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# A Pilot Autoethnographic Study of Reflective Teaching in A Multicultural CFL Classroom

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**Abstract:** This article presents a pilot autoethnographic study investigating the reflective practice of a Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teacher transitioning from multicultural Malaysia to conservative Saudi Arabia. While teacher cognition is recognized as central to effective language teaching, the nuanced, moment-by-moment reflective processes of CFL educators navigating radical cultural shifts remain underexplored. This pilot study aimed to test the feasibility and effectiveness of an autoethnographic approach for capturing these processes. Over sixteen weeks, the researcher, also the participant, collected data through structured reflective journaling and the documentation of critical incidents. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Four key themes were constructed: "The Cultural Broker," capturing the teacher's evolving role in navigating cultural misunderstandings; "When Theory Meets Practice," illustrating the challenges of implementing pedagogical principles across radically different contexts; "The Emotional Landscape of Teaching," revealing the affective dimensions of reflective practice; and "The Weight of Not Knowing," exploring the humility and vulnerability inherent in cross-cultural teaching. The findings demonstrate the potential of autoethnography to generate rich, context-specific insights into CFL teacher cognition during cultural transition. The pilot also provided valuable methodological lessons, confirming the utility of structured reflection while highlighting the need for systematic strategies to manage researcher subjectivity and ensure ethical rigor. The article concludes with implications for CFL teacher development and recommendations for future, larger-scale autoethnographic research.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography, CFL, Reflective Practice, Teacher Cognition, Pilot Study, Cultural Transition, Saudi Arabia

## I. Introduction

The global demand for Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has created increasingly complex teaching environments, with teachers often moving between vastly different cultural contexts (Goh & Yunus, 2021; Wang, F., 2023). For CFL educators, this mobility brings both opportunities and profound challenges. A teacher who has developed effective practices in one setting—such as multicultural Malaysia—may find those same practices not merely ineffective but counterproductive when transplanted to a radically different context like conservative Saudi Arabia (Ahmad & Mustaffa, 2021; Al-Sudairi, 2020).

This study emerges from exactly such a transition. After nineteen years of teaching in Malaysian international schools, I accepted a position at a private boys' school in Saudi Arabia. The move promised professional growth but delivered something unexpected: a fundamental challenge to everything I thought I knew about teaching.

Lessons that had always worked suddenly failed. Students I thought I understood became mysterious. My professional identity, built over nearly two decades, felt unstable.

The article is structured as follows: Section 1 is the introduction, Section 2 reviews relevant literature on teacher cognition, reflective practice, autoethnography, and transformative learning. Section 3 details the methodology, including context, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. Section 4 presents the findings organized around four themes. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to the literature and the conceptual framework, and addresses methodological reflections and limitations. Section 6 concludes with implications and recommendations for future research.

### 1.1 Teacher Cognition

The pedagogical decisions teachers make in response to such complexity are shaped by their deeply held beliefs, knowledge, and ongoing reflections on practice—a domain of inquiry known as teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; 2015). Research has established that teachers are not mere technicians implementing prescribed methods but active thinkers whose mental lives profoundly shape classroom practice (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).

While research on language teacher cognition has grown substantially, much of it has relied on methods that capture what teachers say they do or are observed doing. These approaches may miss the internal, often tacit, reflective processes that drive practice, particularly during periods of cultural transition when familiar scripts no longer apply (Mann & Walsh, 2017). What happens inside a teacher's mind when a trusted technique fails? How does a teacher make sense of cultural dissonance in real time? What is the emotional experience of having one's professional identity challenged?

### 1.2 Insider Perspectives

Autoethnography, a methodology that uses personal experience as primary data to understand cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011; Chang, 2016), offers a promising alternative. By systematically examining their own experiences, teacher-researchers can generate rich, nuanced accounts of the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching across cultural boundaries. This is especially valuable for understanding the disorienting experience of moving between educational contexts—a reality for an increasing number of CFL teachers worldwide.

This pilot study responds to calls for more "practice-near" research that can illuminate the black box of teacher thinking (Mann & Walsh, 2017). It does so by turning the analytic lens inward, treating my own experience of cultural transition as a site of systematic inquiry.

### 1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

This article reports on a pilot autoethnographic study designed to explore my own reflective practice as a CFL teacher transitioning from nineteen years of experience in multicultural Malaysia to a new teaching context in conservative Saudi Arabia. The pilot had two primary aims:

1. To explore the potential of autoethnography for generating insights into CFL teacher cognition during cultural transition.
2. To test the feasibility and refine the methods for a potential larger-scale autoethnographic dissertation study.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What key critical incidents shape my pedagogical decision-making as I navigate the transition from Malaysian to Saudi CFL classrooms?
2. How does structured, critical reflection on these incidents illuminate my beliefs, assumptions, and evolving understanding of my role as a teacher across cultures?
3. What are the methodological affordances and challenges of using autoethnography for this type of inquiry?

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a gap in CFL research by providing an insider's perspective on teacher cognition during cultural transition. Second, it tests the feasibility of autoethnography as a methodology for this type of inquiry, offering methodological lessons for future researchers. Third, the findings have practical implications for CFL teachers navigating similar transitions and for teacher educators preparing teachers for cross-cultural work.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Teacher Cognition and Reflective Practice in CFL

The study of language teacher cognition has established that teachers are active, thinking decision-makers whose beliefs and knowledge profoundly influence their classroom practice (Borg, 2003). Borg's seminal review defined teacher cognition as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81). Subsequent research has demonstrated that these cognitions are shaped by teachers' own experiences as language learners, their teacher education programs, their classroom practice, and the broader institutional and societal context (Borg, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).

In CFL education, research has begun to explore how teachers' cognitions are shaped by the unique challenges of the discipline. Studies have examined the teaching of tones (Li & Lee, 2020), characters (Zhang & Hu, 2022), and the influence of students' cultural backgrounds on instructional choices (Kaur & Chu, 2022). Kaur and Chu's qualitative study in Malaysian multicultural CFL classrooms found that teachers' beliefs about language learning and cultural difference were deeply intertwined with their instructional choices.

Reflective practice is central to teacher cognition, as it is through reflection that teachers can surface, examine, and potentially revise their tacit beliefs (Farrell, 2022). Schön's (1983) concepts of reflection-in-action (the spontaneous adjustments made during teaching) and reflection-on-action (the retrospective analysis of past events) provide a foundational framework for understanding how practitioners learn from experience. Farrell (2022) has extended this work, emphasizing the need for systematic, disciplined reflection that goes beyond casual thought.

However, capturing these often-fleeting reflective moments requires methodologies that go beyond traditional interviews and observations. Mann and Walsh (2017) have called for more emic, practice-near research that can illuminate the moment-by-moment thinking of teachers. This study responds directly to that call.

### 2.2 Autoethnography as a Method for Teacher Inquiry

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political (Ellis, 2004). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography; thus, as a method, it is both process and product (Ellis et al., 2011).

Several forms of autoethnography exist. Evocative autoethnography, championed by Ellis and Bochner (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), emphasizes the emotional and aesthetic power of storytelling to connect with readers and evoke empathy. Analytic autoethnography, proposed by Anderson (2006), aims to use personal experience as a basis for

developing theoretical insights and contributing to existing knowledge. Critical autoethnography, as articulated by Boylorn and Orbe (2021), explicitly foregrounds issues of power, identity, and social justice, examining how broader cultural structures shape personal experience.

In educational research, autoethnography has been used to explore teacher identity, professional development, and the emotional labor of teaching (Hamilton et al., 2021; Keles, 2022). Barkhuizen (2021) used autoethnography to examine identity dilemmas of a CFL teacher, demonstrating the methodology's potential for generating rich, contextualized insights.

The methodology is not without its critics. Concerns about validity, generalizability, and ethical representation are frequently raised (Tolich, 2010). In response, autoethnographers have developed robust criteria for rigor, including the need for explicit reflexivity, transparency about the research process, and a commitment to relational ethics (Ellis, 2007; Lapadat, 2017). This pilot study was designed with these criteria in mind.

### 2.3 Transformative Learning in Cross-Cultural Contexts

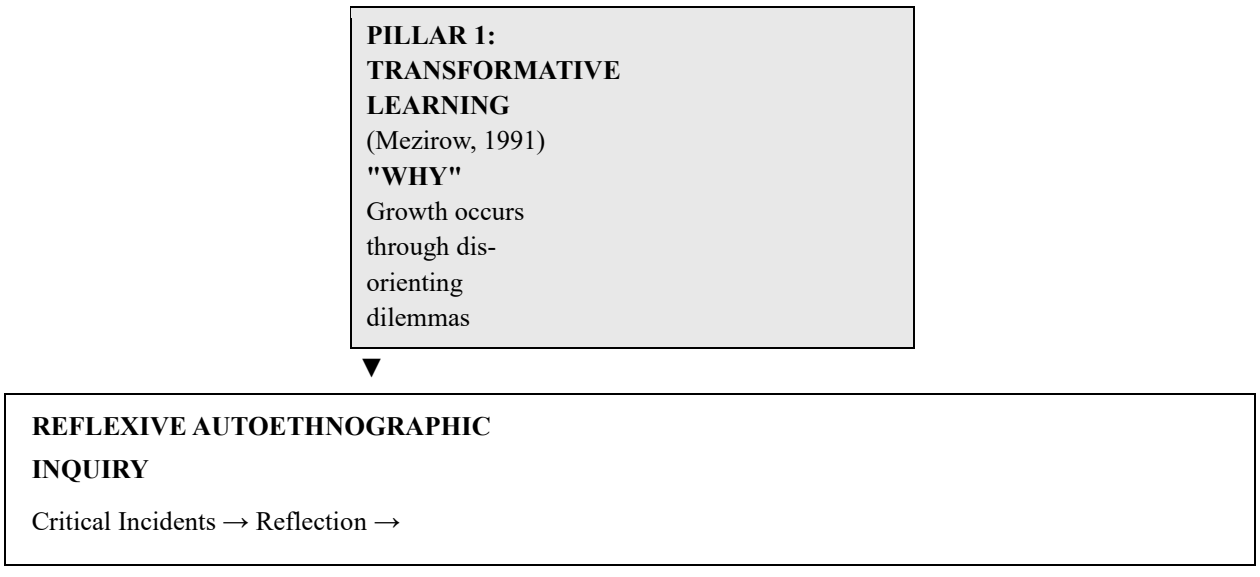
Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory provides a valuable lens for understanding teacher development during cultural transition. A "disorienting dilemma"—an experience that does not fit one's existing framework of understanding—can trigger a process of self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, exploration of new roles, and ultimately, a transformation in perspective that leads to more inclusive and discriminating action.

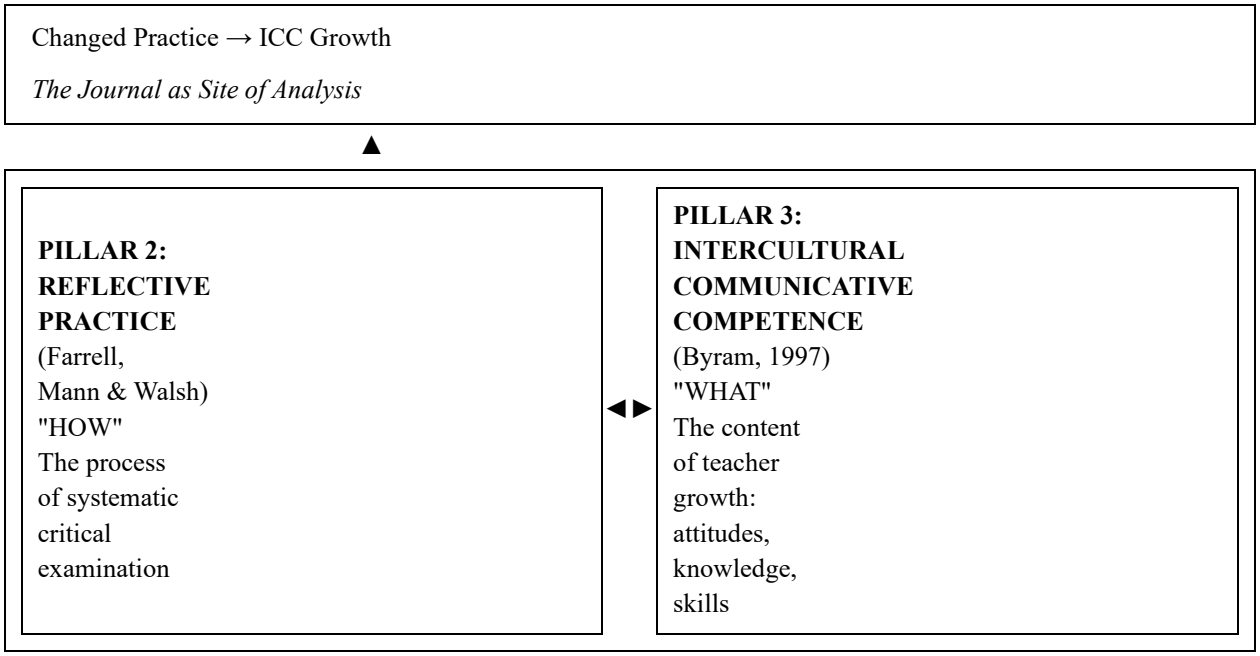
For teachers moving between cultures, such dilemmas are not occasional but constant. The framework of assumptions built up over years of practice in one context is repeatedly challenged in the new setting, creating both crisis and opportunity for growth (Teh & Ching, 2023). This study draws on transformative learning theory as a lens for understanding the developmental trajectory documented in the reflective journals.

### 2.4 The Conceptual Framework Guiding This Study

This pilot study is guided by the conceptual framework as figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Reflexive Autoethnographic Inquiry in CFL Teacher Research**






| Pillar | Core Focus | Key Theorists |
|---|---|---|
| **Transformative Learning** | Why growth occurs through disorienting dilemmas | Mezirow (1991); Teh & Ching (2023) |
| **Reflective Practice** | How growth occurs through systematic reflection | Farrell (2022); Mann & Walsh (2017); Schö |
| **Intercultural Competence** | What growth looks like in cross-cultural teaching | Byram (1997); Ahmad & Mustaffa (2021) |

The framework posits that these three pillars are mutually reinforcing. Disorienting dilemmas (Pillar 1) trigger critical reflection (Pillar 2), which leads to the development of intercultural competence (Pillar 3). This study tests this framework empirically by examining whether the themes constructed from the data align with these theoretical expectations.

## III. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a pilot autoethnographic design. Autoethnography was chosen because the research aimed to explore my own lived experience of cultural transition in teaching—a phenomenon best accessed through first-person, reflective inquiry. The pilot design allowed me to test methods and generate preliminary insights before committing to a larger-scale study.

Following Anderson (2006), this study takes an analytic autoethnographic approach, seeking to use personal experience as a basis for developing theoretical insights about teacher cognition during cultural transition. However, it also incorporates elements of evocative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) by including rich narrative accounts designed to evoke the emotional reality of the experience.

### 3.2 Context and Setting

The study was conducted over a sixteen-week period during my first academic term teaching at a private boys' school in Saudi Arabia (referred to as "MASK school" in my journals). Prior to this, I had taught for nineteen years at an international school in Malaysia (referred to as "HIP International School"), a multicultural context where I had developed my teaching identity and practices.

The contrast between these contexts is significant:

| **Dimension** | **Malaysia (HIP)** | **Saudi Arabia (MASK)** |
|---|---|---|
| **Student Composition** | Multicultural (Malay, Chinese, Indian) | Predominantly Saudi |
| **Cultural Orientation** | Pluralistic, multicultural coexistence | Conservative, religiously-grounded |
| **Educational Approach** | International, student-centered | Traditional, teacher-centered |
| **Language of Instruction** | English as academic lingua franca | Arabic, with English as foreign language |
| **Religious Context** | Multi-religious, secular public sphere | Islamic principles guide all aspects |

This contrast provided rich ground for exploring teacher cognition during transition.

### 3.3 Researcher Positionality

I served as both the researcher and the sole participant. I am a CFL teacher of [ethnicity/nationality] with nineteen years of experience in Malaysian international schools. My positionality—an insider to CFL teaching and Malaysian multicultural education, yet an outsider to Saudi culture and its educational traditions—is a central consideration of this inquiry.

I brought to this study deeply held beliefs about "good teaching" formed in one context, beliefs that would be repeatedly challenged in the new setting. Key aspects of my positionality include:

- **Professional Identity:** I had internalized student-centered, technology-integrated, differentiated instruction as markers of teaching quality.
- **Cultural Assumptions:** I assumed that multicultural awareness meant including diverse cultural content, not anticipating that some content might conflict with religious values.
- **Linguistic Position:** I am not a speaker of Arabic, placing me at a linguistic distance from my students' daily lives.
- **Religious Position:** I am not Muslim, making me an outsider to the religious framework that shapes my students' worldviews.

This dissonance between my established teacher identity and the demands of my new context became the core focus of my autoethnographic reflection. Throughout the study, I maintained a separate reflexive journal to track how my positionality shaped my observations and interpretations (Pillow, 2019).

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through two primary methods over the sixteen-week period.

### 3.4.1 Structured Reflective Journals

Following each teaching day, I completed a structured journal entry. The structure was designed to move beyond simple description and prompt deeper critical reflection. Prompts were informed by the literature on reflective practice (Farrell, 2022) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991):

| Prompt Category | Specific Questions |
|---|---|
| **Description** | What happened today in the classroom? Describe a key moment or interaction in detail. |
| **Feelings** | What were my emotional responses during and after this moment? |
| **Evaluation** | What was positive or challenging about this experience? |
| **Analysis** | What underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, or culture does this experience reveal? How did my own background influence my interpretation? |
| **Conclusion/Action** | What did I learn from this? What might I do differently in the future? |

A complete template of journal prompts is provided in Appendix A.

### 3.4.2 Critical Incident Documentation

I also maintained a separate log of "critical incidents"—specific, unanticipated events that were particularly salient or challenging. Following Tripp (2012), I defined critical incidents not by their objective drama but by their significance for my professional learning. For each incident, I wrote a brief narrative account as soon as possible after the event, capturing:

- The immediate details of what happened
- My initial reactions and feelings
- Why the incident stood out
- Initial thoughts about what it might mean for my practice

A template for critical incident documentation is provided in Appendix B.

In total, I completed 42 journal entries and documented 16 critical incidents over the

| Phase | Description | Application in This Study |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Familiarization** | Reading and re-reading data, making initial notes | I read all 42 journal entries and 16 incident narratives multiple times, noting initial impressions and patterns. |
| **2. Generating Initial Codes** | Systematically coding interesting features of the data | I coded the entire dataset using NVivo, generating codes such as: "cultural misunderstanding," "adapting materials," "feeling exposed," "questioning competence," "student as teacher," "institutional constraint." |
| **3. Generating Initial Themes** | Clustering codes to form potential themes | I grouped related codes. For example, codes related to "cultural misunderstanding," "explaining Chinese customs," "mediating between students," and "adapting materials" were grouped under an initial theme of "cultural mediation." |
| **4. Reviewing Themes** | Checking themes against coded data and full dataset | I reviewed initial themes to ensure they were coherent and accurately represented the data. This involved splitting, combining, and refining themes. |
| **5. Defining and Naming Themes** | Refining the specifics of each theme | Once finalized, I developed a detailed analysis of each theme, articulating its core meaning and significance. |
| **6. Writing the Report** | Weaving analytic narrative with compelling data extracts sixteen-week period. | This article represents the final phase, integrating themes with illustrative journal excerpts. |

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase approach to reflexive thematic analysis. This approach was chosen for its theoretical flexibility and its emphasis on the active role of the researcher in constructing themes.

A sample of a coded journal entry is provided in Appendix C to demonstrate the analysis process.

### 3.6 Ensuring Rigor and Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of this pilot study, I implemented several strategies aligned with criteria for qualitative and autoethnographic research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010; Ellis, 2007).

| Criterion | Strategy Employed |
|---|---|
| **Credibility** | Prolonged engagement (16 weeks); peer debriefing with a colleague familiar with qualitative research; negative case analysis (actively searching for data that contradicted emerging themes) |
| **Transferability** | Rich, thick description of context, incidents, and reflections to allow readers to assess applicability to their own contexts |
| **Dependability** | Audit trail documenting all research decisions; structured journal prompts ensuring consistency in data collection |
| **Confirmability** | Separate reflexive journal to track how my positionality shaped interpretations; clear links between data and themes in analysis |
| **Authenticity** | Member reflection where possible, sharing interpretations with Saudi colleagues to incorporate their perspectives |
| **Relational Ethics** | Ongoing ethical vigilance; anonymization of all students and colleagues; portrayal of others with fairness and respect |

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

**Informed Consent:** I obtained informed consent from the school administration and was transparent with my students about my research role in age-appropriate ways. While individual student consent was not required for classroom observations, I explained that I would be writing about my teaching and that any references to students would be anonymized.

**Anonymity:** All student names and identifying details were replaced with pseudonyms in my journals and in this report. The school is referred to by a pseudonym ("MASK school"). My Malaysian school is also anonymized ("HIP International School").

**Relational Ethics:** Following Ellis (2007), I was constantly mindful of the potential impact of my writing on those represented. Even when describing challenging incidents, I strove to portray students and colleagues with fairness, respect, and compassion. I asked myself continually: "How would I feel if the person I am writing about read this?"

**Data Security:** All journal entries and incident narratives were stored on a password-protected computer with encrypted backup. Identifying information was stored separately from the data.

**Dual Role:** I remained mindful of the tension between my role as teacher and my role as researcher. My primary responsibility was always to my students' learning and well-being. When research activities (such as writing during a lesson) might have interfered with teaching, I prioritized teaching.

## IV. Findings

### 4.1 Overview of Themes

Through reflexive thematic analysis of the sixteen weeks of journal entries and critical incidents, I constructed four overarching themes that illuminate my reflective practice as a CFL teacher navigating cultural transition:

| Theme | Core Focus | Key Journal Weeks |
|---|---|---|
| **The Cultural Broker** | Evolving role from cultural transmitter to cultural mediator | Weeks 1, 3, 12 |
| **When Theory Meets Practice** | Tension between established principles and new context | Weeks 6, 7 |
| **The Emotional Landscape of Teaching** | Affective dimensions of cultural transition | Weeks 4, 5 |
| **The Weight of Not Knowing** | Humility and vulnerability of being an outsider | Week 16 |

Each theme is presented below with illustrative journal extracts and analytic commentary.

### 4.2 Theme 1: The Cultural Broker

This theme captures my evolving role as someone called upon to navigate, explain, and mediate cultural differences in the classroom. It reflects a central tension in my practice: the need to teach Chinese language and culture while being respectful of and responsive to the deeply rooted Islamic cultural norms of my Saudi students. The theme traces a developmental trajectory from cultural transmission to cultural mediation.

#### 4.2.1 The Disorienting Dilemma (Week 1)

The first critical incident, occurring in Week 1, dramatically announced this challenge:

*"When I played a video of families gathering for the New Year's Eve dinner, and the画面 showed wine glasses, the entire classroom fell into silence. Not the kind of amazed silence—but the heavy, uncomfortable silence of something gone wrong. A student, F, finally asked: 'Teacher, is wine haram? Why do Chinese people drink wine?'*

*I felt my face flush. At the HIP International School in Malaysia, this had never been an issue. The Malay students there would simply notice the difference and move on. But here, in this conservative Saudi classroom, I had made a major mistake. I stammered an explanation about cultural differences, but I could feel a divide forming—my carefully planned 'cultural immersion' was building a wall, not a bridge."* (Journal Entry, Week 1)

This incident revealed my assumption that materials effective in multicultural Malaysia would transfer seamlessly. My initial response was defensive and explanatory—what Byram (1997) would call "transmitting" rather than "mediating" culture. The reflection that followed, however, marked the beginning of a shift:

*"Later, in reflection, I realized I had been self-righteous. I had transplanted what worked in multicultural Malaysia—where many students are familiar with Chinese festivals—without sufficient cultural mediation. I hadn't previewed the materials through a Saudi lens. Those wine glasses weren't just props; they were symbols conflicting with deeply held values."* (Journal Entry, Week 1)

#### 4.2.2 Developing Mediation Skills (Week 3)

This reflective insight did not immediately transform my practice, but it created awareness. A later incident involving the character "十" (ten) showed both the persistence of the challenge and my developing response:

*"A student raised his hand: 'Teacher, this looks like a cross. The cross is haram.' I paused and decided not to be defensive. 'Thank you for telling me, Y. You're right, this shape does resemble a cross. But this is the Chinese character for the number 'ten', as ordinary as our 1, 2, 3. It has no religious meaning whatsoever in Chinese culture; it simply represents the number 10.'*

*Then I turned to the whiteboard and wrote the Arabic numeral '10' and the Roman numeral 'X' next to it. 'See, the Roman numeral for 10 is also X, like crossed lines. Different writing systems sometimes have similar shapes, but completely different meanings.'* (Journal Entry, Week 3)

Here, rather than simply explaining Chinese culture, I connected it to symbols familiar to students (Roman numerals), demonstrating what Byram (1997) calls "skills of interpreting and relating." I was beginning to mediate rather than merely transmit.

**4.2.3 Breakthrough: From Transmission to Dialogue (Week 12)**

By Week 12, a breakthrough moment revealed how far this evolution had progressed:

*"K raised his hand. 'Teacher,' he said, 'this is like when we learn to write beautifully. My grandfather does this with Arabic. He says the pen must be held with respect, just like you said about the brush.'*

*Connection. He made the connection himself. I asked him to explain to the class. He stood up—this usually quiet boy—and demonstrated how his grandfather taught him to prepare the reed pen, how the ink must flow, how patience is everything. Other students leaned forward.*

*For the next twenty minutes, we had a conversation—not me teaching them about Chinese culture, but us sharing what it means to treat writing as an art form, a spiritual practice, across our different traditions."* (Journal Entry, Week 12)

This moment represents the fullest expression of the cultural broker theme. I had created conditions for dialogue rather than delivery, for connection rather than transmission. The student became the teacher, and I became a facilitator of intercultural exchange.

**4.3 Theme 2: When Theory Meets Practice**

This theme captures the ongoing tension I experienced between the pedagogical principles I had developed in Malaysia and the messy, unpredictable reality of my Saudi classroom. My journals are filled with moments where theoretically sound ideas—technology integration, differentiated instruction, student-centered learning—clashed with the practical constraints and cultural expectations of my new context.

**4.3.1 The Technology Integration Disaster (Week 6)**

The technology integration disaster in Week 6 illustrates this theme vividly:

*"As an Apple Teacher at HIP International School, I used to take pride in my technology integration. My Malaysian classroom was 'flipped': students did interactive quizzes on iPads, I saw data in real-time, and adjusted my teaching precisely.*

*Today at MASK school, I brought the same confidence. I set up a Gimkit game—at HIP, students always scrambled to participate, competing for rankings, the classroom atmosphere electric. I thought, this will surely energize these quiet Saudi boys.*

*But when I turned around to help a student with technical difficulties, I heard lowered voices and snickering behind me. I turned back and saw three students' screens displaying not Gimkit, but a video game. In the few seconds I had turned away, they'd quickly switched windows."* (Journal Entry, Week 6)

My initial reaction was emotional—a complex mix of shame, failure, and betrayed trust. But the reflective process pushed me deeper:

*"After class, the three boys stood before me. S, the most mischievous, suddenly said: 'Teacher, Gimkit is too boring... games are more fun.'*

*I sat in the empty classroom, staring at that closed MacBook. I thought of Borg's teacher cognition—my belief that 'technology integration' equals 'student engagement' was formed in the privileged environment of Malaysia. But here, technology wasn't a neutral tool; it was an object of desire, a release from repression, a battlefield of power relations.*

*I reflected: I blamed them for being 'disrespectful,' but they were just doing what boys do—finding freedom at the edges of rules. The real problem was my design: I gave them devices, gave them space, then turned my back. I set a trap and punished them for falling into it."* (Journal Entry, Week 6)

This analysis led to practical change. I shifted from individual devices to group activities and used monitoring features not as surveillance but as transparency. More importantly, I shifted my mindset from "they ruined my class" to "I underestimated their situation."

**4.3.2 The Differentiation Disaster (Week 7)**

A similar pattern occurred with differentiated instruction in Week 7:

*"I spent two hours preparing three different sets of activities for a lesson on measure words. One set for my heritage learners who already speak some Mandarin at home, one for the strong non-heritage learners, and a simpler set for the beginners who are really struggling.*

*It was a disaster. I spent the whole class period running around trying to explain three different tasks, students from different groups were confused about what they were supposed to be doing, and I could feel my stress levels rising. By the end, I just wanted to go back to a one-size-fits-all worksheet. So much for differentiation."* (Journal Entry, Week 7)

Again, reflection revealed the gap between principle and execution:

*"Looking back, my problem wasn't the principle of differentiation. It was my execution. I tried to differentiate by task without adequately differentiating by support. The weaker group didn't just need a simpler task; they needed more direct instruction and scaffolding before they could work independently. The heritage group might have been ready for a more open-ended task, but I didn't give them a clear enough framework.*

*I was so focused on the what of differentiation that I forgot the how."* (Journal Entry, Week 7)

This theme demonstrates that teacher cognition is not a static set of beliefs but a dynamic system refined through the very act of practice and reflection. Theories developed in one context must be re-examined and adapted when transplanted to another.

### 4.4 Theme 3: The Emotional Landscape of Teaching

The most pervasive theme across my journals was the intense emotionality of teaching during cultural transition. Far from being a purely cognitive or technical activity, my practice was deeply infused with feelings of joy, frustration, anxiety, connection, shame, and doubt. This theme reveals that reflective practice is not just an intellectual exercise but also an emotional one—and that this emotional dimension is particularly acute when one's professional identity is being fundamentally challenged.

#### 4.4.1 The Silent Boy: Misreading Cultural Cues (Week 4)

The silent boy incident in Week 4 captured the emotional vulnerability inherent in misreading cultural cues:

*"O sat at the back of the classroom, always prepared, always writing. But he never spoke. He never answered my questions, never did pair work, never even spoke when classmates were discussing animatedly in Arabic.*

*Today I tried to force it. 'O,' I said, 'please read the dialogue with K.' He lowered his head, shook it slightly, and wrote something in his notebook. I felt frustrated—was he rebelling? Did he not like my class? I pushed again, gently but firmly. The bell rang. He left quickly.*

*I couldn't stop thinking about it. In Malaysian schools, I had learned to read classrooms in different ways. The Malay, Indian, and Chinese students there had their own silences, but this felt different."* (Journal Entry, Week 4)

My interpretation of O's silence was filtered through my Malaysian framework, where silence might indicate disengagement or resistance. Only through consultation with a Saudi colleague did I understand the cultural script at work:

*"After class, I cautiously consulted my Saudi male colleague. He explained: 'O comes from a conservative family. In such families, boys are taught to respect the teacher, not to question, not to... be too conspicuous. Speaking up voluntarily, especially in front of the teacher, can be seen as disrespectful, or as being too proud.'*

*I was stunned. This was an all-boys class, so gender mixing wasn't an issue. But my colleague's words made me realize I had brought the participation model from the international school in Malaysia here. In Malaysia, I encouraged students to raise their hands actively, speak up loudly, challenge my ideas—that was the cultural expectation there, part of international education.*

*But here, in this Saudi boys' school, the same behavior might mean O was violating what his family taught him about respect for authority and humility. I had misread his silence. It wasn't rebellion, not lack of interest, but a cultural script—a silent language I hadn't yet learned to read here."* (Journal Entry, Week 4)

The emotional arc here—from frustration to confusion to understanding to regret—illustrates the affective cost of cultural learning. But it also shows how emotional engagement can fuel more responsive practice:

*"I redesigned the next speaking activity: students would first practice privately in pairs, then record voice messages to send to me, rather than performing live in front of the whole class. I also offered written response*

*options—letting him 'speak' through writing if that was more comfortable. Most importantly, I stopped calling on him forcibly, instead approaching him during private practice, crouching down, and speaking one-on-one in a lower voice.*

*When I explained the new format, O looked up. For the first time, he nodded slightly. Later, K told me that O actually spoke quite a lot during group practice—'He speaks better than me, teacher, he's just... not used to performing in front of the teacher.'"* (Journal Entry, Week 4)

**4.4.2 Moments of Connection (Week 5)**

Moments of connection, when they came, were correspondingly intense:

*"At the end of class, a group of students came up to me and said, 'Teacher, we were talking about the lesson on 'kung fu' and we realized we have something similar in our culture! It's called 'silat'!' They were so excited to share. For a moment, we weren't just teacher and students. We were just people, sharing and learning from each other. This is why I teach."* (Journal Entry, Week 5)
This theme is crucial because it highlights the often-hidden affective dimension of teacher cognition. My beliefs and decisions were not formed in a vacuum; they were shaped by the emotional currents of classroom life and by my own emotional responses to dislocation and uncertainty.

**4.5 Theme 4: The Weight of Not Knowing**

The final theme captures the humbling realization of my own limitations as an outsider—the weight of not fully understanding my students' lives, my new cultural context, or even my own place in this unfamiliar world. This theme emerged most powerfully in Week 16, when I received student feedback:

*"Today I received student feedback forms. Mostly encouraging—students appreciated the games, the fun teaching presentation, my attempts to make Chinese 'not boring.' But one comment stopped me cold:*

*'Why should I learn Chinese? We have translation machines anyway. We never use Chinese in our lives at all.'*

*Like a sudden blow to the head. Because it's true. I don't know their lives, not really. I don't know what it feels like to pray five times a day, to navigate family expectations about gender, to learn in a language that is neither mother tongue nor international lingua franca (English). I am, and will inevitably remain, an outsider.*

*In Malaysia, after nineteen years, I learned pluralism. I knew when festivals were approaching, could quote Malay idioms, understood the complex dance of ethnic sensitivities. Here, I'm a beginner again. And my students can tell.*

*I felt that old panic: Am I really fit to teach here? I used to teach Chinese literature in classrooms back home; here I only teach 123, hello, how are you..."* (Journal Entry, Week 16)

This moment of recognition was painful but also transformative. The reflective process reframed this discomfort:

*"But then I thought of Mezirow, transformative learning. That disorienting dilemma. This discomfort isn't a signal to retreat; it's a catalyst for growth.*

*I can't become Saudi. But I can be more humble, more curious, more explicit about my position. I can ask more questions. I can admit when I don't understand. I can model what it means to learn across cultural boundaries—not as an expert, but as a fellow traveler.*

*Tomorrow, I'll start class differently. I'll ask them to teach me one thing about their week, their family, their world. I'll take notes. I'll learn.*

*This is the reflective practice I write about—the cycle of experience, dissonance, critical reflection, and changed action. I'm living my own theoretical framework. It's hard. And it's necessary."* (Journal Entry, Week 16)
This theme reveals that cultural transition requires not just new techniques but a fundamental reorientation of professional identity—from expert to learner, from insider to acknowledged outsider, from one who knows to one who is learning to know.

## V. Discussion

### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This pilot autoethnographic study explored my reflective practice as a CFL teacher transitioning from multicultural Malaysia to conservative Saudi Arabia. Four themes were constructed from sixteen weeks of journal entries and critical incidents:

| Theme | Core Finding |
|---|---|
| **The Cultural Broker** | My role evolved from transmitting Chinese culture to mediating between cultures, with critical incidents serving as catalysts for this development. |
| **When Theory Meets Practice** | Pedagogical principles developed in one context (technology integration, differentiation) required fundamental re-examination when transplanted to a new cultural setting. |
| **The Emotional Landscape of Teaching** | Cultural transition is deeply emotional, involving vulnerability, self-doubt, and intense moments of both frustration and connection. |
| **The Weight of Not Knowing** | Acknowledging the limits of one's cultural knowledge is not failure but the precondition for genuine learning and growth. |

### 5.2 Discussion in Relation to Literature

#### 5.2.1 Teacher Cognition in Transition

The findings extend Borg's (2003; 2015) work on teacher cognition by illuminating how deeply held beliefs are challenged when teachers move between cultural contexts. The technology integration disaster (Week 6) and differentiation disaster (Week 7) demonstrate that teacher cognition is not a stable set of beliefs but a dynamic system that must be continually re-examined in light of new contexts. This supports Kubanyiova and Feryok's (2015) call to attend to the situated, context-dependent nature of teacher cognition.

The study also contributes to understanding the "how" of teacher cognition—the moment-by-moment reflective processes that Mann and Walsh (2017) argue are under-researched. The journal entries capture not just what I believed but how those beliefs were enacted, challenged, and revised in real time.

### 5.2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence

The findings provide rich, experiential evidence for Byram's (1997) model of ICC, demonstrating in concrete detail what it means to develop:

| ICC Component | Evidence from Findings |
|---|---|
| **Attitudes** | Moving from defensiveness (Week 1) to openness and gratitude for student feedback (Week 3, Week 16) |
| **Knowledge** | Learning about Islamic sensitivities around alcohol, religious symbols, and cultural scripts for respect |
| **Skills of interpreting and relating** | Connecting Chinese characters to Roman numerals (Week 3); linking calligraphy to Arabic traditions (Week 12) |
| **Skills of discovery and interaction** | Consulting Saudi colleagues about student silence (Week 4); asking students to teach about their culture (Week 16) |
| **Critical cultural awareness** | Recognizing that my Malaysian framework was not universal; understanding my own positionality as an outsider |

The trajectory from the wine glass incident (Week 1) to the calligraphy breakthrough (Week 12) illustrates the development of ICC in vivo, showing how each component of the model is enacted and refined through practice and reflection.

### 5.2.3 Transformative Learning

The study offers compelling support for Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory. Multiple critical incidents served as "disorienting dilemmas" that triggered processes of self-examination, critical reflection, and perspective transformation:

| Disorienting Dilemma | Transformative Outcome |
|---|---|
| Wine glass incident (Week 1) | Realization that cultural materials are not neutral; need for cultural mediation |
| Student silence (Week 4) | Recognition that "active participation" is culturally defined |
| Character "十" question (Week 3) | Development of skills for connecting across cultural symbols |
| Student feedback (Week 16) | Acceptance of outsider identity as position for learning, not failure |

The "weight of not knowing" theme, in particular, captures the uncomfortable but generative space that Mezirow identifies as the precondition for transformative learning.

### 5.2.4 Reflective Practice

The findings contribute to literature on reflective practice (Farrell, 2022; Mann & Walsh, 2017) by demonstrating the power of structured, systematic reflection. The journal prompts pushed me beyond description to analysis, beyond reaction to critical examination. Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action is evident throughout:

- **Reflection-in-action:** The spontaneous decision not to be defensive when a student questioned the character "十" (Week 3)
- **Reflection-on-action:** The retrospective analysis of the technology integration disaster that led to changed practice (Week 6)

### 5.2.5 Autoethnography as Methodology

This study responds to calls for more emic, practice-near research in language teacher cognition (Mann & Walsh, 2017). The findings demonstrate that autoethnography can generate insights inaccessible through traditional methods—the moment-by-moment thought processes, the emotional textures, the developmental trajectories that interviews and observations inevitably miss.

## 5.3 Discussion in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

The findings both illuminate and complicate the conceptual framework that guided this study (Lee, 2024).

### 5.3.1 Alignment with the Framework

| Pillar | Evidence |
|---|---|
| **Transformative Learning** | Each critical incident served as a disorienting dilemma triggering reflection and change |
| **Reflective Practice** | Structured journaling enabled systematic examination of assumptions and development of new approaches |
| **Intercultural Competence** | The trajectory from Week 1 to Week 16 shows clear development across all five ICC components |

The three pillars of the framework are clearly evident in the findings:

The framework's claim that the pillars are mutually reinforcing is supported. The disorienting dilemma of the wine glass incident (Pillar 1) triggered reflective practice (Pillar 2), which led to the development of ICC skills (Pillar 3). Those skills then enabled deeper reflection on subsequent incidents, creating a virtuous cycle.

### 5.3.2 Extending the Framework

However, the findings also suggest additions to the framework. The emotional intensity documented in Theme 3 and the existential vulnerability captured in Theme 4 point to dimensions of cross-cultural teaching that the three pillars, as originally articulated, do not fully capture:

| Dimension | Description | Implication for Framework |
|---|---|---|
| **Affective** | The emotional labor of cultural transition—frustration, shame, joy, connection | Future iterations of the framework might incorporate attention to emotional dimensions of teacher development |
| **Identity** | The fundamental reorientation of professional identity from expert to learner | The framework could explicitly address identity transformation as an outcome of the three-pillar process |
| **Relational** | The importance of relationships with colleagues and students as sources of cultural learning | The framework might highlight the social, relational nature of intercultural development |

## 5.4 Methodological Reflections

As a pilot study, a key aim was to test the feasibility of the methods. This process yielded several crucial lessons for future research.

### 5.4.1 The Value of Structure

The structured journal prompts were highly effective in guiding reflection beyond superficial description. They forced engagement with the "analysis" and "conclusion" levels, which is where the most significant learning occurred. For a larger study, these prompts could be further refined and potentially linked more explicitly to theoretical frameworks.

### 5.4.2 Managing Data Volume

Sixteen weeks of journaling produced 42 entries and 16 critical incident narratives—a substantial amount of rich data. For a longer-term study, this volume would need to be managed carefully. Strategies might include:

- Sampling specific weeks for intensive analysis (e.g., Weeks 1, 4, 8, 12, 16)
- Focusing analysis primarily on documented critical incidents rather than all journal entries
- Using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) from the outset

### 5.4.3 The Challenge of Reflexivity

Maintaining a separate reflexive journal was essential but also challenging. It required a disciplined, meta-cognitive effort to constantly turn the analytic lens back on myself. Questions I found helpful included:

- Why did this incident catch my attention?
- What emotions am I bringing to this analysis?
- How might my cultural background be shaping my interpretation?
- What am I not seeing?

This process, while demanding, is non-negotiable for establishing rigor in autoethnography (Brinkmann, 2022; Pillow, 2019). Future work could incorporate even more systematic reflexive checks, such as sharing reflexive notes with a critical friend.

### 5.4.4 The Power of Negative Cases

Actively searching for data that contradicted emerging themes strengthened the analysis. For example, the Week 12 calligraphy breakthrough could have tempted me toward a narrative of linear progress. But negative cases—moments when I continued to struggle, when students remained disengaged, when cultural misunderstandings persisted—complicated that narrative and prevented oversimplification.

### 5.4.5 Ethical Vigilance

The pilot reinforced the importance of ongoing ethical vigilance (Ellis, 2007). While I anonymized all student details, the act of writing about them, even positively, carries responsibility. Questions I continually asked myself:

- Would the students recognize themselves in this description?
- Would they feel respected and fairly portrayed?
- Have I balanced my story with their right to privacy?

In a larger study, a formal process for seeking student consent to be included in the narrative, perhaps in a general way, would be an important addition.

### 5.5 Limitations

This study is a small-scale pilot, and its findings must be interpreted within the context of several limitations.

| Limitation | Description | Mitigation |
|---|---|---|
| **Single Participant** | Findings are based on one teacher's experience and are not generalizable in a statistical sense. | Rich, thick description allows readers to assess transferability to their own contexts. |
| **Specific Context** | The findings are situated in the particular context of a Saudi boys' school and may not apply to other settings. | Detailed contextual information enables readers to judge relevance to other contexts. |
| **Limited Timeframe** | Sixteen weeks, while sufficient for a pilot, is limited for exploring long-term developmental trajectories. | The study was designed as a pilot; findings point to directions for longer-term research. |
| **Self-Report Data** | The study relies entirely on self-report data, which may be subject to memory limitations and self-presentation biases. | Structured journaling immediately after incidents reduced memory distortion; reflexive journaling surfaced biases. |
| **Researcher Subjectivity** | The analysis is my own interpretation, filtered through my subjective lens. | Multiple strategies for rigor (peer debriefing, negative case analysis, reflexive journaling) were employed to enhance trustworthiness. |

## VI. Conclusion and Implications

This pilot autoethnographic study explored my reflective practice as a CFL teacher transitioning from nineteen years in multicultural Malaysia to a new context in conservative Saudi Arabia. Through sixteen weeks of structured journaling and critical incident documentation, I constructed four themes that illuminate this experience:

| Theme | Core Insight |
|---|---|
| **The Cultural Broker** | Teaching across cultures requires moving from cultural transmission to cultural mediation, with critical incidents as catalysts for this development. |
| **When Theory Meets Practice** | Pedagogical principles developed in one context must be critically re-examined when transplanted to another. |
| **The Emotional Landscape of Teaching** | Cultural transition is deeply emotional; acknowledging and reflecting on emotions is essential for growth. |
| **The Weight of Not Knowing** | Accepting the limits of one's cultural knowledge is not failure but the precondition for genuine learning. |

The findings reveal that teaching across radical cultural difference involves not just acquiring new techniques but undergoing a fundamental reorientation of professional identity—from expert to learner, from transmitter to mediator, from one who knows to one who is learning to know.

### 6.1 Implications for CFL Teachers

For CFL teachers navigating cultural transition, this study offers several practical implications:

**Embrace Disorienting Dilemmas as Learning Opportunities.** The moments that feel like failures—the wine glass incident, the technology disaster—are precisely the moments that catalyze growth. Rather than avoiding or defending against these moments, teachers can learn to see them as gifts: invitations to examine assumptions and develop new approaches.

**Structure Your Reflection.** Casual reflection is easily overwhelmed by the demands of daily teaching. Structured journaling with prompts that push beyond description to analysis can ensure that reflection is systematic and productive. The prompts used in this study (Appendix A) offer a starting point.

**Attend to Emotions.** The emotional labor of cultural transition is real and demanding. Acknowledging feelings of frustration, shame, and vulnerability—rather than suppressing them—can provide valuable data about what matters and what needs to change.

**Cultivate Humility.** The "weight of not knowing" is not a weakness to be overcome but a position to be inhabited. Teachers who can say "I don't understand, can you teach me?" model the very intercultural learning they hope to foster in students.

**Seek Local Guides.** My Saudi colleagues were essential to my learning. Teachers navigating new cultural contexts should actively seek relationships with local colleagues who can interpret what they cannot yet see.

### 6.2 Implications for Teacher Educators

For those preparing teachers for cross-cultural work, this study suggests several implications:

**Incorporate Autoethnographic Assignments.** Teacher education programs might include autoethnographic projects that help novice teachers develop the habit of critical reflection from the start. Such assignments could be structured around the three-pillar framework.

**Prepare Teachers for Disorientation.** Rather than presenting teaching techniques as universally applicable, teacher educators can prepare candidates for the likelihood that their assumptions will be challenged. Case studies like the incidents in this paper could be used to provoke discussion and reflection.

**Address the Emotional Dimensions.** Teacher education often focuses on knowledge and skills, but this study suggests that the emotional and identity dimensions of teaching are equally important. Programs might include explicit attention to the emotional labor of teaching and strategies for self-care.

**Emphasize Cultural Mediation Over Cultural Transmission.** The shift from transmitting culture to mediating between cultures is central to effective cross-cultural teaching. Teacher educators can help candidates understand this distinction and develop skills for mediation.

### 6.3 Implications for Researchers

For researchers in CFL education and language teacher cognition, this study offers several implications:

**Autoethnography as a Legitimate Methodology.** This study demonstrates that autoethnography can generate rigorous, insightful knowledge about teacher cognition. Researchers should consider autoethnography as a valuable addition to the methodological toolkit.

**The Value of Pilot Studies.** The pilot design allowed me to test methods and generate preliminary findings before committing to a larger study. This approach is valuable for any researcher developing a new line of inquiry.

**Attending to Context.** The findings underscore the importance of context in shaping teacher cognition. Research that attends closely to the specifics of context—cultural, institutional, relational—can generate insights that more generalizable studies may miss.

### 6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this pilot, several directions for future research emerge:

| Research Direction | Description |
|---|---|
| **Longitudinal Autoethnographic Studies** | Studies tracking teacher development over multiple years to examine whether initial adaptations are sustained and how deeper transformation unfolds. |
| **Comparative Autoethnographies** | Studies examining teachers transitioning between different pairs of contexts (e.g., China to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia to China) to identify context-specific and context-transcending aspects of cross-cultural teaching. |
| **Collaborative Autoethnographies** | Studies involving multiple teachers navigating similar transitions, allowing for triangulation of perspectives and exploration of shared patterns. |
| **Studies Incorporating Student Perspectives** | Research that pairs teacher autoethnography with student interviews or reflections, providing a more complete picture of the intercultural classroom. |
| **Intervention Studies** | Research examining whether structured autoethnographic reflection, as a formal professional development tool, enhances teacher adaptation and effectiveness during cultural transition. |
| **Cross-Cultural Validation of the Framework** | Studies testing the three-pillar framework in different cultural contexts to examine its applicability and identify necessary adaptations. |

### 6.5 Concluding Thoughts

By turning the analytic lens inward, this study has sought to generate knowledge that is not only academically rigorous but also deeply human—reminding us that at the heart of every classroom, especially those bridging cultural divides, is a teacher constantly thinking, feeling, struggling, and growing.

As I wrote in my final journal entry:

*"I can't become Saudi. But I can be more humble, more curious, more explicit about my position. I can ask more questions. I can admit when I don't understand. I can model what it means to learn across cultural boundaries—not as an expert, but as a fellow traveler."* (Journal Entry, Week 16)

This, perhaps, is the ultimate contribution of autoethnographic inquiry: not definitive answers, but honest questions; not certainty, but the courage to keep learning alongside our students. For CFL teachers navigating the complexities of multicultural classrooms, this stance of humble, curious, reflective engagement may be the most valuable resource of all.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Structured Journal Prompt Template**

Use this template for each journal entry. Complete as soon as possible after teaching.

| Section | Prompt | Your Response |
|---|---|---|
| **Date** | | |
| **Lesson/Topic** | | |
| **Description** | What happened today in the classroom? Describe a key moment or interaction in detail. Include who was involved, what was said and done, and any relevant contextual details. | |
| **Feelings** | What were my emotional responses during and after this moment? What did I feel in my body? | |
| **Evaluation** | What was positive or challenging about this experience? What worked well? What didn't? | |
| **Analysis** | What underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, or culture does this experience reveal? How did my own background influence my interpretation? What cultural scripts might be at work that I don't yet understand? | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Conclusion/Action** | What did I learn from this? What might I do differently in the future? What questions do I still have? | |

**Appendix B: Critical Incident Documentation Template**

Use this template to document critical incidents as soon as possible after they occur.

| Field | Description |
|---|---|
| **Date:** | |
| **Incident Title:** | A brief, descriptive title (e.g., "The Wine Glass Incident") |
| **Narrative:** | Write a detailed account of what happened. Include: who was involved, what was said and done, where it occurred, and any other relevant contextual details. Aim for rich, thick description. |
| **Initial Reactions:** | What were your immediate thoughts and feelings during and immediately after the incident? |
| **Why This Incident?** | Why does this incident stand out? Why might it be important for your development as a teacher? |
| **Assumptions Revealed:** | What assumptions about teaching, learning, or culture does this incident reveal? |
| **Connection to Pillars:** | Initial notes on how this incident might relate to: • Transformative Learning (disorienting dilemma?) • Reflective Practice (what reflection does it prompt?) • Intercultural Competence (what ICC skills/knowledge/attitudes does it call upon or challenge?) |
| **Follow-Up:** | What actions, if any, will you take in response to this incident? |

**Appendix C: Sample Coded Journal Entry (Anonymized)**

**Journal Entry: Week 3**

| Text | Codes Applied |
|---|---|
| Today I was teaching numbers. I wrote "十" (ten) on the whiteboard and explained this simple Chinese character. The students were quiet, but I assumed it was concentration. | Assumption: quiet = concentration |
| Until Y raised his hand: "Teacher, this looks like a cross. The cross is haram." | Cultural sensitivity; Student voice; Religious dimension |
| I felt a surge of tension—not anger, but the realization that I had stumbled into another cultural minefield. | Emotional response; Cultural awareness |
| In Malaysia, my Malay students would also notice the visual similarity, but there, in an environment of multicultural coexistence, students were accustomed to the idea that "different scripts have different shapes." | Comparison with prior context; Context matters |
| Here in Saudi, the sensitivity around religious symbols is absolute. A character resembling a cross could be seen as an offense to faith. | Cultural learning; Religious context |
| I paused and decided not to be defensive. "Thank you for telling me, Y. You're right, this shape does resemble a cross." | Reflective practice (in action); Open attitude |
| Then I turned to the whiteboard and wrote the Arabic numeral "10" and the Roman numeral "X" next to it. "See, the Roman numeral for 10 is also X, like crossed lines. Different writing systems sometimes have similar shapes, but completely different meanings." | Skills of interpreting and relating; Connecting to familiar |
| I had the students form words with "十": October (十月), very (十分), perfect (十全十美). I overwhelmed that initial visual impact with a flood of linguistic examples. Gradually, the whispering stopped, and some began to copy. | Pedagogical adaptation; Moving forward |

| | |
|---|---|
| After class, I reflected: I had almost made the same mistake as in Week 1—assuming characters are neutral visual symbols. | Reflection-on-action; Learning from past |
| This reminded me of what Byram calls "critical cultural awareness"—not making students accept Chinese culture, but enabling them to reflect on their own cultural standpoint while understanding the other's context. | Connecting to theory; ICC development |
| Y's question was actually a gift to my teaching, if handled properly. | Reframing; Transformative learning |