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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to reexamine the principle of researcher-as-instrument to provide insights on methodological ways of engaging critically and reflexively. There are few published pieces that have given attention to the complexities of the educational researcher’s identities through the method of critical self-analysis. The researcher’s nine published case studies were critically reanalyzed by using the criteria of excellent qualitative research such as rich rigor to examine the relationship between the researcher’s identities and the quality of qualitative research. The findings suggest that the researcher’s published studies lack sincerity most among other criteria. The layered identities of the researcher, specifically her theoretical knowledge and linguistic orientation, influenced the data interpretation and subsequent reports. The field of educational research tends to view researchers as one homogenous group; this study redefines that notion as the findings uncover that the researcher’s positionality affects data interpretation. The findings suggest that a more rigorous method of reexamining the concept of researcher-as instrument is vital for the improvement of the educational practice. A suggestion for future publications is to include a “complexities” section to share researchers’ complex identities in their qualitative research reporting.

Keywords

researcher-as-instrument, self-reflexivity, researcher identity, qualitative educational research, quality of educational research

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“Researcher-As-Instrument” in Qualitative Research: The Complexities of the Educational Researcher’s Identities

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The purpose of this study was to reexamine the principle of researcher-as-instrument to provide insights on methodological ways of engaging critically and reflexively. There are few published pieces that have given attention to the complexities of the educational researcher’s identities through the method of critical self-analysis. The researcher’s nine published case studies were critically reanalyzed by using the criteria of excellent qualitative research such as rich rigor to examine the relationship between the researcher’s identities and the quality of qualitative research. The findings suggest that the researcher’s published studies lack sincerity most among other criteria. The layered identities of the researcher, specifically her theoretical knowledge and linguistic orientation, influenced the data interpretation and subsequent reports. The field of educational research tends to view researchers as one homogenous group; this study redefines that notion as the findings uncover that the researcher’s positionality affects data interpretation. The findings suggest that a more rigorous method of reexamining the concept of researcher-as instrument is vital for the improvement of the educational practice. A suggestion for future publications is to include a “complexities” section to share researchers’ complex identities in their qualitative research reporting.

Keywords: researcher-as-instrument, self-reflexivity, researcher identity, qualitative educational research, quality of educational research

This article reports on the critical reanalysis of the researcher’s nine published case studies by using criteria of Tracy’s (2010) excellent qualitative research through the concept of researcher-as-instrument. The studies are the ones that the researcher (first author) conducted in diverse classrooms (elementary, middle, and high schools) on teachers’ instructional approach and its relationship with students’ language and literacy learning. The current study aims to reexamine the relationship between researchers’ identities and quality of qualitative research.

“The researcher is an instrument” is a common phrase in qualitative studies. As qualitative scholars (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2018) have pointed out, the researcher is a major tool who plays a key role in data collection, interpretation, and presentation. The researcher defines the meaning of data at all stages of the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This refers to the concept of “researcher-as-instrument” and it is a basic tenet to any qualitative researcher. Yet, this basic principle seems to lack close examination. The meaning of “researcher-as-instrument” is complex because it takes into consideration researchers’ complex identities (e.g., knowledge, linguistic, or racial orientation), which can influence the quality of research. Researchers’ identities can promote positive and negative emotions of belonging and self-confidence (Roger et al., 2018); they influence the interpretation and presentation of the data.

Despite the importance of the researcher's role in qualitative research, there has been little in-depth discussion on how *educational* researchers' identities influence the quality of qualitative research. That is, the relationship between researchers' identities such as their racial and linguistic orientation and the quality of qualitative studies was not clearly known. Educational researchers themselves are complex and heterogeneous. They interpret a certain situation through the lens of their cultural and theoretical knowledge on education, which can affect the quality of the study. Ironically, the field of education has progressed over decades with new educational theories that consider the potential subjects or participants' varied identities (e.g., critical social constructivism), but it seems that there are few, if any, published pieces that have given attention to the complexities of the researcher's identities through the method of critical self-analysis; therefore, the notion of "the researcher-as-instrument" should be addressed to improve the quality of educational research.

As teacher educators and qualitative researchers in the field of literacy education, we (first and second authors) posit that the educational field should pay more attention to methodological issues and offer more intellectual space to discuss these important matters. One of the major contributions that qualitative research made to the educational field is that the researcher contributes to deepening educators' understanding of a situation investigated by the researcher (e. g., classroom settings where interactive dynamics occur). Educational practice has been informed by this research contribution. A rigorous method of reexamination of the concept of researcher-as instrument is vital for the improvement of the educational practice.

The purpose of this article is to reexamine the principle of researcher-as-instrument to provide insights on methodological ways of engaging critically and reflexively. Although qualitative researchers often include their positionality in publications, it often lacks a discussion on how their positionality and identities are related to the quality of studies. To our knowledge, this current study may be the first attempt to tackle this issue through a critical self-analysis method. The research question that guided the current study was: how do the educational researcher's identities influence the quality of the qualitative studies?

Given that our role as qualitative educational researchers is ongoing, continued efforts to reexamine our studies with the lens of identities is important. Although the notion of researcher-as-instrument has been examined by focusing on researchers' identities, it has not been widely known how it impacts the quality of qualitative studies. More critical analysis of studies by using criteria of excellent qualitative studies would be helpful to understand the relationship between researchers' identities and quality of qualitative research.

As Hertz (1997) suggested, reflexive researchers continuously question the origin of interpretations. This reanalysis approach might feel vulnerable to qualitative researchers due to the reinterpretations that might be discovered, yet this process may improve our educational research and practice, and perhaps direct the future of the qualitative educational field.

Literature Review on Researcher as Instrument

Literature review on researcher-as-instrument shows that the concept has been examined in different ways by focusing on the researcher's learning process through reflection, reflexivity, or positionality (e.g., Dennis, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Pezalla et al., 2012; Soh et al., 2020; Xu & Storr, 2012). Additionally, the review of literature on researcher-as-instrument indicates that the concept has been discussed in various disciplines including health science, but the discussion in educational context is severely lacking.

For example, the study by Pezalla et al. (2012) introduces the concept of researcher-as-instrument, *the key role in the research process*, through reflection and reflexivity. In the study, the researchers reflect on their roles as interviewers by focusing on how their personality characteristics contribute to creating conversational spaces. The findings show that certain

interviewers' characteristics are more effective than others in drawing specific experiences from interviewees. The researchers provide implications that standardization of interviewer practices is a problem and suggest a more systematic process of self-reflexivity in interviewer training. In summary, this study outlines the relationship between the interviewers' personality characteristics and the quality of the data.

Similarly, Soh et al. (2020) discuss the notion of researchers' reflection and reflexivity in conducting focus group research with older adults. They particularly rely upon the researcher's reflective process in preparing participants and in handling unexpected situations. The researcher, a physiotherapist, reflected on his pragmatic stance to obtain solid outcomes for his research on community-dwelling older patients' perception about recovering balance. The researcher reported that, through reflection on relationship building with older people and reflexivity on his philosophical orientation, he was able to clarify the findings. The study demonstrates that the researcher's ontological ("the nature of being," p. 2) and epistemological ("the nature of knowledge," p. 2) positions invite improvement in research learning. Clearly, this study indicates that there is a relationship between researchers' philosophical orientation and the quality of research methods.

While the studies above examined the concept of researcher-as-instrument through the researchers' reflective process, the study by Xu and Storr (2012) focused on how the researcher facilitated her college students' learning of the notion through diverse research projects. The researcher guided her students, neophyte qualitative researchers with economics background, to develop a sophisticated understanding of the necessity for congruence between the ontological and epistemological philosophical underpinnings of the research question, data collection techniques, and analysis.

Literature review on researcher-as-instrument also shows that the concept has been discussed by focusing on the researcher's positionality and identity in the data collection process. For instance, Dennis (2018) examines the concept through her positionality; instead of positioning herself as an interviewer who simply asks prepared, fixed questions on their faiths to the nine female Christian participants, she positioned herself as a co-creator of dialogue with the participants. Through this process, the researcher was able to obtain "truth-telling," an element of trustworthiness. The study suggests that trustworthiness could be established through more active interactions with the participants.

As shown above, the notion of researcher-as-instrument has been discussed in multiple disciplines including health science and economics. There has been some attempt to understand the relationship between the researcher's positionality and the quality of qualitative research in the process of data collection; however, a systematic examination on how a researcher's identities such as theoretical and linguistic orientation influences the quality of qualitative research is lacking. Although scholars note that a researcher's continuous process of reflection is an important element to achieve the quality of research (e.g., Jootun et al., 2009), there is a paucity of research that examines how an educational researcher's theoretical and linguistic identities are related to the quality of research by using specific criteria of qualitative research. The current study attempts to expand our understanding of its relationship to improve methodological approaches. It opens an issue for a further discussion to improve the field of qualitative research.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher's nine published case studies were evaluated using Tracy's (2010) criteria of excellent qualitative research. The qualitative inquiry method has numerous strengths and merits, but it is often criticized for the lack of objectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). One way this positivist perspective can be changed is through qualitative educational

researchers' continuous examination of their identities. Given that the validity of data interpretation is imbedded within the researcher's identity (Dennis, 2018), qualitative researchers need to be constantly engaged in the critical self-reflexive process to achieve trustworthiness to challenge the criticisms of qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The reanalysis of qualitative studies by using specific criteria is critical to move the field forward.

Tracy's (2010) criteria of excellent qualitative research were formal frameworks for this study, which aimed to reexamine the quality through the lens of researchers' identities. The criteria include: *worthy topic*, *rich rigor*, *sincerity*, *credibility*, *resonance*, *significant contribution*, *ethics*, and *meaningful coherence*. Tracy provides these eight major markers of quality in qualitative research by using Denzin's (2008) "big tent" idea on qualitative research. We chose Tracy's criteria to evaluate the nine case studies because they are inclusive and align with what other renowned qualitative scholars (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Richardson, 2000) conceptualize as "excellent" qualitative research. Tracy (2010) presents "a model for quality in qualitative research that is uniquely expansive, yet flexible" (p. 837).

The definitions of Tracy's (2010) criteria used in this study are as follows: (a) *Worthy Topic* implies that the educational research topic should be relevant, timely, interesting, and significant; (b) *Rich Rigor* is achieved when the study uses sufficient, complex theoretical constructs and data sources in the context to capture nuance and complexity; (c) *Sincerity* implies that the educational study should be characterized by self-reflexivity about subjective values and biases of the researcher; (d) *Credibility* refers to trustworthiness in qualitative research and is accomplished when research is marked by thick description, concrete detail, showing rather than telling, triangulation, and multi-vocality; (e) *Resonance* refers to researcher's capability to meaningfully echo, influence an audience (Tracy, 2010) and touch the audience's mind and head (Bochner, 2000); (f) *Significant Contribution* implies that the purpose of qualitative educational research is to expand the educational knowledge such as in the areas of theory, practice, and method, and educational research should provide a significant contribution conceptually, theoretically, practically, morally, methodologically, and heuristically; (g) *Ethics* is achieved when the study considers several ethical issues including procedural ethics (such as human subjects). Procedural, situational, and relational ethics are all important elements to be considered to ensure the "rightness" of qualitative educational research; and finally, (h) *Meaningful Coherence* indicates that the educational study should achieve what it purports to be about and use methods and procedures that fit its stated goals and interconnects literature, research questions, and findings with each other.

Overall, the eight criteria above are a useful theoretical lens to evaluate the caliber of the nine case studies by examining how the researcher's identities influence the data interpretation and presentation.

Methods

Data Sources

For the study purpose, the nine qualitative studies (2007-2018), which the researcher conducted in elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States, are used as the data sources. To be aligned with the study's focus on the researcher's identities, the researcher used only articles in which she was the sole data collector. The author interpreted her own previously published studies of the period of 2007-2018, including journal articles (Yoon, 2007, 2010a, 2012, 2015a; Yoon & Uliassi, 2018) and book chapters (Yoon, 2009, 2010b, 2015b, & 2016). Although these studies have different research questions, purposes, settings, and foci, the

commonalities are that they are all qualitative case studies that examined teachers' instructions with students' learning experiences in the U.S. In most of the studies, the researcher took her role as a non-participant observer, a more distant role, to obtain more nuanced classroom dynamics (Liu & Maitlis, 2010).

Along with the data of nine case studies, other data sources were also used for analysis. They include field notes on the classroom observations, research logs, and reviewers' comments on the manuscripts. Since the research question for this current study focuses on the researcher's identities to examine the quality of qualitative studies, these data sources provided additional insights.

Data Analysis

The data analysis took three initial steps for the primary data sources: (1) reviewing each publication on the studies with Tracy's (2010) eight criteria; (2) creating datasheets for each publication (e.g., nine sheets for nine publications) to locate the issues in each section such as theoretical frameworks; and (3) completing sheets by using the eight criteria to see how the studies in the publications met each criterion and to find supporting examples.

The purpose of these initial steps was to obtain a general picture of the quality of the studies inductively. In these initial steps, the focus was on what criteria the publications did and did not meet. However, the initial steps did not specifically show how the findings are related to the researcher's identities, which is the focus of the current study. Thus, a more focused analysis was necessary to go beyond the surface level of analysis. It was important to see how the findings were developed and how they were related to the researcher's identities including educational knowledge, linguistic, and racial orientations. As stated, the data sources were useful for the process of more focused analysis. This process led to closely examining the research log, field notes, and the reviewers' comments on the manuscripts because they included more details related to the researcher's identities.

With this focus of the researcher's identities in mind, specific coding strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) were employed to further develop the themes. First, through an open coding process (e.g., examining and categorizing), the data of the field notes, research log, and the published articles/chapters on the nine case studies were examined by focusing on the researcher's identities, guided by the research question and Tracy's (2010) criteria on qualitative studies. Through the open coding process, "possibilities," "dilemmas," and "tensions" were developed.

These categories were further examined to make connections among them through the axial coding process (e.g., making connections among categories) and through checking the eight criteria. At this axial coding stage, it was important to see how the open coding outcomes of "possibilities," "dilemmas," and "tensions" were linked to worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. In this process, it was evident that the categories of possibilities, dilemmas, and tensions were particularly found in the criteria of *Rich Rigor* and *Sincerity*. These three categories were combined to two categories: possibilities and challenges. Given that dilemmas and tensions represent challenges, these categories were put into a larger category of challenges. Possibilities mean that the researcher achieved certain criteria while challenges represent that she struggled to achieve certain criteria.

Next, the researcher further developed the categories through selective processes. The categories of possibilities and challenges show connections, but in a contrastive manner. Since selective coding processes involve validating relationships among categories, the researcher developed the category which captures both categories of possibilities and challenges. This process resulted in the inclusive category: "complexities." To check the accuracy of this

category, both examples of possibilities and challenges were listed under the inclusive category of complexities.

During the analysis process, the researcher invited a qualitative researcher (second author in this article) to review her publications to ensure the reliability of the findings. The second author, Christine Uliassi (literacy teacher educator, White, native-English speaker) reviewed the researcher's nine publications independently. She reviewed publications using the same criteria as the researcher. The second author's evaluation sheet revealed that eight of the nine publications received the "no" mark on the criterion of *Sincerity*. It was a consistent theme with the researcher's initial analysis. Given that the purpose of the independent review was to check how each publication met the eight criteria, the second author's analysis on the data source was useful to see how the researcher's initial analysis was reliable.

Although the second author participated in the evaluation of the researcher's published work, she did not have access to data sources such as teachers' and students' interviews to ensure ethical processes. The findings below are the outcomes of this initial analysis between the researcher and the second author as well as the researcher's analysis of her identity issues.

Researcher's Identities and Study Background

The lead researcher, Bogum Yoon, is a literacy teacher educator. She is multilingual with English as her additional language, and she emigrated from South Korea to the US. The current study's topic was prompted by her study findings that she presented at a national conference. In this instance, the researcher presented a case study of an English language arts teacher's critical practice (Yoon, 2016), and she received multiple questions from the audience on her interpretation of the data as a researcher. These questions made the researcher realize that she might be biased based upon her profession as a critical literacy educator. The questions from the audience on the researcher's positionality invited her to investigate this topic more critically. Upon reanalysis of the data of both the teacher and the students, the researcher found that the students' writing samples demonstrated their learning of critical literacy. The researcher realized that she made a quick conclusion about the teacher's lack of critical practice based on her observation only without closely examining her students' learning outcomes, which might be influenced by the teacher's instructional practice. These findings invited her to reflect more on her identities as a researcher and prompted her to reexamine the data of the other case studies.

Along with these findings, the paucity of the discussion of "researcher-as-instrument" in the field of educational research also led the researcher to explore this issue to fill the gap. Through the extensive literature review on the topic, the researcher found that this fundamental notion has been somewhat discussed (e.g., Dennis, 2018), but there is little in-depth discussion in the educational field through their studies. The literature review helped the researcher to convince herself that it is a worthy topic to explore and to contribute to the educational field.

Although the researcher conducted this current study to contribute new insights to the qualitative educational research, she felt vulnerable through this long, "painful" process of critical self-analysis. Closely examining and revisiting her own previously published studies required immense academic and ethical responsibility. Based on her extensive experience in the educational field, the researcher considers herself an "expert" of qualitative educational research. Yet, it was her first time critically evaluating her studies with the framework of the quality of qualitative research. She positioned herself as a learner throughout this analysis process. For this study, she intentionally used the term, "the researcher," avoiding the first-person pronoun "I," to relieve the personal connection to the work. In this article, the researcher and the first author are used interchangeably.

Findings

The findings suggest that the layered identities of the researcher, specifically her theoretical knowledge and linguistic orientation, influenced the data interpretation and subsequent reports. From the eight criteria, the researcher experienced the possibilities in achieving *Rich Rigor* and the challenges in *Sincerity* concerning her identities including her knowledge orientation. The researcher's complex identities were visible in the criteria.

Researcher's Identities in Rich Rigor

Rich Rigor could be achieved when complex theoretical constructs, along with the detailed data collection and analysis, were used. In this aspect, the researcher's case studies seemed to be successful in meeting the criterion by capturing complexities of the teachers' literacy instruction through a longer period of observational time (e.g., at least one full semester or year, two or three times a week) and formal/informal interviews (e.g., at least two formal interviews in the beginning and at the end). The studies included the detailed processes of data collection and processes with complex theoretical constructs such as literacy teachers' positioning of themselves as teachers for all students or as teachers for general education students. The theoretical constructs of interactive positioning and self-positioning, for example, guided the study and were used for the data analysis. The review sheets by both first author and second author showed that this criterion was met across the studies.

Yet, other issues were found. In addressing *Rich Rigor*, the researcher found that the use of different theoretical frameworks might bring different interpretations of the existing qualitative data. The varying results based on different theories revealed this dilemma to the researcher. For instance, one of the researcher's studies set in a middle school setting used culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as a theoretical framework to examine the two language arts teachers' instruction and interaction with English language learners (ELLs). In the original study, the researcher interpreted that one teacher supported the students' literacy development effectively, while the other teacher did not.

This finding could be different if the researcher used a different theoretical framework such as "new literacies" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; New London Group, 1996). Using this framework, the data could be interpreted as the other teacher, who previously was seen as ineffective, used diverse technological tools and "innovative" methods to effectively improve students' reading and writing skills. In revisiting the field notes, the researcher found that there were a few examples (e.g., using students' favorite music) that could support the teacher's effective instruction. The teacher might have been portrayed as an "exemplary" practitioner who offers the students including ELLs multiple opportunities to experience multimodalities; however, the researcher interpreted the teacher's approach as lacking cultural inclusivity during instruction. This shows the limited interpretation of the data; the finding illustrates that the researcher's knowledge (e.g., preference for certain theoretical tools) might affect the interpretation of the data.

The researcher's limited interpretation of the data was also shown in other studies. For instance, in her study about a high school ELA teacher's instructional approach, the researcher presented the teacher's interview data and classroom observation data to demonstrate the inconsistency between the teacher's stated belief of critical literacy and action. The purpose of the one-year longitudinal study was to report the teacher's direct influence on students' critical literacy and implications from the study findings. In the study, one finding was that the teacher's practice did not seem to engage students in critical literacy tasks during a whole-class discussion. To support this claim, observation data on the students who tended to be quiet in class discussions were provided.

Through the reexamination of the data, however, including the students' interview data and writing samples, the researcher found that the teacher attempted to help her students engage in critical practices. The students' work met the teacher's objective; the participant students' writing examples demonstrated that they were able to critically examine the text and not simply absorb the author's message. For example, in the writing sample, the students shared multiple viewpoints about an incident (e.g., accidental shooting, relationships with friends) from the text. They stated that the text was written in a way to "influence the reader." The participant students' writing samples showed they understood the author's purpose of the text. The teacher's invitation for the students to take interpretative authority on the text appeared to influence the way they responded to the text with a critical lens.

As shown in the writing examples, the students engaged in critical literacy education. They recognized that the text is not neutral, which is an important learning element of critical literacy that the teacher reinforced; however, the researcher tended to overlook this instructional focus. Rather, it was described as the lack of "multiculturalism." This interpretation of the teacher's data is based on the researcher's knowledge orientation. The researcher believed that the component of multiculturalism should be included in any critical literacy practice. This shows that the researcher did not pay attention to the various forms of critical literacy.

Critical practice can take different forms (see Janks, 2014; Lewison et al., 2002; Lewison et al., 2014; Luke, 2004; Vasquez & Felderman, 2013). "Interrogating multiple viewpoints" is one of the dimensions of critical literacy. This finding indicates that the researcher's knowledge orientation that critical literacy should include the perspectives of multiculturalism is based on her belief and bias (even if it is a grounded one). In this case, the researcher's biases in the form of critical literacies seemed to affect the way that the data were interpreted and reported.

This critical self-analysis evokes the researcher's dilemmas and tensions by bringing different interpretations on the same data. It shows the researcher's knowledge as an instrument was negatively impacted by the lack of diverse theories. It also indicates that her knowledge as the instrument was used by favoring certain theories and frameworks. The findings suggest that a deeper level of analysis of the researcher's identities is needed to achieve the criterion of rich rigor. Meeting the criterion through the surface level of analysis might not be sufficient to explain the impact of the researcher's identities on the data interpretation.

Researcher's Identities in Sincerity

The current study also finds issue in meeting the criterion of *Sincerity*, which means that the study needs to be characterized by self-reflexivity about subjective values of the researcher. In revisiting the publications, the researcher found that she did not include her identities, biases, and values which might have shaped her interpretation of the data. One noticeable finding was that the researcher did describe her ethnic orientation by writing down her thoughts in her field notes, but she did not fully describe her minority identities in the U.S mainstream context in most of her publications. There were only two out of nine publications that included ethnic identities. This analysis was also consistent with the second author's review of the publications.

The notion of the researcher-as-instrument implies that the researcher needs to triangulate the data with diverse sources including field notes. Yet, the analysis shows that she did not introduce her identities including her educational and linguistic backgrounds in the publications. For instance, in her field notes on a high school English teacher who was teaching Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the researcher stated, "I was also asked to memorize the lines in *Hamlet* in my country." In this statement, the researcher compared the American teacher's approach to

Hamlet to that of her primary country. Based on her own experience in her native country, simply memorizing the lines was not helpful to deepen her understanding of the text.

This negative experience seemed to guide the researcher's observation. She seemed to make an abrupt conclusion. The researcher interpreted the data of the high school English teacher's approach as "traditional" and "limited." It was evident that the researcher linked her observation to her experience in her native country. The data presentation would have been meaningful if she had shared how her interpretation was based on her personal experiences to ensure sincerity. Her subjective values should have been presented to meet the criterion and to help the reader better understand the claims; however, she did not share her identities, biases, and values in her publications.

Her identity presentation was absent in other publications as well. For instance, in her study of one novice teacher's instruction for ELLs in an urban elementary school, the researcher described the methods in detail including the school context, the participants (the teacher and the ELLs), and the data collection and analysis. However, no section includes the researcher's identities to achieve sincerity. The description of her identities might have been helpful for the reader to understand how the teacher's dependence on the "teacher guidebooks" was interpreted by the researcher. Similar to the participant teacher, when the researcher was a novice English teacher, she also used teacher guidebooks as a major resource. Yet, the researcher did not share that her interpretation of the data is related to her experience as a novice teacher of language arts.

This lack of the depth into the researcher's identities in her publications brings many questions to consider. One intriguing finding was that the fear of revealing her ethnic and linguistic identities seems to be apparent after the researcher found that she was positioned by an anonymous reviewer as an incapable writer compared to native English speakers. For example, the reviewer stated:

The quality of the writing, along with the research topic, led me to suspect that the writer also might have been a non-native speaker/writer of English... my sense is that this entire piece would benefit from the careful attention of a "critical friend" who can help to strengthen the quality of the writing.

This statement evinces that the researcher's identity as a non-native English speaker was negatively portrayed. If the manuscript needed more clarity, then the reviewer could have pointed the areas in need of improvement without mentioning the researcher's assumed identities.

This finding illustrates that the presentation of the researcher's identity is important to meet the criterion of *Sincerity* by sharing her subjective values on the phenomenon that the researcher observed. However, due to the hidden power she faced in the mainstream culture where "standard" English is a norm, the researcher felt that she was in dilemma regarding whether to fully disclose her identities including her ethnicity and primary language. These identity factors might be useful for the reader to better understand the classroom data that the researcher collected.

In summary, the findings suggest that the criterion of sincerity is challenging to achieve when the researcher's identities are not shared in the research report. Although sincerity can be achieved in the process of data collection as shown in the researcher's field notes, it cannot be met if the researcher does not disclose her identities in the research report. The findings show the complexities to meet the criterion under the mainstream norm that the researcher either experiences or perceives.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to reexamine the notion of the “researcher-as-instrument” in qualitative studies by discussing the impact of the researcher’s identities on data interpretation and presentation of educational studies. The findings show that the researcher’s theoretical literacy knowledge and linguistic backgrounds most influenced the data interpretation and presentation, and accordingly, influenced the quality of qualitative research positively or negatively. The reanalysis of the researcher’s published articles and chapters provides useful information for addressing complexities of researchers’ identities in qualitative research. It has been typical for qualitative researchers to write about their positionality in the publications, but the relationship between their positionality, identities, and the interpretive process have not been fully described (Dennis, 2018). This critical self-analysis using Tracy’s (2010) criteria provides important insights for educational researchers to examine this relationship and to conduct qualitative research. Although the researcher directs this study to educational researchers, the findings can be transferable to researchers in other fields since the quality of qualitative studies can be achieved through critical self-analysis. It is highlighted below how the findings of the current study confirm, refine, and extend the existing studies.

First, this research builds and further develops the work of other scholars who have discussed how researchers’ identities and the experiences they bring to their research can impact their interpretations of data. Although the researcher-as-instrument is viewed as a potential threat to validity (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003), how this is related to the researchers’ identities has not been discussed. This current study suggests that the quality of the study is influenced by the researcher’s knowledge, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. These identity factors bring the perspectives of both insiders and outsiders depending on the context (Shim, 2018). Thus, self-reflexivity about these backgrounds needs to be described and shared in the data presentation to ensure the criterion of *Sincerity*.

The findings imply that more space and attention should be given to researchers’ identities and knowledge for a more accurate interpretation of the findings. As Zalberg (2015) noted, qualitative research findings are outcomes that are influenced by the researcher’s identities and cultural characteristics. This implies that qualitative research is complex. There might be no “true,” “authentic,” or “accurate” interpretation. Qualitative researchers can only approach the “kind of truth,” (McCracken, 1988, p. 5, cited in Fink, 2000), which might bring possibilities that any qualitative researchers seek for the world of children, learning, and teaching.

Second, the descriptions of the complexities of the data interpretation need to be noted in qualitative research. The limitations of a study are typically noted, but this study suggests that it should go beyond the limitations. As shown in the analysis of the current study, *Rich Rigor* was met on the surface; however, that does not mean the interpretation is complete. The incompleteness of the data interpretation was only found through this critical self-analysis study. Although there are qualitative educational studies that use the existing data with a new lens (e.g., Kuby, 2011, 2013), there is a dearth of research on using a critical self-analysis method. The findings of the current study were possible through this method to see the quality of qualitative studies.

This study suggests that self-reflexivity is a necessary process for any qualitative researcher. The researcher echoes Callaway’s (1992) point that “reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness” (p. 33). The study confirms that self-reflexivity should be done continuously during and after the study to examine the data interpretation. As shown in the findings, the researcher’s lack of certain theories and preference for certain frameworks resulted in limited data interpretation and presentation. It shows that self-reflexivity needs to take place at all stages of the qualitative research process, including

the report stage to enrich the findings of the study. While qualitative researchers engage in self-reflexivity, they position themselves as an “inter-dependent entity with the study” (Undurraga, 2019), rather than as an independent entity from the study.

Third, this critical self-analysis indicates that, rather than viewing the “researcher-as-instrument” as a simple “check” list in the qualitative study, closer examination with relation to the researcher’s knowledge, linguistic, and racial background is needed. It suggests that educational researchers go beyond traditional notions of researchers, which views them as one homogenous group from similar backgrounds in the mainstream context. This dominant view of qualitative researchers may be why the researcher-as-instrument has not been discussed in-depth. The current study suggests that it is important to acknowledge researchers’ biases, beliefs, and values shaped by their linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to ensure sincerity in qualitative educational research. The researcher’s cultural dimensions need to be shared in the publications.

At the same time, the qualitative field as an entity determines the environment for the scholars and researchers to disclose their linguistic identities in full length, which might affect their data interpretation. Although the sincerity issue is the researcher’s responsibility as an instrument, the educational field should ensure a safe environment in which scholars from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds can express their identities without hesitation. Indeed, minority educational scholars face linguistic challenges in the mainstream context (e.g., Jang, 2017). As Hurd (2010) identified in his qualitative study, researchers negotiate their identities when there are hidden items and other revealed selves intermingling with each other. Norton (2000) also noted that individuals’ identities can be understood with relation to social and inequitable structures which are reproduced in daily social interactions. The findings of the current study support these scholars’ claims. The researcher decided not to include her identities by sensing the hidden agendas and the mainstream power of “standard” English.

The findings suggest that it is important for the educational field to value different writing styles which are based on different linguistic backgrounds. In this global era, it is about time for the educational field to consider Englishes (Kubota & Lin, 2009). As the racialized speakers strive to achieve the legitimacy of their Englishes (Smith, 2020), the educational field also joins the group to value different verbal and written styles. The identities of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse scholars could be only understood within social structures that individuals face. Their identities as educational scholars could be produced or reproduced according to what the educational field values.

Fourth, the current study findings, which show that *Rich Rigor* and *Sincerity* were the major issues in relation to the researcher’s identities, refine existing studies. The issues of *Rich Rigor* and *Sincerity* from the current study were different from other studies in which *Credibility* and *Meaningful Coherence* issues were more common (see Yoon et al., 2015, for extensive literature review on qualitative studies). It shows that each qualitative study meets criteria differently, and no single criterion is complete to explain the quality of qualitative studies. In this aspect, it is important for educational researchers to compare their findings with other studies’ findings to ensure the quality of qualitative research and to illuminate the future of educational research.

Finally, it is often considered an important method to use outside raters in qualitative research to ensure the reliability of the data. However, in this self-evaluation method, it might be challenging to use this method since outside raters cannot have access to the original data when they were not involved with the study or were not approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Thus, educational researchers must acknowledge the complexities of the data interpretation by including their diverse identities. The concept of the researcher-as-instrument brings multiple opportunities for educational researchers to conduct qualitative research. Yet,

educational researchers also need to recognize that it is “the Achilles heel” (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003).

This is the reason that we as qualitative researchers and scholars constantly need to revisit our data to improve the quality of the study. Revisiting our data involves the emotional aspect of qualitative work (Thomson et al., 2012). Reporting them with reinterpretation is more challenging. As Atwell (2015) noted, writers are vulnerable. Educational researchers become more vulnerable when they are contemplating whether to report the revised findings with a reinterpretation of the data. However, the current study indicates that it is an essential process to move educational research and practice forward. The familiar concept of the researcher-as-instrument offers new insights through the critical self-analysis method.

One limitation of the current study is that the second author in this paper could not access to the original data and the reanalysis of the data heavily depended on the researcher’s interpretation. If the second author could have reviewed the data, she might have provided a different interpretation from the researcher. This limitation of the study could be addressed in future research by including outside raters as part of researchers in the beginning of the study and by including them in the IRB process.

Despite this limitation, this current study achieves its purpose and provides fresh insights. It is only the beginning of further refining our research contributions to the educational field. As Hertz (1997) asserted, “to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (p. viii). We invite educational researchers to dialogue about ways to illuminate the future through qualitative research as a methodological way of engaging critically and reflexively.

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