolve both methodologically and ethically. By doing so, researchers can better harness its transformative potential in shaping pedagogical and professional discourses in teacher education.

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## THE AUTHORS

Hessameddin Ghanbar is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Islamic Azad University, Fereshtegan International Branch, Tehran, Iran. His research syntheses appeared in many prestigious journals in the field like *The Modern Language Journal*, *Language Learning*, *System*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, and *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. He is a top-cited author on Google Scholar, with his works having more than 1100 citations.

Jaber Kamali (from Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey) is a researcher in TESOL/ELT and Language Teacher Education. He serves as the editor-in-chief of *Language Teacher Education Research Journal*, has published several articles in top-tier journals, and was among the top-cited authors of Wiley publications in 2020–2021.

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## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

- Appendix S1. Appendix A.** Reference list of reviewed studies.
- Appendix B.** Coding scheme, final data, analyzed results.
- Appendix C.** Stated research questions.
- Appendix D.** Multiple data sources.
- Appendix E.** The search string used and other search specification for each database.
- Appendix F.** Coding scheme.