

Beyond Formal Training: An Account of Informal, Self-directed Professional Development

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Abstract

Professional development in tertiary ESL settings is generally discussed in terms of formal workshops and training programmes. The informal, self-directed professional development (PD) that emerges through everyday teaching practice, particularly in under-resourced ESL settings, is often overlooked. Addressing this gap, this study presents an autoethnographic reflective narrative of a longitudinal, informal, self-directed PD trajectory undertaken by an ESL practitioner-researcher in Sri Lanka. Informed by Dewey's and Schön's reflective practitioner model, Farrell's framework for reflecting on practice, and the British Council's continuing professional development (CPD) framework for teachers, the study uses data from the author's PhD research, experiential data from classroom experimentation with digital tools, social platforms, and more recently AI technologies, as well as classroom practice, conference participation, contributions to peer-reviewed publishing, and feedback from learners and colleagues. Situated within the author's specific institutional and sociocultural context and influenced by personal motivations, this autoethnographic reflective narrative suggests that teacher agency, critical reflection, ethical responsiveness, pedagogical innovation, and contextual sensitivity can foster sustained PD. A key pedagogical takeaway from this study is that ESL practitioners should view technology integration into instruction as a reflective process of experimentation, evaluation, and adaptation. The study presents actionable strategies for ESL practitioners, institutions, and policy makers. ESL practitioners can professionally develop through systematic observation, critical reflection, pedagogical experimentation, and the documentation and dissemination of classroom-based insights. Institutions and policymakers can support such informal, self-directed PD by recognising reflective practice, integrating mentoring and peer learning into workload structures, and endorsing context-sensitive policies that validate classroom inquiry and blended professional learning pathways.

Keywords: Autoethnographic reflective narrative; technology-integration; ESL practitioner-researcher; informal; self-directed; professional development

Introduction

The dynamic evolution of digital technologies has redefined how languages are taught and learned. In response language practitioners are called upon to integrate digital tools and platforms that serve a pedagogical purpose into their (pedagogical) practice (Salaberry, 2001). Stickler, Hampel, and Emke (2020) state that teachers' need tailored, flexible, and dynamic training opportunities, for many teachers feel overwhelmed when new technologies are introduced through top-down directives with minimal training to help their integration into teaching and learning. While PD in higher education has traditionally relied on formal workshops and institutional programmes, research suggests that for many practitioners, particularly those working in under-resourced contexts, self-directed, continuous learning helps practitioners to address their evolving PD needs and refine their practice. (Abou Said & Abdallah, 2024). Irgatoglu (2021) argues that this form of PD empowers educators to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. Reinforcing this view, Aljassar and Altammar (2020) emphasise its relevance in tertiary education, where academics are increasingly expected to manage complex and evolving professional demands.

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioner-researcher, I came to realise that the formal training available to me did not address how technology could be used in a pedagogically sound and contextually relevant manner. This became more evident when teaching Generation Z and now Generation Alpha learners, who bring with them new expectations, new literacies, and a different relationship with technology. Hence, faced with this reality, I made a deliberate and thoughtful decision to pursue my own PD. This raised the question, "How can I effectively grow as a professional in an area I was never formally trained in?" To find answers to this question, I resorted to informal, self-directed PD, an approach that is not only an alternative but also a necessary complement to formal learning offering personalised, flexible, and deeply reflective opportunities (Murray, 2021) grounded in real classroom practice, which has been shown to significantly enhance teachers' confidence and professional competence (Ní Ríordain et al., 2019).

This autoethnographic reflection is a narration of my informal, self-directed professional development (PD) trajectory as an ESL practitioner-researcher in a Sri Lankan state university. My PD trajectory spans from 2017 to 2025, and parallels that of global shifts in PD, where digital innovations demand that educators become reflective practitioners and autonomous learners (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Spanning over several years, this reflective narrative focuses on my integration of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and digital assessment tools in ESL instruction. It traces how I grappled with technological transformations, responded to institutional challenges, and engaged in reflective practice outside formal training systems. Feedback from colleagues, learners, peer reviewers, and conference participants has been an integral part of my informal, self-directed PD journey. When I submitted manuscripts for publication, the peer review process provided constructive critiques that challenged my assumptions and led to analytical reflections. Similarly, presenting at conferences allowed me to engage directly with peers who asked the right questions and offered valuable insights that made me reflect more critically on my practices. These ongoing dialogues, not just one-off suggestions, helped me experiment, adapt, and refine my use of digital tools in ESL teaching. Over time, this process strengthened my professional agency and led to meaningful transformation in how I approach my role as an ESL practitioner-researcher, especially within resource-limited contexts. These insights were further disseminated through academic publications and presentations, documenting the challenges, innovations, and outcomes associated with integrating CALL and dig-

ital tools in resource-constrained classroom contexts. Thus, my publications are not merely academic outputs but reflect a lived professional trajectory where teaching challenges led to research questions, and research insights transformed classroom practice.

My evolving understanding of informal, self-directed PD was guided by both personal initiatives and the principles of reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983), and framework for reflecting on practice (Farrell, 2015a). Dewey's and Schön's concepts focused on PD through *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. They conceptualised *reflection-in action* as real-time reflection during teaching to adapt on the spot and *reflection-on-action* as retrospective analysis of teaching to learn from past experiences. Building on the works of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), Farrell (2015a) extended reflective practice through his own framework and introduced the idea of *reflect-for-action*, which is planning future teaching based on past insights. He described reflective practice as a process in which teachers consciously assume the role of reflective practitioner. They subject their teaching and learning beliefs to critical analysis, accepting full responsibility for their classroom actions, persistently improving their teaching.

To give structure to my informal self-directed PD, I aligned it with the British Council's Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework (British Council, 2015) for teachers. In particular, the domain, *Taking Responsibility for Professional Development*, offered a clear structure for identifying my own professional needs. This framework guided my initiative through a range of learning activities, including reflective practice, teacher-led research, collaboration with peers, participation in academic conferences, as both presenter and attendee, and the reading and publication of scholarly work.

Thus, Dewey's (1933) and Schön's (1983) and Farrell's (2018, 2022) concepts gave meaning to my reflective processes, and the CPD framework provided a roadmap for assessing and structuring growth across key domains. The CPD framework for teachers developed by the British Council (British Council, 2015) provided the structural guide to assess competencies and plan targeted development. In conjunction, they formed the foundation of my self-directed, situated, and reflective practice as an ESL practitioner-researcher in a Global South context.

Rationale and Significance

By examining my own evolution as an ESL practitioner-researcher, I intend to shed light on how my engagement with research, digital tools, and classroom experimentation has informed and transformed my teaching practice and fostered my PD, particularly in a Global South context where formal PD infrastructure is limited.

Literature Review

Professional Development

PD, in general, is conceptualised as a continuous, career-long process that has a direct impact on student learning outcomes and is shaped by the broader educational context, including curriculum reforms, collaborative partnerships, and the availability of both formal and informal learning opportunities (Sancar et al., 2021). According to Kyriakides et al. (2017), effective professional development must address the individual needs of teachers as well as provide a structured and purposeful pathway for continuous growth, for a personalised and systematic approach ensures that PD is both relevant and impactful. Kourieos (2016) is of the view that PD should be designed as parallel learning environments in which knowledge is collaboratively constructed and critically interpreted through engagement with others involved in the PD process.

PD, particularly in CALL, requires EFL practitioners to have technological fluency and pedagogical soundness, if they are to create inclusive and responsive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of learners (Tafazoli et al., 2025). Hubbard (2018) argues that practitioners need to build a strong foundation in CALL, develop their knowledge through personally meaningful projects, and focus on individual growth. He added that maintaining professional journals, using digital platforms, and undergoing structured training are an important part of a well-grounded PD practice. This perspective on PD aligns closely with the wider field of language teacher training, in which multiple modes of professional learning are recognised. Echoing this view, Richards and Farrell (2005) point out that PD can take place through formal workshops, institutional training, and informal self-directed learning.

As for informal, self-directed PD in CALL, recent empirical research further reinforces its significance. For example, the findings of the exploratory six-month pilot study conducted by Graham, Lin, and Huang (2025) with Taiwanese bilingual school teachers revealed that self-directed PD showed promise in enhancing English proficiency. However, the authors recommend that self-directed PD should be embedded within broader institutional frameworks rather than treated as an isolated endeavour. Cosgun and Savaş (2024) examined how in-service EFL teachers made use of ICT and online resources to support their sustained learning and growth. Their findings also revealed that teachers gave priority to and benefited from online PD practices.

Studies indicate that self-directed PD is found to be more relevant and impactful (Lopez & Cunha, 2017), particularly due to the dynamic nature of CALL. In many contexts, practitioners hardly have any access to tailor-made formal CALL training, because of which they are often forced to independently learn and integrate technologies into their classrooms (Kusuma, 2022, as cited in Tafazoli et al., 2025). Studies also reveal that conventional top-down PD models often fail to deal with contextual challenges faced by teachers (Al-Seghayer, 2017), do not address their diverse needs (Al-Bakri & Troudi, 2020; Richards & Farrell, 2005), and are constrained by time, inadequate follow-up, and financial barriers (Omar et al., 2017; Averina & Kuswandono, 2023).

Thus, as opposed to formal PD, informal PD, which is undertaken by practitioners outside institutional frameworks, is self-directed and flexible. Informal PD is significantly shaped by teachers' daily instructional practices, individual interests, and specific professional requirements (Al-Seghayer, 2024). Informal PD is referred to as experiential and action-based learning, in which practitioners/educators develop their skills through active engagement, critical reflection, and ongoing refinement of their teaching within authentic classroom contexts (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Richards and Farrell (2011) add that teacher learning does not only include acquiring academic and pedagogical knowledge and the practical application of such knowledge but also the development of a professional identity as a language teacher within a specific context. Furthermore, Girvan, Conneely, and Tangney (2016) emphasise the vital role of collaborative strategies, including peer observation, reflective dialogue, and constructive feedback, in enhancing pedagogical effectiveness. Thus, informal, self-directed PD can not only be regarded as viable alternative to formal training but also a dynamic and sustainable approach to PD in the increasingly complex and technology-enhanced landscape of language education.

The Role of Reflective Practice in Professional Development

Although knowledge obtained through informal, self-directed PD is practical, timely, and context-specific (Stanfield, 2025), it is likely to bring the expected results only if it is combined with reflective practice, which plays a vital role in PD.

Reflective practice in PD is viewed through many lenses. Schön's (1983) notion of *reflection-in-action* draws upon Dewey's (1933) concept of *reflection-on-action*. The insights gained from *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* provide a basis for future pedagogical decision-making, a process subsequently conceptualised as *reflection-for-action* by Farrell (2018).

Reflective practice is a structured process through which practitioners reflect on their assumptions, evaluate their experiences, and refine their approaches to teaching and learning. Farrell (2015b) conceptualises reflecting on practice as a cognitive process supported by specific attitudes. It is described as a deliberate and systematic process in which practitioners can reflect on their practice through various approaches that depend mainly on the practitioner's goals and context. Dewey (1933, as cited in Farrell, 2018) observes that if teachers do not reflect on their teaching, they may act more out of habit, tradition, or external authority than by thoughtful, informed choices. Farrell (2018) argues that reflective practitioners do not struggle with professional stagnation or experience emotional burnout, for they tend to have a mindset that enables them to critically examine and refine both their teaching and broader life experiences. In other words, reflective practice enables practitioners to take ownership of their PD and use day-to-day classroom experiences as opportunities to learn, adapt, and grow. Farrell (2018) adds that revisiting Dewey's and Schön's foundational work confirms that reflective practice is an evidence-informed process in which practitioners/educators systematically gather and analyse data related to their professional actions to make informed instructional and pedagogical decisions. Thus, reflective practice is considered more than a tool or method. It is an evolving and sustained process of constructing and reconstructing one's professional identity over time (Farrell, 2013b).

Farrell and Kennedy (2019) argue that reflective practice provides a comprehensive and effective framework for language practitioners. Drawing on Farrell's (2015a) framework for reflecting on practice, they trace one teacher's reflective engagement across five dimensions: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflection. They state that these five dimensions help practitioners move beyond surface-level technical adjustments and examine the underlying beliefs, values, and contextual factors that shape their practice. According to them, this multidimensional framework of reflecting on practice encourages practitioners to critically reflect on their teaching and take informed pedagogical decisions. In the context of informal, self-directed PD, where structured institutional support is limited, this framework can be instrumental in validating and deepening experiential learning through critical and systematic reflection.

As the demands for PD continues to grow, educational institutions are turning to technology-driven PD. Such initiatives are endorsed as efficient, accessible, cost-effective, and time-saving solutions, for they provide flexible scheduling to EFL teachers, attract a wider international audience, and boost motivation through self-paced learning (Monyai, 2024; Tafazoli, 2024).

Drawing on his own experience with online teaching, Lewis (2006) argues that those interested in becoming e-teachers or e-moderators would be able to take informed decisions on pedagogy can only through reflection and critical analyses. He recommends practical strategies such as maintaining a teaching journal and inviting someone who would critically observe and give feedback on the teaching.

Thus, within the context of CALL, reflective practice is most likely to grant ESL practitioner-researchers the opportunity to question their assumptions about teaching and learning in technology-integrated contexts, evaluate the effectiveness of technologies used, and make informed revisions based on classroom dynamics and the needs of the learners. In the context

of this reflective study, too, the author constantly revisited her own teaching, questioned her pedagogical decisions and classroom experiences, and refined her instructional strategies to make learning more meaningful and relevant to her learners.

Conceptual Development Framework

The British Council's CPD framework for teachers (British Council, 2015) encourages teachers to take active ownership of their PD. This involves reflecting on their learning preferences and needs, setting clear short- and long-term career goals, and exploring different pathways to achieve them. It also emphasises the importance of staying current with developments in teaching and learning, and making good use of technology to development.

The CPD framework encourages teachers to get involved in a range of meaningful professional activities, such as collaborating with colleagues, participating in training, conducting classroom-based action research, attending, and presenting at conferences, reading, and publishing academic work, and joining professional teaching associations. Observing other teachers, and being observed in turn, is also seen as a useful PD tool. At its core, the framework promotes continuous reflection on how PD influences classroom practice and improves student outcomes. In doing so, it recognises the teacher as an informed, reflective, and self-directed professional committed to lifelong continuous learning.

The flexibility of the CPD framework makes it adaptable to diverse contexts. Institutions in the Global South, including Sri Lanka, could customise CPD pathways that reflect local challenges while upholding global standards. What made the CPD framework particularly relevant in my professional journey is its emphasis on autonomy, adaptability, and critical reflection. It allowed me to document not just what I did, but also why and how, which proved invaluable in connecting my personal growth with broader institutional and pedagogical needs.

Methodology

Research Design

This narrative adopts an autoethnographic (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022), reflective methodology. As a qualitative research method, autoethnography enables practitioners to critically analyse (Anderson, 2006) their own professional growth while situating their experiences within broader academic discussions (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Adam, Ellis, & Jones, 2017).

The insights presented in this study come from my own recollections and reflections (Liu, 2020; Sondari, 2021; & Yazan, 2019). My informal, self-directed PD evolved through iterative cycles of identifying pedagogical challenges, experimenting with digital tools in the classroom, rethinking assessment, and reflecting on what worked (and what did not). These reflections were shaped not only by my own learning but also by ongoing responses to institutional challenges, policy changes, and the evolving needs of my students. Whether I was experimenting with digital tools, rethinking assessment strategies, or making small adjustments to my teaching, each decision was guided by a sincere effort to make learning more engaging, relevant, and responsive to the teaching context.

Research Aim

The study aims to explore how informal, self-directed PD evolves overtime through sustained reflective practice in a resource constrained tertiary ESL context.

Guiding Question

The following question guided this study:

1. How did my informal, self-directed professional development evolve through sustained reflective practice in a resource constrained tertiary ESL context?

Data Sources and Time Frame

The longitudinal corpus includes my PhD research, peer-reviewed publications, feedback from reviewers, colleagues, and students, conference presentations, and course-related documents. This reflective process, from 2017 to 2025, helped me integrate experiential knowledge with research-based evidence in a way that is structured and contextually responsive. This aligns with Bergmark (2020) and Kourieos (2016), who argue for the importance of collaborative, context-specific learning.

Reflexivity and Ethical Positioning

I tried to maintain reflexivity through sustained self-questioning and reflection on my teaching and research decisions. I remained mindful of how my actions shaped student learning and my own PD.

Ethical considerations guided me to be transparent about my experiences, represent them as is, and ensure that institutional practices, classroom observations, and professional reflections were carried out responsibly. Throughout the reflective process, I was aware of and have acknowledged in this narrative my positionality as an ESL practitioner-researcher in a state university in Sri Lanka.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the longitudinal corpus outlined in the above section (see Data Sources and Time frame) was conducted in four steps. Initially, as a chronological, reflective reconstruction. Initially, key moments of insights and actions that shaped my classroom experiences were revisited. These moments were not considered as isolated instances but as lived experiences through which I reflected on my evolving identity as an ESL practitioner-researcher.

Given the inherent subjectivity of memory, recollections were cross-referenced with professional records, peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and documented online interactions, consistent with narrative inquiry practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This step strengthened the credibility of the reconstruction and helped identify recurring pedagogical concerns and decision-making patterns.

Following this, the data were coded to identify recurring themes. Schön's (1983) concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and Farrell's (2015a) five dimensions: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflection were used to develop the themes. Finally, the themes were mapped onto the British Council's CPD framework for teachers to situate informal learning within a recognised PD structure.

These concepts and frameworks enabled me to visualise how spontaneous classroom decisions, later reflections, and subsequent pedagogical amendments interrelated over time.

Summary of Reflective Professional Development Table

Table 1 below describes the chronological development of my informal, self-directed PD as a tertiary-level ESL practitioner-researcher, aligning key activities with Schön's reflective practitioner model, Farrell's framework for reflecting on practice, and the British Council's CPD

framework for teachers. Together, they demonstrate how my professional learning evolved in response to pedagogical challenges, technological changes, and institutional realities.

Each of the category represents a distinct aspect of my commitment to informal, self-directed PD. Collectively, these publications and conference presentations document my consistent experimentation with digital tools.

This table is not merely a record of activities but also a coherent narrative of sustained reflective practice, depicting how authentic teaching challenges have been transformed into opportunities for innovative teaching, reflection, and PD.

Table 1. *Chronological development of my informal self-directed professional development as a tertiary-level ESL practitioner-researcher*

Stage & activity	Key focus	Schön/Dewey concept	Farrell’s framework for reflecting on practice	British council CPD framework for teachers
2017–2018	<i>Tertiary-Level Students’ Perception of Individualised Self-Paced Teaching</i> <i>Self-Instructional Material-Centred Multimedia Computer Program: A Solution to the Challenges of Large, Heterogeneous, Teacher-Fronted Classes</i>	Reflection-on-action: Evaluating the effectiveness of self-paced computer-assisted language learning program in addressing the needs of heterogeneous learners	Principles/ Practice: Aligning pedagogical principles with digital strategies for diverse learners	Theory & Practice/Digital Integration/ Understanding Learners
2018–2022	<i>The Impact of Individual Learner Motivation on Group Activities Using Google Docs</i> <i>Challenges Encountered During Synchronous Online Collaborative Writing</i>	Reflection-on-action: Reviewing collaborative writing experiences to improve task design. Reflection-in-action: Responding to participation and role issues in real-time digital collaboration	Practice: Adapting teaching strategies during live online sessions	Teaching and Learning/ Evaluating and Improving Practice Digital Integration/ Inclusive Practices
2021–2024	<i>Teacher Perception of Facebook as a Mode of Assessment</i>	Reflection-on-action: Re-visiting assessment practices through social media use	Beyond Practice/ Principles: Considering institutional expectations and ethical aspects of digital assessment	Assessment/ Feedback/ Working with Others

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Stage & activity	Key focus	Schön/Dewey concept	Farrell’s framework for reflecting on practice	British council CPD framework for teachers
2024–2025	<i>Exploring Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use of Facebook</i>	Reflection-on-action: Analysing teacher and learner experiences with social media-based learning	Practice/Theory: Evaluating the pedagogical implications of integrating informal platforms	Assessment/ Feedback/ Working with Others
	<i>The Harsh Realities of CALL in a Sri Lankan State University</i>	Reflection-on-action: Critically evaluating the limitations of CALL in resource-constrained contexts	Beyond Practice/Theory: Reflecting on the sociocultural and institutional factors influenced and restricted the use of CALL	Contextual Awareness/ Inclusive Practices/ Leadership
	<i>Challenges in Integrating CALL: Self-Reflective Insights from an ESL Practitioner in Sri Lanka</i>	Reflection-on-action: Examining personal experiences to understand implementation challenges	Beyond Practice/ Practice: Balancing contextual constraints with pedagogical innovation	Contextual Awareness/ Inclusive Practices/ Leadership
2025	<i>Rethinking ESL Assessments: Enhancing Learner Engagement and Academic Integrity (ChatGPT)</i>	Reflection-in-action: Responding to emerging ethical and pedagogical challenges posed by AI	Beyond Practice/ Principles: Rethinking assessment practices to uphold integrity and engagement in the AI era	Digital Innovation/ Assessment/ Professional Values

Discussion

The reflective autoethnographic account of my self-directed PD has evolved through questioning my own practices, incorporating feedback from students, colleagues, academic peers at conferences, peer reviewers, and ‘adapting my pedagogical practices in alignment with the evolving need of my learners’. As Kyriakides et al. (2017) emphasise, effective PD must be both systematic and tailored to individual needs to bring about meaningful change in the classroom.

Technology Integration as a Professional Development Engine

A significant aspect of my informal, self-directed PD has been pedagogical experimentation with digital tools such as Google Docs and Facebook. Using digital tools was not just about delivering instruction; these digital spaces allowed me to see how students engaged with tasks, notice what worked and what did not, and adjust my teaching accordingly. In this way, PD emerged from reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983). For example, the use of Facebook for continuous

assessment revealed mismatches between assessment criteria and student engagement, prompting a reconsideration of feedback strategies and rubric design. Similarly, analysis of revision histories and interaction patterns in Google Docs exposed disparities in participation, leading to the development of targeted scaffolding strategies for less proficient or less confident learners.

These feedback loops, task design, learner response, reflection, and redesign, reveal how technology-mediated experimentation can serve as a sustained engine for PD. This aligns with Farrell's (2015b) conception of reflecting on practice.

Constraints as Design Features Rather Than Obstacles

Another significant aspect of my informal, self-directed PD is how I responded reflexively to contextual barriers. Working in a resource-limited institutional context required pedagogical choices that were pragmatic, low-cost, and flexible. Prior research suggests that online learning environments support PD most effectively when these environments offer meaningful opportunities for practitioners to address real-world teaching challenges (Beach, 2017; Mayer et al., 2017). Guided by this perspective and informed by Schön's reflective practitioner model, Farrell's framework for reflecting on practice, and the British Council's CPD framework for teachers, I approached constraints as opportunities for reflection and inquiry rather than as barriers. In doing so, I explored the possibility of using freely available digital platforms and adaptable assessment designs as instructional tools and observation sites. For instance, using Google Docs for collaborative writing (Irshad, 2022), I experimented with designing synchronous writing tasks, provided real-time feedback, and reflected on how students engaged with the activity, engaging in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983).

Similarly, when I used Facebook as a tool for continuous assessment (Irshad, 2024), based on learner responses, I redesigned tasks in real time and revisited my approaches to providing feedback, a process of ongoing, iterative reflection as conceptualised in Farrell's framework of reflective practice. When I began noticing students turning to AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete the tasks assigned to them, rather than taking any punitive measures or imposing sanctions, I reflected on how this emerging technology could be used in thoughtful, ethical, and pedagogically sound ways. This led to a re-evaluation of my assessment practices and the introduction of more transparent, interactive tasks that encouraged the ethical use of generative AI (see appendix A and appendix B for an example of how an assessment was redesigned; for more details, read articles mentioned below). This form of flexibility reflects Tafazoli et al.'s (2025) claim that effective CALL PD must foster both technological fluency and pedagogical soundness to address diverse learner needs.

These pedagogical shifts went beyond classroom practice and resulted in documented scholarly outputs, as seen in conference presentations such as "Teacher Perception of Facebook as a Mode of Assessment" and publications such as "Challenges in Integrating CALL" (Irshad, 2025) and *Rethinking ESL Assessments: Enhancing Learner Engagement and Academic Integrity* (Irshad, in press), an extension of my self-directed PD shaped by emerging digital realities. Collectively, these works represent an extension of my informal, self-directed PD shaped by evolving digital realities aligning with British Council's CPD framework for teachers. While grounded in my own practice, these outputs could also offer transferable insights for educators working in similarly resource-constrained or policy-limited contexts.

Academic Dissemination as PD Amplifier

Equally important was the role of retrospective reflection, particularly in transforming classroom experiences into scholarly outputs. My publications (see above) and conferences presentations

were not merely empirical studies; rather, they emerged from reflective questioning into what worked, what failed, and what could be reimagined. These instances of *reflection-on-action*, prompted by questions raised in feedback from students, fellow teachers, peer reviewers, and conference audiences, led to deeper insights into my own assumptions and the pedagogical implications of technology use in under-resourced contexts. Far from being theoretical abstractions, these studies represent grounded, practice-based investigations aligned with Farrell's framework of reflecting on practice.

Beyond dissemination, scholarly writing and conference presentations served as both a form of professional validation and a means of connecting with an intellectual community, an outcome particularly valuable in settings such as mine where institutional support for ESL PD is limited.

The act of facilitating workshops, mentoring colleagues, and contributing to institutional capacity-building initiatives also marked a shift in my PD, from reflective practitioner to reflective leader. These activities, although informal, were driven by a strong sense of responsibility to uplift practice within my academic community. This leadership dimension aligns with British Council's CPD framework for teachers (domain of *Working with Others*,) as well as Farrell's (2015a) framework for reflecting on practice.

AI as a Catalyst for Assessment Redesign and Ethical Repositioning

As students increasingly turned to generative AI tools such as ChatGPT for task and assessment completion, I began to reflect on how-on-how assessment practices might be redesigned to promote transparency, engagement, and ethical use. In practice, this led to the development of more interactive and process-oriented tasks that required personal input, staged drafts, and explicit reflection, turning emerging technologies into opportunities for meaningful learning rather than threats to academic integrity.

These adaptations show how AI became another driver of PD reinforcing Tafazoli et al.'s (2025) claim that effective CALL PD must integrate technological fluency with pedagogical soundness.

In conclusion, my experiences reveal several practice principles that may be useful for ESL practitioners in similar contexts. Freely available digital tools can create opportunities for collaboration, formative assessment, and a range of similar context-specific practices. Observing students' revision patterns, levels of participation, and digital habits can guide in amendments to task design, feedback, and scaffolding. Incorporating multimedia elements into teaching, learning, and assessment can help sustain engagement and support learners with different levels of confidence and proficiency. As new technologies, such as generative AI are introduced, guiding learners to use them with academic integrity will lead to responsible rather than defensive use of such technology. These insights suggest that PD does not depend on advanced infrastructure, but on teachers' willingness to reflect and adapt within the realities of their own classrooms.

Implications

The insights gained from this reflective study, as stated above, lead to practical implications for ESL practitioners, institutions, and policy makers. For ESL practitioners, professional growth can be facilitated through a structured five-step informal self-directed PD cycle: systematically observing classroom practices and student engagement, critically reflecting on instructional decisions and underlying assumptions, experimenting with pedagogical approaches, tasks, or assessment methods, documenting insights through journals or teaching notes, and disseminating findings via presentations, publications, or peer discussions. At the institutional level,

informal, self-directed PD can be fostered by formally recognising reflective practice through micro-credentials or internal awards, integrating mentoring and reflective activities into workload planning, and providing structured opportunities for peer sharing along with protected time for collaborative learning. Policymakers, can promote informal, self-directed PD by endorsing reflective portfolios and classroom-based inquiry as valid evidence of professional learning, facilitating blended pathways that combine formal programmes with self-directed experimentation, and designing policies that are responsive to contextual constraints rather than presuming uniform access to training or technological resources.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic reflection narrates my informal, self-directed PD trajectory as an ESL practitioner-researcher working in a state university setting with limited resources. Rather than depending on formal training or institutional programmes, my informal, self-directed PD has emerged out of lived experience, necessity, an ongoing dialogue with my teaching context, and a willingness to pause and ask: What is working? What needs to change? How can I effectively grow as a professional in an area I was never formally trained in? As Richards and Farrell (2005) and Lewis (2006) suggest, effective teaching does not emerge solely from formal training but from continuous reflection and responsiveness to the learner's reality.

Through the lenses of Dewey, Schön, Farrell, and the British Council's CPD framework for teachers, I have made sense of an evolving trajectory of PD. Each phase of this trajectory, starting with a self-paced material-centred CALL program, then using Google Docs and Facebook, and more recently addressing the impact of AI, reflects an evolving relationship with technology and teaching. What began as an isolated act of problem-solving gradually developed into a reflective practice, informed by theory yet grounded in the daily realities of students, systems, and constraints.

This autoethnographic reflection shows that meaningful PD is not a fixed destination but an ongoing reflective process. Informal, self-directed PD, especially in CALL, transcends technical mastery. It is about openness, adaptability, ethical judgement, and a deep commitment to learners. When we make space for critical inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, even in the busiest classrooms, we begin to shape not only our own PD but also the future of ESL itself.

Further Research

Future research could build on this foundation by exploring the informal, self-directed PD trajectories of other educators across diverse contexts, particularly in under-resourced or post-colonial settings where formal opportunities are limited. Comparative case studies or collaborative autoethnographies may shed light on shared challenges and locally grounded innovations in CALL.

Moreover, there is a need for further research into how informal and formal PD intersect, how educators move between these modes, and how institutions can better recognise and support informal efforts. Finally, the increasing presence of AI in language education calls for deeper investigation into how teachers can ethically and effectively integrate such tools while preserving learner autonomy, authenticity, and critical engagement.

Finally, this reflective narrative is just one piece of the puzzle. There is still much to explore about the barriers teachers face, how access and context shape self-directed PD, and how best to blend formal and informal PD. My informal, self-directed PD experiences, though situated in a specific institutional setting, hold broader relevance for educators engaged in reflective practice. My experiences have validated the notion that in an era of rapid technological advancement and pedagogical changes, ESL practitioners must be lifelong learners. By sharing my

experiences, my aim is to encourage fellow ESL practitioners to embrace informal learning as a means of staying relevant, adaptable, and engaged in continuous PD. I also hope, through this reflective narrative to inspire them to share their own stories contributing to a broader dialogue on what PD can look like when it originates from within.

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Appendix A

Movie Write-up (Individual Assignment)

Instructions for Students

- This is an individual assignment in which students watch a 30-minute movie clip (selected by the lecturer) and prepare a write-up on the relevant clip containing **an alternative plot**, in 3 drafts.
- Students may obtain a softcopy of the movie/clip **from the lecturer** if they produce a suitable storage device (e.g. pen drive).
- The alternative plot should be **in the student's own words**. As a pre-writing activity, the lecturer will obtain a sample of writing from each student for comparison purposes.
- The answer should be **between 250-300 words**.
- **Font Size – 12; Font Type - Times New Roman; Line Spacing - Double-spaced**
- The first two drafts will be checked by the lecturer for language errors, originality, word count etc. and returned to the students with feedback and the third draft, to be written in-class, will be considered final.
- The first and second drafts need to be emailed to the lecturer **as an attachment of a Word document, with a copy to moviewriteup2018@gmail.com**
- When emailing drafts to the lecturer, students should mention the following in the email subject line: English Gr. No, CPM no, Draft no. e.g. **Gr. 16, CPM 13500, Draft 2**
- The drafts should mention the **NAME & CPM OF THE STUDENT, ENGLISH GROUP NUMBER, NAME OF THE MOVIE, and the NAME OF THE LECTURER**.
- Plagiarized (copied from the internet and/or peers) answers **will not be given marks**.
- The deadlines for the email-submission of the drafts are as follows;
 - 1st draft –
 - 2nd draft –
- The lecturer will announce the date on which the 3rd draft is to be written in-class in due course.

Appendix B: Task and Instructions

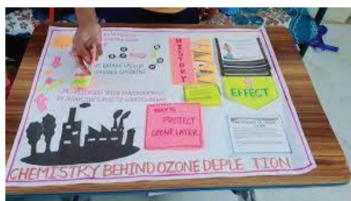
Poster Presentations

Task

- Students are required to do a poster (group) presentation based on the short movie they watch in class.
- Each group should present an alternative plot (the storyline of the movie needs to be changed) while retaining the main characters to deliver the same message as in the original movie.
- Students in a class will be divided into groups of 5-6 (not exceeding the limit) in the order of the CPM numbers (can be the same groups formed for formal presentations)

Poster Preparation

- After watching the movie in class during the first session of the week, time for designing and preparation of the poster is allocated within lecture hours (the usual two weekly sessions from). However, the groups are advised to work independently in addition to these allocated times, to complete their posters.
- The link of the movie will be shared with the groups after all the students watch it together in class
- The poster should present the alternative plot of each group.
- The poster should be creatively designed (unique) incorporating the following:
 - title of their story
 - text -should be readable from a distance
 - graphics – e.g.: pictures- hand drawn and/or printed, photographs, symbols, maps, diagrams, graphs, charts etc. to complement the narration.
 - white space
- Given below are some examples (*but we know that you can do better ☺!*)



- Groups are allowed to choose their own material to create the poster.
- A printed Power Point presentation will not be accepted.

Presentation

- The poster presentation follows the standard practices of the formal presentations (body language, appropriate transition signals/sign posting language etc.)

- All the members of the group should take part in the presentation.
- The presentation should include the following:
 - Introduction (greeting, introducing the members etc.)
 - Justify and/or explain the title
 - Clearly narrate the events of their alternative plot