

# A Comparative Critical Review of Case Study Design in Educational Research: Analyzing Teacher Beliefs and Learner Autonomy in ELT

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## ABSTRACT

This article offers an in-depth critical evaluation of case study research methodologies as applied within educational inquiry, with a primary focus on English Language Teaching (ELT) and the evolution of learner agency. By contrasting two distinct scholarly works, specifically the 2017 study by Jerome and Samuel regarding the "cognitive-behavioral gap" in novice educators and Skupeňová's 2023 longitudinal analysis of metacognitive growth, this paper interrogates the methodological integrity and ontological assumptions underpinning the "intrinsic case study" framework. Central to this critique is the argument that the perceived weakness of the case study approach, which is a lack of statistical generalizability, is actually its greatest asset in providing "thick description." Such qualitative depth allows for the mapping of nuanced, situational classroom realities that traditional quantitative metrics typically fail to capture. Through a systematic synthesis of data collection techniques, participant selection logic, and the ethical nuances present in both studies, this article constructs a professional roadmap for researchers in the field. Key themes explored include the necessity of robust data triangulation, the complexities of managing researcher-participant power imbalances, and the transition from static observation toward narrative-driven inquiry. Ultimately, the synthesis calls for a hybrid methodological stance. This stance must be capable of capturing both the immediate, visible snapshots of pedagogical practice and the gradual, internal trajectory of student self-regulation.

**Keywords:** Case Study Design, ELT Pedagogy, Teacher Beliefs, Learner Autonomy, Qualitative Methodology.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Evolution Of The Case Study In Educational Research

The case study remains one of the most resilient and versatile research strategies within the social sciences, occupying a particularly significant position in the field of education. While quantitative methodologies typically seek to isolate specific variables to uncover universal truths, the case study acknowledges that educational phenomena are inherently complex and inseparable from their real-world contexts (Hamilton, 2024). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of intricate dynamics, encompassing social, cultural, economic, and historical factors that shape learning environments (Harb, 2024; Warren & Bell, 2022). As defined by Yin (2018), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Leandro et al., 2025). This approach is fundamental to educational inquiry because teaching and learning never occur in a vacuum; instead, these processes are constantly shaped by administrative policies, cultural backgrounds, and the intricate interpersonal dynamics between instructors and students (Eslit, 2025; Siry & Wilmes, 2020).

Historically, the case study was frequently marginalized by post-positivist researchers who viewed it as purely anecdotal or lacking in statistical power. However, influential scholars such as Robert Stake (1995) and

Lawrence Stenhouse (1988) argued that the "intrinsic" value of a single case provides a depth of understanding that large-scale surveys simply cannot replicate. Methodological work counters these critiques by demonstrating that case studies contribute significantly to description, theory building, and theory testing when cases are carefully selected and constructs are clearly defined (Elstub & Pomatto, 2022; Gerrits, 2021; Ridder, 2017). This concept of "thick description" allows researchers to capture the subtle nuances of human behavior, intent, and cognitive processes. Within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), this depth is vital since language acquisition is an intensely personal journey, and case studies are uniquely positioned to explore underexplored issues such as identity, agency, and sociocultural influences (Alsagoor, 2025; Rahaman, 2025; Weidl & Erling, 2025).

This critical review evaluates two distinct applications of the case study design within the contemporary ELT landscape. The first article, authored by Jerome and Samuel (2017), examines the professional identity of a novice teacher in Malaysia through the lens of a "cognitive-behavioral gap," which refers to the documented disconnect between a teacher's stated pedagogical beliefs and their actual performance in a live classroom. The second article, written by Skupeňová (2023), adopts a more narrative-driven approach to track the longitudinal development of a student's metacognitive skills and learning management through specialized language advising sessions.

### Identification of the Primary Sources

This critical review evaluates the application of the case study design through a comparative analysis of two distinct peer-reviewed articles situated within the contemporary ELT landscape:

- **Article 1 (A1):** Jerome, C., & Samuel, R. K. (2017). *Not Quite What It Seems: Rethinking the Way We View Teachers' Beliefs and Practices*. Published in the *International Journal of Instruction*. This study utilizes a qualitative case study to investigate the professional identity of a novice teacher in East Malaysia, specifically examining the "cognitive-behavioral gap" between stated pedagogical beliefs and classroom performance.
- **Article 2 (A2):** Skupeňová, J. (2023). *The Story of Becoming an Autonomous Learner*. Published in *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*. This article adopts a longitudinal, narrative-driven case study approach to track the evolution of a student's metacognitive skills and learning management through specialized language advising sessions

Contrasting these two studies facilitates an interrogation of several critical methodological questions. The inquiry focuses on how the researcher's specific choice of "case" influences the selection of data collection instruments and how triangulation is effectively achieved in a single-subject design to ensure internal validity. Furthermore, the ethical implications of the power dynamics between the researcher and the participant in an educational setting remain a central concern. Ultimately, this synthesis demonstrates that the "bounded system" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of the case study remains the most effective tool for bridging the persistent gap between abstract educational theory and the practical realities of the classroom, a gap that recent empirical work suggests is co-produced by institutional, cultural, and policy factors.

### Theoretical Framework And Comparative Research Design

The efficacy of a case study depends on the clarity of its theoretical framework and the precision used to bound the investigation (Homme et al., 2024). Defining what is being studied and what is excluded is essential for internal coherence and analytic focus (Halizahari, 2019). This section examines how Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023) establish these boundaries and the ontological lenses used to interpret their data.

### The Intrinsic Case Study Approach

Both studies adopt the "intrinsic case study" model. According to Stake (1995), an intrinsic study is undertaken because the case itself is of genuine interest; the goal is to understand that particular case rather than to generalize or build broad theory (Harwati, 2019). This approach aligns with qualitative research paradigms that seek to

describe and understand phenomena within their natural contexts, constructing a holistic portrayal that delves into the nuances of informant perspectives (Halim et al., 2024).

In A1, the case is intrinsic because the focus remains on the professional dissonance of a single novice teacher, "May." The researchers aim to understand the distinct environmental and psychological factors triggering her specific "cognitive-behavioral gap". Similarly, Skupeňová (2023) utilizes an intrinsic design to follow a university student's journey toward autonomy. This approach provides a holistic, "thick description" that sophisticates the reader's understanding of the setting and the complexity of the learner's experience. This inherent characteristic of intrinsic case studies means that while their findings may not be statistically generalizable, they offer robust analytical generalizability, wherein the specific mechanisms and dynamics uncovered within a single case can provide a theoretical lens through which other similar contexts might be understood (Kasch, 2021; Şengül, 2025).

### **Bounding the Case: Time, Place, and Activity**

Bounding a case by time and activity is a critical methodological requirement that clarifies what counts as relevant data (Pacewicz, 2020). For A1, the boundaries are strictly professional and temporal: the case is bounded by the definition of a "novice teacher" and a one-week data collection window. The study specifically examines May's pedagogical practices and beliefs during this defined period (Bedeker, 2023)

In contrast, A2 employs a more fluid, longitudinal boundary encompassing a full academic semester. Explicit decisions regarding time units and boundaries are crucial in longitudinal work to strengthen the validity of timelines. While A1 provides a "snapshot," A2 addresses "process dimensions" such as duration and pace, which allow for a deeper explanation of the student's change over time. This temporal flexibility in A2 permits the exploration of emergent metacognitive strategies and their evolution, aligning with Merriam's assertion that the "bounded system" is defined by the phenomenon under scrutiny, rather than rigid adherence to a specific topic (Tan et al., 2023).

### **Ontological Positions: Post-positivism vs. Constructivism**

These articles represent distinct ontological positions. Jerome and Samuel (2017) lean toward a post-positivist approach, which retains a realist ontology but acknowledges that knowledge is fallible. They prioritize triangulation and structured tools to refine hypotheses regarding teacher behavior.

Conversely, Skupeňová (2023) operates from a constructivist position, assuming multiple, socially constructed realities. In this framework, narrative data is treated as co-constructed through the interaction between the advisor and student rather than as pre-existing data point (Kolasa & Sajdak-Burska, 2025). This "relational inquiry" acknowledges that dialogic "moments of meeting" reshape how events are experienced and narrated, foregrounding intersubjectivity and emotional engagement.

These two designs demonstrate that the case study is a flexible framework capable of either diagnosing a professional problem through post-positivist explanation or chronicling personal transformation through constructivist meaning-making. While the former prioritizes an objective understanding of observable phenomena, the latter delves into the subjective interpretations and shared understandings that shape individual experiences (Heinrich et al., 2021). However, both approaches converge on the common goal of providing an in-depth examination of a specific case, utilizing diverse methodologies such as questionnaires, interviews, and stimulated recalls to achieve triangulation of data sources (Kennedy et al., 2026; Negretti & Khuder, 2023).

### **Participant Selection and Sampling Rigor**

Within the qualitative tradition, and specifically in case study research, the validity of a study's findings is inextricably tied to the internal logic of participant selection (Bouncken et al., 2025). This approach differs fundamentally from quantitative research, which generally relies on probability sampling to achieve statistical representativeness. Instead, the case study utilizes purposive sampling (Dahal et al., 2024). The primary objective is to identify an "information-rich" case. This means selecting a participant who manifests the

phenomenon under investigation with enough intensity to provide meaningful insights (Campbell et al., 2020). This section evaluates the specific selection criteria employed in Article 1 (A1) and Article 2 (A2), considering how these choices impact both the depth and the transferability of the research.

### **Purposive Sampling and Theoretical Grounding**

A1 (Jerome and Samuel, 2017) exhibits a high degree of methodological precision through its application of criterion-based purposive sampling. The researchers did not pick a teacher based on mere convenience. Instead, they established a firm theoretical boundary by utilizing the definition of a "novice teacher" established by Gatbonton (2008). By narrowing the scope to an educator with fewer than two years of experience, the authors ensured that their data would be analyzed within the specific developmental context of early-career instruction.

From an initial pool of nine potential participants, "May" was chosen because she occupied a unique intersection of professional variables. She was a volunteer, she operated within a specific East Malaysian educational setting, and she held a clearly defined set of "espoused beliefs" regarding communicative language teaching. This deliberate selection process is vital. It allows the researchers to credibly argue that the "cognitive-behavioral gap" identified in May's practice is likely a function of her developmental stage as a novice educator, rather than a reflection of her general intellect or a lack of pedagogical training.

### **Convenience and Opportunistic Sampling in Narrative Inquiry**

In contrast to the structured approach of A1, Article 2 (Skupeňová, 2023) utilizes a blend of convenience and opportunistic sampling. The participant was a student already enrolled in a specific elective course titled "English Autonomously." This student provided consent for the researcher to use recorded advising sessions as primary data. While convenience sampling is sometimes viewed as less rigorous in other contexts, it is often the most ethical and practical route for a longitudinal narrative case study.

The student featured in A2 is identified as a "high performer." Within case study methodology, selecting an "exemplary case," such as a high-achieving student, can be just as academically rewarding as selecting a "typical case." By focusing on a highly motivated individual, the researcher is able to observe the maximum potential of the language advising framework. The investigative focus shifts from whether the method works for a general population to how the method functions at its peak. This aligns with the "intrinsic" nature of the inquiry, where the unique trajectory of the individual remains the primary concern.

### **The "N of 1" Dilemma and Transferability**

A frequent criticism leveled against both of these studies is their reliance on a single participant, which is often called the "N of 1" dilemma. Critics frequently argue that findings derived from one teacher or one student cannot be generalized to the broader population of ELT practitioners or learners (Fu et al., 2023; Ranta & Zavialova, 2022; Yang & Kyun, 2022). However, such critiques often stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of qualitative goals.

As Yin (2014) explains, the case study aims for "analytic generalization" as opposed to "statistical generalization" (Glette & Wiig, 2022). In A1, the objective is to contribute to a theory of teacher beliefs rather than to describe every teacher in Malaysia. In A2, the goal is to refine the theory of learner autonomy. By offering a "thick description" of these specific individuals, the authors facilitate "transferability." This allows a reader in a different context, such as a teacher educator in Europe, to examine May's challenges in Malaysia and identify parallel patterns within their own professional environment. Similarly, by understanding the nuanced journey of the high-performing student in A2, educators elsewhere can gain insights into optimizing learner autonomy within their own institutional settings.

### **Ethical Dimensions of Selection**

The selection process also involves significant ethical considerations. In A1, the voluntary nature of May's participation acts as a primary ethical safeguard. The researchers explicitly state that she was one of nine

volunteers, suggesting she was comfortable with the potentially invasive nature of being videotaped during her lessons.

In A2, the ethical landscape is more nuanced due to the dual role of the researcher as both an advisor and an investigator. Selecting a student for a case study naturally involves a power imbalance. The researcher must be certain that the student did not feel pressured to participate due to their status in the course. Skupeňová (2023) addresses this concern by utilizing anonymized transcripts and focusing on the student's personal development. Nevertheless, the advisor-advisee relationship is a critical variable that requires ongoing acknowledgment when discussing sampling rigor.

The analysis of these selection processes confirms that both A1 and A2 employed sampling strategies that were well-suited to their respective research questions. A1 required a theoretically bounded novice to investigate professional divergence, while A2 required a willing narrator to document the evolution of a psychological trait over time (Hofstetter, 2022).

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments of Inquiry**

The structural integrity of a case study depends heavily on the researcher's capacity to capture data from diverse perspectives (Paparini et al., 2021). In qualitative inquiry, this is frequently referred to as "triangulation," a metaphor derived from navigation and surveying that involves using multiple points to locate an exact position (Schlunegger et al., 2024). In the context of the studies by Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023), triangulation is not merely a checkbox for validity; rather, it serves as the primary mechanism for uncovering the hidden complexities of the educational experience. This multi-modal approach enables a more robust interpretation of phenomena by corroborating findings across disparate data streams (Anderson, 2024).

### **Divergent Tools for Divergent Goals**

Interview is considered the most ubiquitous tool in case study research, but both authors deviate from this norm in favor of more specialized instruments (Negretti & Khuder, 2023). This choice reflects the distinct nature of their research questions: Jerome and Samuel (2017) sought to measure "congruence," which required objective observation, whereas Skupeňová (2023) aimed to document "growth," which necessitated subjective reflection.

### **A1: The Empirical Triangle of Observation**

Jerome and Samuel (2017) utilized a sophisticated three-part data collection framework to investigate the novice teacher, May. Their instruments included a two-part questionnaire to establish a "baseline" for May's espoused beliefs, videotaped classroom observations to record actual practice, and verbatim transcription for a microscopic analysis of classroom discourse. This design is particularly robust because it allows the researcher to "audit" the participant's claims (Johannesen et al., 2024). If May asserted a value for student autonomy in her questionnaire, the video evidence could either corroborate or refute that claim. Such triangulation is essential for identifying the "cognitive dissonance" that often plagues novice teachers who struggle to reconcile their university training with the harsh realities of the classroom (Agudo, 2024)

### **A2: Narrative Data and Longitudinal Advising**

Skupeňová (2023) adopted a more fluid approach to data collection, focusing on the chronological evolution of the learner. Instead of isolated observations, the data consisted of three advising interviews conducted across the semester, reflective learner logs, and feedback forms to confirm self-assessments (Alshraah et al., 2023).

In A2, the "instrument" is effectively the dialogue between the advisor and the student. This represents a shift toward "relational inquiry," where data is not something "extracted" from a subject but is instead "generated" through interaction (Dai et al., 2024). The application of Tassinari's (2012) dynamic model allowed the researcher to categorize the student's emerging metacognitive subskills, such as planning and monitoring, as they surfaced over time (Ali et al., 2025). This longitudinal, narrative-driven approach provided rich, detailed insights into the student's evolving self-regulatory processes within the academic context (Estaji, 2024).

## The Role of Technology in Data Capture

Both studies highlight the increasing significance of technology in modern case study research (Naeem & Thomas, 2025). In A1, the use of video recording provided an objective record but also introduced the "Observer Effect" or "Hawthorne Effect," where participants alter their actions because they are being watched (Stals et al., 2020).

In A2, digital recording facilitated a narrative depth that hand-written notes could not replicate. By capturing nuances in tone and hesitation, the researcher constructed a "story of becoming" (Höpfner & Promberger, 2023). This highlights a key divergence: A1 utilizes technology to "prove" a gap in practice, while A2 employs it to "preserve" a journey of growth.

## Addressing the Absence of Formal Interview

It is noteworthy that neither study relied on a traditional, one-off semi-structured interview (Moon et al., 2026). In A1, the researchers substituted the interview with a detailed questionnaire. While this allowed for a structured comparison of beliefs, it may have obscured the "why" behind the teacher's actions. A post-observation interview, often termed a "Stimulated Recall Interview," would have allowed the teacher to explain her decisions while watching her own lesson, adding a significant layer of depth (Blake, 2024). Similarly, A2's reliance on advising sessions, while providing rich longitudinal data, might have benefited from supplementary formal interviews to explore specific metacognitive strategies or emotional responses in greater detail (Lazović, 2025; Saqr et al., 2021).

In A2, the "advising sessions" functioned as interviews, yet they remained pedagogical in nature rather than purely investigative. This blurs the line between "teaching" and "researching," a common occurrence in Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry (Yanto & Ramdani, 2023). However, this requires the researcher to be extremely careful regarding data interpretation, as the student may be performing a specific "version" of themselves to meet perceived institutional expectations (Prosek, 2020).

By synthesizing these methods, it becomes evident that the "instrumentation" of a case study must be tailor-made for the phenomenon under study. Whether through the objective lens of a camera or the intersubjective dialogue of an advising session, the goal remains the capture of the "bounded system" in its full complexity (Paparini et al., 2021)

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: CONVERGENCES AND CONTRADICTIONS

The fundamental value of a critical review rests in its capacity to synthesize outcomes across distinct studies, thereby identifying universal pedagogical patterns (Shehata et al., 2026). Although Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023) are situated in vastly different geographical and cultural landscapes, their combined findings shed light on the inherent friction between educational theory and actual human performance. This section investigates the "Cognitive-Behavioral Gap" observed in teaching practices alongside the "Metacognitive Evolution" documented in student learning management.

### The Dissonance of the Novice Teacher

In A1, Jerome and Samuel (2017) exposed a significant contradiction that frequently surfaces in teacher education (Tomisu et al., 2025). The participant, May, articulated a profound theoretical commitment to student-centered methodologies and communicative language teaching (CLT) within her initial questionnaire responses. However, a microscopic analysis of the videotaped lessons revealed a practice that was almost entirely teacher-fronted.

This evidence suggests that pedagogical beliefs are not static psychological traits; instead, they are "situated" and often highly sensitive to the immediate pressures of the classroom environment (Sun & Zhang, 2024). Extant

research conducted between 2020 and 2026 reinforces the observation that novice ELT teachers often carry idealistic beliefs that prove difficult to implement in real-time settings (Fernandez et al., 2025).

Recent empirical evidence (2020–2026) reinforces the observation that this dissonance is often a survival mechanism rather than a lack of training (Daccache & Ibrahim, 2023; Jalaluddin et al., 2024). Researchers have identified that in contexts with high institutional pressure, such as those described in East Malaysia—novice teachers often revert to traditional methods due to perceived student proficiency gaps and rigid time constraints (Choy et al., 2021). This dissonance is further mirrored in recent systemic reviews of the Indian context, which suggest that while innovative frameworks like flipped learning are gainfully explored, their implementation remains contingent on overcoming entrenched institutional and infrastructural barriers (Azhar & Rashid, 2024). This indicates that without structural support, the transition from student-teacher to practitioner often results in the sacrifice of idealistic values for the sake of classroom management (Taylor & Hikida, 2024)

### **The Nonlinear Journey of Autonomy: A Developmental Critique**

In contrast to the "gap" identified in A1, Skupeňová (2023) documented a clear, albeit nonlinear, pathway of evolution in A2. These findings suggest that becoming an autonomous learner is not a simple acquisition of skills, but a process defined by a cycle of "crises" and "resolutions" (Stringer, 2024). This developmental perspective aligns with self-regulated learning frameworks that emphasize the iterative and often challenging nature of metacognitive skill acquisition (Kharroubi & ElMediouni, 2024). Using Tassinari's (2012) descriptors, the researcher demonstrated that the student's capacity to plan and monitor his learning was not a fixed trait but a dynamic skill set that fluctuated throughout the term.

A2 serves as a robust counter-argument to the notion of autonomy as "independence." Instead, the case study illustrates that true autonomy is often a form of "interdependence" (Gupta et al., 2024). The student's metacognitive subskills, such as the ability to evaluate materials, only surfaced through the dialogic interaction with the advisor. This implies that autonomy is less an internal state and more a co-constructed outcome of the learning environment (Güler, 2021; Kharroubi & ElMediouni, 2024). The dynamic nature of learner autonomy is increasingly relevant in the digital age, where systematic reviews indicate that emerging AI tools are reshaping the boundaries of learner agency and self-regulation (Azhar & Abdullah, 2024).

### **Comparative Synthesis: The Role of External Scaffolding**

When A1 and A2 are viewed together, a significant theme regarding the **Architecture of Support** emerges. In A1, the teacher failed to act on her beliefs because she lacked the necessary "pedagogical scaffolding", such as mentor support or a flexible curriculum to handle the weight of her environment (Magnusson et al., 2023). Conversely, in A2, the student succeeded because the environment, specifically the advising sessions, was explicitly designed to catch him during moments of failure (Oliver, 2024; Zorwick et al., 2024).

Both studies affirm that "intentions" alone are insufficient for educational transformation. In A1, intentions collapsed under environmental weight; in A2, they flourished through structural support. This comparative insight shifts the scholarly conversation away from individual "competence" and toward the "support structures" that enable both educators and students to manifest their values in practice (Fagerholm et al., 2025).

The necessity for such structural scaffolding is evidenced by the move toward large-scale digital initiatives, such as MOOCs, which aim to provide the continuous pedagogical and technical upskilling required for teachers to bridge the theory-practice divide (Azhar & Rashid, 2025).

### **Critique Of Ethics and Limitations in Case Study Inquiry**

A rigorous critical review must look beyond the immediate findings of a study to examine the methodological and ethical constraints that shaped those results (Taylor, 2023). Within qualitative research, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection, issues such as researcher bias, power dynamics, and participant anonymity become paramount (Rejina & Wu, 2026). This section evaluates how Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023) navigated these challenges while identifying the inherent limitations of their single-subject designs.

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## Ethical Reflexivity and Power Dynamics

In A1, Jerome and Samuel (2017) demonstrated commendable ethical transparency by employing the pseudonym "May" to protect the teacher's professional identity (Mufori et al., 2025). This was particularly crucial given the "deficit" nature of the findings, which underscored a significant failure to align classroom practice with stated beliefs. By securing her anonymity, the researchers facilitated an honest portrayal of a novice teacher's struggle without jeopardizing her professional standing. Furthermore, May's status as a volunteer reinforces the study's ethical integrity, signaling a high degree of informed consent and respect for individual autonomy.

However, A2 presents a more complex ethical landscape. Skupeňová (2023) utilized narrative data from advising sessions where the researcher also served as the student's advisor, creating what is known as a "Dual Role" conflict (Rejina & Wu, 2026). Although the study followed systematic procedures for data analysis, the inherent power imbalance between an advisor and a student can trigger a "Social Desirability Bias" (Israel et al., 2023). The student may have consciously or unconsciously performed a version of "autonomy" believed to satisfy the advisor's expectations. While the study utilized anonymized transcripts, the risk of influence in goal setting and material selection remains a critical point of critique. Ethical research in such a context demands a high degree of "Reflexivity," where the researcher explicitly discusses how their personal presence and institutional role shaped the emerging narrative (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

## The "Small N" and Generalizability Debates

As previously noted, both studies are limited by their focus on a single participant. In A1, the investigation centered on only one teacher from the nine who originally participated in the broader research project (Hamilton, 2024). This "Small N" approach provides only a narrow window into the expertise of teachers at different career stages; May's practices as a novice may not reflect the more refined techniques of an experienced educator, which limits the study's capacity to speak to the ELT profession at large (Hua & Thảo, 2024).

Similarly, A2's singular focus on one university student's journey toward autonomy, while deeply insightful, restricts the generalizability of its findings to diverse student populations or educational contexts (LEE, 2025). These case studies, while rich in detail, cannot definitively establish overarching pedagogical principles or instructional strategies applicable across varied learning environments without further replication and expansion to broader cohorts (Borsetto et al., 2024).

## Methodological Constraints in Data Capture

The specific instruments used in both studies also present certain limitations. In A1, the researchers relied on a questionnaire to capture beliefs and video observations to document practice (Kwong et al., 2025). However, they failed to conduct a formal interview to bridge these two data points. Without a "Stimulated Recall Interview," where the teacher explains the specific "why" behind her classroom decisions while viewing the footage, the researchers are forced to infer her motivations. This leaves a significant gap in the "explanatory power" of the case study.

In A2, the research is narrative in nature, and the interviews were embedded within the pedagogical process itself rather than being conducted as part of a formal research design. This "observer-only" stance can potentially lead to a lack of objectivity, as the researcher is essentially interpreting a story that they helped to facilitate. Furthermore, the reliance on feedback forms for triangulation provides only a superficial layer of secondary data, as students often provide positive feedback in elective courses to maintain a favorable relationship with the instructor. This dynamic can further complicate the extraction of unbiased data, particularly when assessing the efficacy of pedagogical interventions (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021).

## The Observer Effect and Authenticity

Finally, both studies must contend with the "Hawthorne Effect," where the act of being observed fundamentally alters the behavior of the subject. In A1, the researchers explicitly acknowledged that classroom interactions

might not have reflected a "regular" class because it was being videotaped. The teacher may have been performing a "heightened" version of her pedagogy or, conversely, may have felt more inhibited than usual.

Similarly, in A2, the student's learning log and advising sessions were "performative" acts. The student was fully aware that his progress was being monitored for an elective course. For a case study to achieve true "Authenticity," the researcher must spend enough time in the environment, a concept known as "prolonged engagement", to ensure that participants have become comfortable enough to act naturally. While A2 achieved this through a semester-long engagement, A1's one-week observation period remains a notable limitation in capturing the "authentic" daily professional life of the teacher.

By acknowledging these limitations, this review does not seek to invalidate the findings of A1 and A2. Instead, it aims to place those results within a realistic context, providing a more nuanced and sophisticated view of the challenges inherent in conducting qualitative research in the modern classroom (Alipio, 2025; Mantula et al., 2024)

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis of Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023) underscores the profound versatility of the case study design in educational research. By operating within the "bounded system" of ELT, these studies utilized distinct methodological lenses to uncover the intricate layers of human experience; A1 provided a diagnostic snapshot of professional dissonance, while A2 offered a longitudinal chronicle of psychological evolution. Together, they demonstrate that the intrinsic case study remains the premier instrument for capturing the nuance, crisis, and development that define modern pedagogy (Wu, 2022).

### Synthesis of Comparative Insights

A primary conclusion of this review is the deterministic role of context in shaping teacher and learner behavior (Anderson, 2024). Jerome and Samuel (2017) illustrated that a teacher's beliefs are not fixed internal compasses but are constantly renegotiated against external pressures like student proficiency and institutional constraints. Similarly, Skupeňová (2023) demonstrated that learner autonomy is a dynamic skill set that either flourishes or withers based on the quality of interpersonal scaffolding provided (Eppendi et al., 2025). Ultimately, both studies reveal that educational intentions require a supportive environment to successfully translate into action.

### Methodological Recommendations

To enhance future rigor in case study designs, this review proposes four strategic shifts:

- **Integration of Stimulated Recall:** To move beyond researcher inference, future studies should utilize stimulated recall interviews where participants provide first-person explanations for their pedagogical choices (Delany et al., 2025). This technique would provide a more robust understanding of the cognitive processes underpinning observed behaviors, addressing the "explanatory power" gap often found in observational studies.
- **Prolonged Engagement:** To mitigate the Hawthorne effect, researchers should prioritize semester-long immersion over short-term observations to capture truly authentic behavior (Qiang & Zhang, 2021). Moreover, future investigations could systematically examine professional competence and continuous professional development practices in conjunction with professional teacher identity (Ayar, 2021).
- **Reflexive Reporting:** Given the inherent power dynamics in educational settings, researchers must explicitly document their "positionality" and how their institutional roles may have influenced the data (Christolouka & Verdis, 2025; Sibbald et al., 2025). This fosters greater transparency and allows for a more critical assessment of potential biases (Catayoc, 2025).
- **Hybrid Designs:** The most robust path forward involves combining the structural analysis of belief-practice gaps with longitudinal narratives of growth to provide a 360-degree view of the educational landscape (Tsakeni et al., 2026). This integrated approach would enable researchers to map the intricate interplay between individual agency and systemic influences, thereby advancing a more holistic understanding of pedagogical phenomena (Stringer & Jordan, 2025; Tra & Thảo, 2025; Yun & Chong, 2025).

## Final Concluding Statement

The case study approach is a sophisticated tool for critiquing the modern educational system. When executed with rigor, it moves beyond the anecdotal to reveal universal truths about the human beings at the heart of every curriculum (Hamilton, 2024; Okowa & Otero, 2024). By focusing on the particular, the case study allows us to perceive the complexities of education in a way that no other methodology can replicate (Merriam, 2018). Furthermore, these detailed examinations of individual teaching and learning situations can provide crucial nuances that complement generalizations derived from large-scale quantitative studies (Danielsson et al., 2023). Additional research focusing on the interplay between teacher identity and agency, and how these factors influence equitable practices in STEM education, could further enrich this understanding (Holincheck & Galanti, 2025).

Finally, the contrasting narratives of Jerome and Samuel (2017) and Skupeňová (2023) prove that while theory provides the map, only the case study captures the true topography of the pedagogical journey. By honoring the individual story, we gain the necessary clarity to refine the collective systems that define modern language education.

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