From Curiosity to Confidence: A Faculty's Autoethnographic Reflection on Real-Time AI Support in Academic and Creative Work

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Abstract
This study provides an autoethnographic inquiry into how generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools affected the professional and creative practices of a faculty member based in Southern India. Framed through the lens of reflective practice theory, the story follows the journey from initial curiosity to confident, ethical, and intentional engagement with AI across the disciplines of teaching practice, academic writing, and institutional communication. It utilizes reflexive journals and recorded interactions and AI engagements from May to October 2025 as data sources to develop the themes of increased productivity, inclusive communication, and creative thinking in parallel with the tensions of intellectual dependency, authenticity, and data privacy. The paper situates these findings within an expansive literature review of global scholarship on AI literacy and ethical practice in higher education. Connecting lived experience and emergent frameworks of use promotes practical perspectives for educators who are reckoning with generative AI in their higher education institutions. Finally, it offers some recommendations around institutional AI literacy initiatives, reflective documentation, and contextually situated strategies for utilizing these tools in effort to support integrity and inclusivity for all learning through technology.

Keywords:generativeAI;autoethnography; reflective practice; higher education; academic writing; South India; technology-enhanced learning

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems like Chat GPT, Gemini, and Claude are swiftly transforming higher education systems globally. These models can aid the conceptualization, drafting, translation, and critical reflection on work — processes that have historically taken a significant amount of faculty time and commitment. Recent research on AI describes it as both a cognitive enhancer and pedagogical disruptor (Kasneci et al., 2023; <Cotton et al., 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2023). In contexts where faculty members regularly balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (such as in India), these tools hold the possibility of increased efficiency but raise important issues of authorship, originality, and reflective ethics.

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) promotes using digital tools for creativity and student engagement while retaining a strong focus on ethical use of technology that is inclusive for all. However, there is very little scholarship about how faculty members are experiencing and meaning-making their AI-assisted work in non-Western contexts. Most of the literature is situated in the context of Western institutions, which have primarily examined students' writing, the need for AI literacy, or policy lens (Zawacki-Richter, 2024; Lu & Guo, 2024).

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This article contributes to the literature by narrating the lived experience of a South Indian faculty member who worked with AI in various roles educator, researcher, and institutional communicator. Using autoethnographic methods, this article documents how real-time AI engagement moved from a space of experimenting with curiosity, to a space of confident, reflective partnership that considered both efficiency and ethical considerations.

The study aims to:

- Explore how AI-assisted interaction influenced academic and creative productivity.
- Reflect on the emotional, ethical, and cultural dimensions of AI use.
- Derive implications for faculty development and institutional AI literacy programs.

Statement Of The Problem

Although generative AI tools are becoming more visible in higher education, we lack important insights into how faculty members, particularly in the Global South, personally engage with and adapt to using these technologies in their academic work. Most research to date focuses, to varying degrees, on the student experience, technology affordances, or policies with emphasis on or discussion of academic practice. However, we and the literature lack scholarship that examines and describes the lived realities of educators who are using AI in practice to teach, conduct research, or create.

In the context of South Indian higher education, faculty members often work in multilingual contexts and increased workloads, and more efficient tools such as AI could have transformative benefits for these educators. However, issues of authorship, authenticity, and cultural appropriateness are still concerning. Thus, the issue is the lack of reflective, situationally appropriate scholarship that describes how educators transfer from simply being curious about AI to using AI confidently and ethically with awareness of their situational reality.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by providing an auto-ethnographic reflection of a South Indian faculty member's experience of and sense-making about the integration of generative AI into academic and creative work. Ultimately, this study is an attempt to illuminate the relationship between digital transformation and reflective practice in a South Indian higher education context.

Literature Review

Emergence of AI in Higher Education

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education has accelerated rapidly since 2020, driven by generative tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot. Recent studies (Kasneci et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2024) emphasize that AI technologies now influence pedagogical design, assessment, and academic writing support. UNESCO (2023) highlighted AI literacy as a critical global competency, stressing ethical and inclusive frameworks for AI adoption. Within the South Asian context, however, literature remains sparse regarding the lived experiences of educators who actively experiment with AI as part of their academic routines.

AI is already being used in academic work for automated grading, plagiarism detection, content generation, and personalized tutoring systems (Dwivedi et al., 2023). However, scholars Zawacki-Richter (2024), and Lu and Guo (2024), warn that the distinction between assistance and authorship remains an area of ethical debate. Therefore, faculty reflection about AI use is a valuable area of research especially in parts of the world like India where there are variations in institutional readiness, and digital infrastructure (AICTE, 2024).

Faculty Perceptions and AI Literacy

Research on the adoption of AI in the classroom is usually framed from the

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standpoint of technology readiness rather than the reflexivity of faculty. Cotton et al. (2024) proposed AI literacy, which captures not only functional understanding but also critical awareness of ethical, cultural, and pedagogical issues. In Indian universities, disparities in digital skills are discursively framed as a recurring barrier to implementation (Natarajan & Thomas, 2023). Other research from global contexts such as Lu and Guo (2024) found that while many educators valued AI for efficiency, they were also concerned about overreliance, data privacy, and the potential disappearance of academic originality.

In the academic ecosystem of South India, teaching is conceptualized as tightly bound to cultural ideas of intellectual labour and authorship. Thus, invoking generative AI tools will be a site of tension and negotiation. The reflective practice tradition (Schön, 1983) provides a useful theoretical framing to understand how faculty engage in these tensions, by reflecting iteratively on learning from their own professional experiences, to accommodate or change practice.

Autoethnography and Reflexive Scholarship

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Adams et al. (2015), autoethnography situates the researcher's lived experience as both object and method of inquiry. In this genre, the scholar marries lived experience and contextualizes the sociocultural meaning of the experiences. Recently, autoethnography has remerged within digital education research as a practice for documenting academic life amid technological change (Walton, 2022). Through the lens of AI integration, autoethnographic accounts explicate the "hidden curriculum" of adaptation among academics, or the ways academics learn, unlearn, and reframe identity when confronted with new technology. Reflexive autoethnographies are especially pertinent in postcolonial academic contexts in South India, where Human educators navigate the simultaneous claim of global digital systems and recognition of local psychologizing of pedagogical identity.

Gaps in Existing Research

There are multiple studies that highlight researching pedagogical approaches to AI, however, limited studies look into faculty's real-time, personal reflections of using AI tools in the areas of academic writing, teaching, and creativity. Most of the conversations remain Western-based discourse, with limited voices from Global South educators. In addition, there continues to be limited exploration of AI literacy, cultural identity, and reflective practice.

This study helps add to the literature by offering an autoethnographic reflection of a South Indian educator's experiences of using generative AI tools and offers a localized contribution to broader conversations of AI around the world. It also adds to the literature by connecting reflective practice theory to the emerging understanding of AI literacy to place a South Indian academic's experience within contemporary conversations about technological transformation and ethical authorship.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs an autoethnographic approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), combining personal narrative with cultural interpretation. Autoethnography situates the self as both subject and researcher, allowing exploration of professional transformation through reflexive documentation. It is especially suited to investigating emerging technologies where personal meaning-making intersects with institutional practice (Adams et al., 2015).

Context and Participant

The author, a faculty member at a self-financing college in Coimbatore District,

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Tamil Nadu, engages in curriculum design, report writing, student mentoring, and academic event coordination. Daily responsibilities often require swift content creationand administrative communication contexts where AI assistance was gradually integrated.

Data Collection

Data were collected from reflective journals and archived AI-chat transcripts maintained between May and October 2025. Each entry included:

- Context of AI use (academic, administrative, or creative)
- Type of interaction (drafting, rewriting, summarizing, ideation)
- Perceived benefits and challenges
- Ethical reflections on authorship, bias, or dependency

Over 60 interaction logs and 20 extended reflective notes were analyzed, providing a comprehensive record of the evolution from experimental to deliberate AI use.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Using an iterative process coding approach, the four themes that emerged were (1) Productivity and cognitive relief, (2) Communication that is inclusive and contextual, (3) Promoting creativity, and, (4) Integrity ...ethical vigilance. The insights of each person were then consolidated for a more comprehensive institutional and cultural analysis through repeated memoing and rereading cycles.

Ethical Considerations

No confidential institutional or student data were entered into any AI systems. Any identifying characteristics were anonymized. The study followed UNESCO's (2023) Guidelines on Generative AI in Education as well as the ethical principles outlined by NEP (2020) emphasizing transparency and accountability. While involving self-study and reflection, the study did not require a formal human subject review, but instead promoted integrity through reflexive transparency.

Findings: The Reflective Journey From Curiosity To Confidence

Phase.I — Curiosity and Initial Experimentation

The author's engagement with AI arose out of an interest in exploring whether generative tools could respond to bilingual prompts — in English and Tamil — might honour cultural idioms and maintain an academic voice. The early trials produced success as the AI produced grammatically sound and contextually relevant responses. This intrigue evolved into exploration due to the AI's ability to recognize nuances associated with local festivals, community outreach, and the institutional ethos, giving rise to an implicit intellectual partnership rather than an automated task completion agent.

Phase.II — Integration into Daily Academic

Work Gradually, AI became integrated into professional routines. It helped to support drafting event reports, exam questions, summaries of student feedback, and proposals for research/action projects A task that took hours of revisions to refine was completed in minutes. This impact on productively reshaped the writing experience from a burdensome administrative duty into one of creativity and reflection. For instance, in the report back on the academic seminar, a suggested paraphrase produced by AI reduced redundancy, while maintaining local institutional references.

Phase. III — Reflexivity and Ethical Maturity

Ethical questioning accompanied deeper integration. Was AI co-authoring or simply providing assistance? After each of the significant AI-assisted tasks, a reflection log was kept to indicate where the

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distinction lay between self-generated content and AI-suggested content. This intentional journaling promoted reflexive awareness and continued to reinforce agency and ownership of the author's expression. As time progressed, the faculty member began to consider AI a collaborator of sorts that enhanced, rather than displaced, human thinking.

Illustrative Observation

An excerpt from the reflective journal (August 2025), aids in unpacking this shift:

"Today, while I was drafting a circular that invited students to an inter-department fest, the AI proposed a succinct version that better represented the tone I was attempting to achieve. I recognized this wasn't about the AI replacing my words, but about it refining my purpose. Wow, it literally felt as if I had a co-teacher with me, but a quiet co-teacher."

These moments of realization stoked the potential of AI to be a reflective mirror that clarifies and allows for an expansion of self-expression and pedagogy that fosters communicative enlargements.

Discussion

Productivity and Cognitive Relief

A significant advantage was the optimization of time and cognitive load. Faculty working in Indian higher education is often confronted with high student enrolments and multiple competing administrative responsibilities. Using AI support, faculty could save an estimated 40%-60% of time spent drafting or writing, enabling them to shift their time and investment into mentoring students and researching for courses. The findings of Kasneci et al. (2023) and Cotton et al. (2024) provide some support for this type of reallocation of the human effort since they identified a role for AI as a ―cognitive exoskeleton‖ that can potentially augment human capability without replacing it.

Inclusive and Multilingual Communication

A second distinctive finding involved increased inclusion in an academic communication. The AI's capability of rewriting formal English into simple, culturally relevant phrasing provided some access for students from rural, non-English speaking communities, especially in relevant South India multilingual contexts. This also provides evidence in support of Lu and Guo's (2024) observation that AI may scaffold linguistic equity in various language classrooms.

Creativity and Pedagogical Innovation

AI catalyzed something else - creativity. The AI's iterative prompts helped catalyze new titles for articles or research papers, innovative classroom activities, and even layout or titles for workshops. Co-creating with awareness and respect for the potential of AI opened new avenues for divergent thinking, inkeeping with Schön's (1983) model of reflection-in-action for professional development through a dialogic mode of engagement within professional practice.

Ethical Risks and Reflexive Safeguards

Three major risks were identified:

- Intellectual dependency: Excessive reliance on AI could dull critical writing skills.
- Originality and plagiarism: While generated text appears unique, cross-checking via Turnitin or iThenticate remains vital to ensure authenticity.
- Data privacy: Faculty must avoid entering confidential institutional or student data into AI systems.

To mitigate these, the author institutionalized self-review checkpoints: reading aloud final drafts, annotating AI contributions, and maintaining reflective notes. These habits strengthened ethical literacy and restored balance between automation and authorship.

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Comparative Perspective with Global Literature

Whilst attention of Western literature to AI's role in academic writing (Zawacki-Richter>, 2024), we focus on situating AI in the Indian academic context, where time constraints, multilingualism, and hierarchies contribute to novel patterns of usage and acceptance. The experience of South Indian authorship shows AI to simultaneously be a democratizing tool in and a possible homogenizer of voice in writing, creating tensions that require local guidelines, which uphold linguistic diversity alongside academic rigor.

Implications For Higher Education

Theoretical Implications

The findings substantiate Schön's (1983) Reflective Practitioner framework, positioning AI as a dialogic partner that supports self-reflection and adaptive expertise. It also extends reflective practice into the digital realm, echoing Adams et al. (2015) on the evolving nature of professional identity in technology-mediated contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

Institutions should:

- Embed AI literacy modules in faculty development programs.
- Encourage reflective journaling to track AI usage and foster ethical consciousness.
- Develop clear authorship guidelines for AI-assisted work.
- Promote multilingual and culturally aware AI application, ensuring inclusivity for students from regional backgrounds.
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Policy Implications

In accordance with NEP 2020 and UNESCO's (2023) position statements, Indian HOIs may adopt policies about AI use within educational advancement that promote innovation while building ethics. A sense of responsible enthusiasm, where educators approach AI with curiosity instead of fear, will serve to assist equitable digital transformation.

Conclusion

This research adopts an autoethnographic method to show an educator in South India moving from initial exploration of generative AI, to implementing its use with an emergent ethical confidence. The reflective inquiry described below indicates that generative AI can be employed to enhance productivity, inclusivity, and creativity, without compromising authenticity, when it is informed by attention and a commitment to ethical practice.

Generative AI is not simply an emerging technological tool, it's an extension of the educator's experience of reflective practice. Externalizing thinking, and engaging in real-time feedback through generative AI, radically shifts an educator's thinking about their writing and communicating in order to enact that experiences, and what it means to "act as a teacher". However, engaging in this practice requires self-discipline and cultural gravity.

The inquiry into educator experience may be expanded to present the voices of multiple faculty in India with timelines, and explore longitudinal possibilities on the shifts of professional identity, epistemic trust, and linguistic diversity. Research like this may in turn, be used to inform institutional-level frameworks that enable the tension between global competence with local pedagogical practice to emerge.

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